

***Starting Further Back:  
An Analysis of Karl Rahner's Mystagogical Approach  
Applied to The New Evangelisation in an Australian Setting***

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***Anthony Edward Mellor***

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Dedicated to my parents, John and Daphne, my first teachers in the ways of faith.

We declare to you what was from the beginning,  
 what we have heard,  
 what we have seen with our eyes,  
 what we have looked at  
 and touched with our hands,  
 concerning the word of life — this life was revealed,  
 and we have seen it and testify to it,  
 and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us —  
 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have communion with  
 us; and truly our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:1-3

From time to time you lead me into an inward experience quite unlike any other, a sweetness beyond understanding. If ever it is brought to fullness in me my life will not be what it is now, though what it will be I cannot tell.

St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, Book X, 40.65.

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## **Abstract**

The New Evangelisation is the name given to a renewed impulse of evangelisation for today's world. The situation of religious institutional diminishment in many Western countries requires a more nuanced approach to the proclamation of Christian faith. This new context demands new methods of re-proposing the Good News in the modern age. A mystagogical approach looks towards modes of evangelisation which engage the religious imagination and draw out personal experiences of transcendence and religious sensibility. In its creative and reflective processes, mystagogy is a form of invitation to recognise and respond to the “always already” Divine presence at play in personal, concrete experience and larger human history.

Historically, mystagogia was a catechetical method used by patristic teachers which led the neophytes into a deeper realisation of the experience of Christian initiation. More broadly, Karl Rahner advocated a renewed mystagogical approach to theology in the modern age by developing modes of theological expression which spring from human experience rather than from doctrinal definitions. Rahner reframed the *fides qua/fides quae* distinction as the “transcendental” and “categorical” dimensions of religious experience, and recognised the need for theological methodology which brought into a greater unity the *fides qua* (the act of believing) and the *fides quae* (the content of faith).

A mystagogical mode of communicating the Gospel involves reading the cultural context in which the Gospel is proclaimed and received, and entering into a pre-credal conversational style of social dialogue. In the Australian context, as in any context, there are certain cultural and communal narratives which can be identified to assist the evangelising conversation. David Tracy's analysis of Hans Georg Gadamer's dynamics of interpretative “conversation” offers a framework for mystagogy in the public realm. As a form of



conversation, a mystagogical approach looks to develop a more culturally-alert language and style, seeking to acknowledge and describe the personal, yet often unnoticed, experiences of self-transcendence. A mystagogical approach to New Evangelisation utilises the language of personal experience to connect the act of believing (*fides qua*) with the rich heritage of the Christian tradition (*fides quae*) through levels of *spiritual awareness, reflection, interpretation* and *responsiveness*. This mystagogical conversation explores these dimensions as a pedagogical pathway to developing a more alert religious sensibility.

In order to situate these conversations in the public realm, Tracy's three fields of theological reference (society, academy and church) offer a framework for developing mystagogical conversations. Drawn from Tracy's three "publics", these three fields of reference for a mystagogical approach to *NE* can be identified as: The Performative Space (Church); the Dialectic Dialogical Space (society); and the Open Communicative Space (culture). These three fields identify differentiated modes of conversation, each of which requires a particular evangelising freshness and creativity. An analysis of these differentiated spheres helps develop forms of evangelisation more attuned to the ecclesial, social and cultural realities of the contemporary moment.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<i>ACBC</i>	Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
<i>AG</i>	<i>Ad Gentes Divinitus</i> : The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, 7 <sup>th</sup> December 1965.
<i>CDF</i>	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
<i>CEA</i>	Catholic Earthcare Australia
<i>CELAM</i>	Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (Latin American Episcopal Conference)
<i>DCE</i>	<i>Deus Caritas Est</i> : Encyclical of Benedict XVI on Christian Love, 25 <sup>th</sup> December 2005
<i>DP</i>	<i>Instruction on the Proclamation of the Gospel and Interreligious Dialogue: "Dialogue and Proclamation - Reflections and Orientations"</i> , Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 19 <sup>th</sup> May, 1991.
<i>DV</i>	<i>Dei Verbum</i> : Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 18 <sup>th</sup> November 1965.
<i>EE</i>	<i>Ecclesia de Eucharistia</i> : Encyclical letter of John Paul II on the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, 17 <sup>th</sup> April, 2003.
<i>EG</i>	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> : Apostolic Exhortation of Francis on The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 24 <sup>th</sup> November, 2013.
<i>ES</i>	<i>Ecclesiam Suam</i> : Encyclical of Paul VI on the Church, 6 <sup>th</sup> August 1964.
<i>EvN</i>	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> : Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI on Evangelisation, 8 <sup>th</sup> December 1975.
<i>FR</i>	<i>Fides et Ratio</i> : Encyclical of John Paul II on the Relationship between Faith and Reason, 14 <sup>th</sup> September 1998.
<i>GME</i>	<i>Gaudet Mater Ecclesia</i> : Opening Address of John XXIII at the Second Vatican Council, 11 <sup>th</sup> October 1962.
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> : Pastoral Constitution on Church in the Modern World, 7 <sup>th</sup> December 1965.
<i>LF</i>	<i>Lumen Fidei</i> : Encyclical of Francis on the Light of Faith, 29 <sup>th</sup> June 2013.

<i>LS</i>	<i>Laudato Si'</i> : Encyclical of Francis on the Care of Our Common Home, 24 <sup>th</sup> May 2015.
<i>NE</i>	<i>The New Evangelisation</i>
<i>NMI</i>	<i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> : Apostolic Letter of John Paul II at the close of The Great Jubilee of The Year 2000, 6 <sup>th</sup> January 2001.
<i>RH</i>	<i>Redemptor Hominis</i> : Encyclical of John Paul II at the Beginning of His Papal Ministry, 4 <sup>th</sup> March 1979.
<i>RM</i>	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> : Encyclical of John Paul II, on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, 7 <sup>th</sup> December 1990.
<i>TMA</i>	<i>Tertio Millennio Adveniente</i> : Apostolic Letter of John Paul II on the Preparation for the Year of Jubilee 2000, 10 <sup>th</sup> November 1994.
<i>US</i>	<i>Ubicumque et semper</i> : Apostolic Letter of Benedict XVI in the form of <i>Motu Proprio</i> establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, 21 <sup>st</sup> September 2010.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### ***INTRODUCTION:***

#### ***Starting Further Back***

## **Introduction: Starting Further Back**

### 1.1 BEGINNINGS

The stirrings of this project emerged slowly from pastoral experience. In so far as this might be deemed a pastoral project, *Gaudium et Spes* (hereafter, *GS*) provides a concise if incomplete definition of such pastoral aims. The motivation and focus might be deemed ‘pastoral’, in so far as, “while resting on doctrinal principles” this thesis seeks to explore evangelising connections between the kerygma of the Church and the modern world.<sup>1</sup> “Pastoral” can be a slippery and evasive term, malleable to one’s own biases and preferences, and can imply a certain freedom from rigour. The pastoral instinct at the base of this thesis focuses on the communicative dimension of evangelisation. Good News is dead news if it is unable to be received by an intended (or any) audience.

Many parents who present their children for baptism will express genuine yearnings for faith and community. This is frequently described in terms of a desire to pass on to their children their own Catholic experience, a need for identity and connection to community, and an assurance of some moral guidance and wisdom. Parents will name these hopes with genuine conviction. This conviction rarely translates into ecclesial practice. For many, Catholic identity and community find expression through loose affiliation which requires little regular connection to a tangible community of faith. The aim of this thesis is to explore this fragmented landscape of faith and to discern opportunities for connection and re-connection.

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World* (7<sup>th</sup> December, 1965): *The Documents of Vatican II* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publication, 2009), Preface, note 1. All quotes from Vatican II documents taken from: *The Documents of Vatican II*, trans. Vatican (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2009).

The title of this thesis is drawn from Michael Paul Gallagher's suggestion that the evangelising conversation needs to "start further back" at the non-doctrinal, pre-religious, imaginative level of human experience.<sup>2</sup> Broadly speaking, this requires, at least in part, an inventive form of dialogue. For this dialogue to be purposeful, an awareness and discernment of cultural dynamics is essential. The New Evangelisation (hereafter, *NE*) provides an ecclesial context to explore the nature of this dialogue. With this in mind, this thesis will explore *NE* as a strategy to engage the on-going spiritual search in the Australian cultural milieu. A particular form or style of evangelising engagement, best described as "mystagogical", will form the basis for this examination.<sup>3</sup> As a short, pre-emptive definition, "mystagogical evangelisation" is taken to mean a style of communication which aims to arouse the spiritual dimensions of the human person through creative engagement with the imaginative capacity for transcendent experience and religious expression.

The temptation is to interpret the context of the Catholic Church in Western countries, and particularly in Australia, from within a narrow sense of diminishment, disaffiliation and "de-evangelisation". This limited focus creates a distortion. Quick fixes, reactionary responses and catechetical stridency distract from the greater task of a deeper cultural dialogue which acknowledges the truly tectonic shifts of the modern age. Australian society, like most Western societies, has been swept along by social, cultural, political and philosophical forces, rapidly shifting horizons of ultimate concern and fashioning a new-found and limitless sense of freedom which re-frames the nature of the human person and the quest for meaning. Historical currents suggest that these rapid changes are not rapid at all, and that the secular project rides on a centuries-old tide of change.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Paul Gallagher, *Dive Deeper: The Human Poetry of Faith* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2001), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Brief descriptions of "evangelisation", "new evangelisation" and "mystagogical" are offered later in this chapter and fuller analysis in chapters 3 and 4 respectively.

## 1.2 DIRECTION

In recent decades, *NE* has become one ecclesiological pathway to engage the uncommitted baptised. More broadly speaking, *NE* has also embraced an apologetical tone, reaching beyond the non-practising and out to the unconvinced in matters of faith and God. Many have attached their banners to *NE*, more often in ideological terms than in theological reasoning. The context of *NE* requires a thorough examination in order for *NE* not to “become a kind of vapid mantra”, but rather, one which energises the proclamation of the Gospel with “a good deal of imagination and courage”.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the principal question which directs this investigation is:

What might be appropriated from Karl Rahner’s mystagogical proposal and developed as a form of engagement for new evangelisation in an Australian context?

The background to this examination is three-fold:

- *NE* has been developed as an ecclesial response to the transformed social and cultural conditions in which a decision for “faith” is made and lived;
- Karl Rahner proposed a mystagogical form of theologising as a method more attuned to questions and concerns of the modern age;
- The Australia secular culture provides a setting in which a more detailed approach to a mystagogical engagement can be proposed.

In line with this three-fold background, this thesis is intended to contribute to the on-going conversation regarding the necessary forms of evangelisation needed today through these three aims:

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Coleridge, “A Different Fire: Vatican II and New Evangelisation”, in *Words from the Wound*, ed. Anthony Ekpo and David Pascoe (Strathfield: St. Pauls, 2014), 141.

- A ecclesial and practical analysis of the cultural horizon of lived faith;
- A theological grounding of *NE* in firm theological underpinnings;
- And a development of the mystagogical instinct of Rahner into a category of evangelisation by exploring pneumatological (spiritual) and pastoral responses to the receptibility of the Christian mystery and kerygma in an Australian context.

These chapters can be considered as pairings. The first chapter will examine the relationship between gospel, faith and culture, with a view to identify the historical and philosophical causes of the depletion of the religious imagination in the Western societies. The second chapter will explore the development of *NE* as an ecclesiological initiative and the various forms of theological reflection which have been undertaken on this theme.

The third chapter enters into the core examination of this thesis, and examines Rahner's principle of a more missionary and mystagogical method of theologising. Chapter Four will extend beyond Rahner, with a review of his methodological antagonists, as well as examples of a mystagogical pursuit in the Australian theological scene.

The fifth and sixth chapters are a combined attempt to offer a more systematic approach to a mystagogical form of evangelisation. Grappling with cultural conditions and settings has always been a necessity for the Church's evangelising activity. In a specific sense, this thesis aims to direct a mystagogical evangelising eye towards the Australian cultural scene. These final two chapters draw together a number of evangelising imperatives and engage these with an explicit cultural environment. The aim is to identify defining features of a mystagogical approach. Following on from these chapters, the concluding comments look forward to a more fruitful mystagogical evangelising endeavour.

The progression of the chapters and the particular areas of investigation can be summarised as follows:



**TABLE 1:** Progression of thesis

<b>Content</b>	<b>Aim</b>
<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction: Starting Further Back</b>	<p><i>What is at stake today is not Church affiliation and practice but the ability to develop a religious imagination in a secular world. The over-arching foci of this thesis are three-fold:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. The context which gives rise to NE;</i></li> <li><i>2. Rahner's mystagogical proposal as one methodology for NE;</i></li> <li><i>3. Developing a mystagogical evangelisation for an Australian context.</i></li> </ol> <p><i>This introductory chapter situates the themes of this thesis and clarifies terminology.</i></p>
<b>Chapter 2 – Faith, Gospel and Culture: A Complex Drama</b>	<i>This chapter explores the historical, philosophical and cultural roots of a new context for evangelisation and to identify the historical causes of the displacement and disenchantment of the religious imagination in a secular environment.</i>
<b>Chapter 3 – Readings of the New Evangelisation</b>	<i>Evangelisation has become a key ecclesial term since the Second Vatican Council, and NE has emerged as a response to a decline in Church membership and participation, particularly in Western countries. NE is a term which describes various approaches to evangelisation emerging from diverse assessments of the contemporary moment.</i>
<b>Chapter 4 – A Mystagogy of Living Faith: Rahner's Mystagogical Proposal</b>	<i>Rahner proposed a renewed theological style for the modern age. Rahner's proposal offers a starting-point for a mystagogical category of evangelisation.</i>
<b>Chapter 5 – Mystagogy Beyond Rahner: Responses and Developments</b>	<i>In the absence of a systematic method for a mystagogic theology, critics of Rahner's project serve to identify requisites for a more comprehensive framework.</i>
<b>Chapter 6 – Context and The Australian Setting: Conversations with Culture, Spirituality, Theology and Praxis</b>	<i>Context shapes theology but is not its limit. A mystagogical approach necessarily engages the cultural context. The Australian cultural context provides a window into the development of mystagogical themes of evangelisation.</i>
<b>Chapter 7 – Spaces of Conversation: Mystagogical Approaches</b>	<i>A proposal for a mystagogical approach to NE identifying essential strands of pre-creedal evangelisation through creative dialogue and engagement.</i>
<b>Chapter 8 – Conclusion: Review, Prospects and Directions</b>	<i>A summary of the ground that has been covered and on-going questions and perspectives presented for further consideration.</i>

### 1.3 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Issues of faith and culture are very wide fields of investigation. These questions can be approached from a variety of disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, theology, or ecclesiology. In this project, there is a blend of each of these disciplines. Predominantly, the primary area of concern is a theological approach to questions of Christian anthropology in a dominant secular culture. This necessitates drawing upon philosophical, sociological, and historical research, and viewing these insights through a theological lens which engages with contemporary secular culture.

For example, a review of the development of *NE* requires both sociological and ecclesiological perspectives. An analysis of Rahner's mystagogical approach requires both theological and philosophical assessments. An exploration of culture requires both anthropological and hermeneutical inquiries. The following points outline the mixture of methods and disciplines used in this thesis:

1. Ecclesiology: The ecclesiological development of the concepts of evangelisation and new evangelisation, incorporating a literary review of commentaries and proposals for *NE*. This will also include Australian mystagogical approaches.
2. Cultural analysis: The historical, philosophical and sociological developments which have accentuated the split between culture and the gospel. Specific observations about Australian secular culture will be integrated throughout this analysis.
3. Theological dialogue: A theological and philosophical analysis of Rahner's "mystagogical methodology" as a response to a new cultural context. This will be placed in dialogue with four critics (Ratzinger, Von Balthasar, Lindbeck and Metz) of Rahner's method as a means of developing a more systematic mystagogical style.
4. Contextual and Practical theology: A theological and cultural interplay will engage the Australian setting, drawing upon previous foundations, with the aim of identifying expressions of the experience of the sacred which might be used as building-blocks and stepping-stones for a mystagogical approach in an Australian context.
5. Mystagogy and the practice of theology: The concluding chapters will draw together these various strands and identify key components of a

mystagogical approach to evangelisation in an Australian setting with the intention of developing a creative and experiential category of evangelisation.

The scope of this endeavour is broad and requires a precise focus within the vast horizon of possible areas of inquiry. Much has been written about each of these subjects and it is impossible and undesirable to cover every strand of thought. The conclusions of this thesis are directed towards theological and ecclesiological categories. Evangelisation for a new context remains the constant theme running through each survey and the final proposals. This mixture of modes and methodologies indicates the accuracy of Rahner's observation that theology for a modern context cannot remain an abstraction but requires concrete points of connection with a new cultural moment.

#### 1.4 TO WHAT END?

*NE* has been something of the new agenda. It is the lens through which the Church perceives a new missionary task. *NE* was initially focused upon "churches of ancient origin" (Europe) but is now understood as a permanent posture of engagement with secular culture and its global influence.<sup>5</sup> The broad horizon of *NE* can be defined as the need for a renewed, contemporary missionary impulse, particularly in areas where the Christian faith was once a defining feature of the spiritual, cultural, social and political landscape but is now diluted in its force.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (Strathfield: St. Pauls, 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2013), 25. "I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. 'Mere administration' can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'."

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter (Motu Proprio): Ubicumque et semper* (21st September, 2010). Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apl\\_20100921\\_ubicumque-et-semper.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper.html) on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 (hereafter, *US*).

In establishing a new Curial dicastery (Vatican department) called the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation, Benedict XVI named the “abandonment of the faith” as a particular challenge of our time, and which he saw as “a phenomenon progressively more manifest in societies and cultures which for centuries seemed to be permeated by the Gospel”.<sup>7</sup> These social changes, which “have a long and complex history” account for a profound re-ordering of the way in which human beings look at the world.<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI summarised this radically-altered context with both positive and negative appraisals. Social progress has been accompanied by significant cultural revolutions. While scientific and technological advancement, economic development and “global-scale migration and an increasing interdependence of peoples” have enhanced the lot of the individual and human societies, “this has not been without consequences on the religious dimension of human life as well”.<sup>9</sup>

The identified need for *NE* turns on the view that human progress, despite its “undeniable benefits”, has weakened the transcendent sensibility, resulting in “a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred”:

Even though some consider these things a kind of liberation, there soon follows an awareness that an interior desert results whenever the human being, wishing to be the sole architect of his nature and destiny, finds himself deprived of that which is the very foundation of all things.<sup>10</sup>

This new social context requires “careful discernment” from which grows a new response, and *NE* is an umbrella term given to this discernment and missionary renewal. *NE* is not “a single formula” which “would hold the same for all circumstances”, yet all the churches “living in traditionally Christian territories need [...] a renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *US.*

<sup>8</sup> *US.*

<sup>9</sup> *US.*

<sup>10</sup> *US.*

<sup>11</sup> *US.*

There is more to be said on this. However, at the outset, it is important to note that the key evangelising concern is situated in the interconnections and disconnections of faith and culture. The dynamics of this relationship form a major thread of this thesis. The roots of what has now become known as *NE* were expressed in the famous opening address of John XXIII when he identified his core pastoral desire for the Second Vatican Council. His vision was for the council to appeal “to all people of good will” and to demonstrate the “validity of the (Church’s) teaching” rather than pronouncing condemnations.<sup>12</sup> John XXIII urged the Council members to seek new ways of proclaiming the ancient truths of faith and to be open to contemporary forms of research and thought. While maintaining the “sacred patrimony of truth”, the Church must at the same time “look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate”.<sup>13</sup> This vision is summed-up in an oft-quoted line: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another”.<sup>14</sup>

John XXIII acknowledged that the world had entered a new era which called forth a new kind of response from the Church. A new course was set. In the years since the Council, this course has been one of many contours, competing interpretations, creative energies, cautious revisions and new missionary enterprises, all set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world. These shifting and evolving social patterns have provided alternative sources of renewal and vexation for the Church. In Western countries, a socially and culturally

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<sup>12</sup> John XXIII, "Gaudet Mater Ecclesia (Pope John's Opening Speech - 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1962) ", in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (London: Herder and Herder, 1966), 7.2 (hereafter, *GME*), 716.

<sup>13</sup> *GME*, 5.5. Abbott, 714.

<sup>14</sup> *GME*, 6.5. Abbott, 715. Peter Hebblethwaite paints a dramatic picture of the reception of John XXIII's opening address with the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* recording a variation to his actual words. The official Vatican translation continues to carry the altered version. The *Acta* included its own interpretation, virtually a minor commentary of what the Pope meant by “ancient deposit of faith” and its expression. The struggle for “an authoritative interpretation” of the Council has been occurring since its opening day. “Those who held an ‘immobilist’ view of language regarded it as pernicious neo-modernism; those on the other hand who thought that history was a necessary dimension of all theology found it liberating. There can be no doubt about what Pope John said and meant.” Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Council* (London: Chapman, 1984), 432-3.

supported religious faith that was previously understood to be “unshakeable” has not only been “shaken” but also been received with casual indifference or outright rejection.

As it was at the Second Vatican Council, the Church’s relationship to “the world” remains a central question, but it is a “world” of many unfolding complexities and of profound social and cultural transformation. It is a “world” which can barely keep pace with itself. *NE* has not evolved into a clear answer, but its considerations and associated ventures allow the possibility for the question to mature and ripen within the consciousness of the Church.

What will this research question add to this broader field of theological investigation? As described earlier, firstly, these questions are prompted by personal ponderings and pastoral experiences. This is an area of personal interest, and these concerns address practical questions of pastoral practice, the on-going viability of ecclesial life and the contribution of the Church to a people’s cultural life and social capital. It also addresses fundamental questions such as the relationship between the Divine and the human, and the cultural narratives necessary for the salvific proclamation of the gospel today. Secondly, this project seeks to analyse the agenda and evaluate the proposals of *NE* in current ecclesiological discourse to discern some future avenues. Thirdly, Karl Rahner’s mystagogical theme is based on the premise that the modern mind was more attuned to the personal than the corporate, and to the concrete rather than the abstract. In this context, this project seeks to give some shape to a “mystagogical evangelisation” and to offer some form of systematised strategy. Fourthly, the relationship between faith and culture requires a particular locus of investigation, and the Australian secular culture provides this stage in both universal and unique ways. While not explicitly adopting the term, the Australian theological endeavour has also produced many works which look towards a mystagogical category of evangelisation and theologising through a creative engagement with lived faith. This is a field in which some

treasures might be found through scholarly excavation. The over-arching aim is to attempt to synthesise these themes into a cohesive reflection on evangelisation within the Australian cultural context and offer a mystagogical approach as a particular category which might be beneficial for *NE*.

The danger is to seek to say too much. There are many streams which, necessarily, will remain unexplored or underdeveloped. There is also the difficulty of analysing a proposition such as *NE* which is in a process of evolution. As will be noted, the pontificate of Pope Francis has substantially changed the scope of *NE*. In the end, this thesis seeks to be a modest contribution to a theological reading of what the Church needs to be in this time and this place.

## 1.5 BRIEF NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

To conclude this introductory chapter, brief definitions and explanations of the terminology developed throughout this thesis provide a reference for their usage. These terms are listed in alphabetical order:

- ***Church:*** *NE* is a concept which has emerged from within Roman Catholic context, and therefore, the term “Church” will generally apply to the Roman Catholic Church. However, it will also relate to “local churches” in more specific geographical and historical settings. The limiting of the term “Church” to the Roman Catholic context does not presume that there are not broader ecumenical implications for the proclamation of the Gospel. The contemporary secular environment has implications for all Christian churches and communities, and *NE* will also require ecumenical co-operation in mission and evangelisation.

▪ ***Concrete human experience:*** What is intended here is not a philosophical or hermeneutical treatment of the terms “concrete”, “human”, or “experience”, but rather a generalised term which incorporates the “data” of normative human activity. It implies the world in which human beings become aware of and encounter their subjectivity. Concrete human experience includes the whole and the particular of the anthropological habitat of human consciousness: embodiment, cognition, affectivity, socialisation and history. It encompasses the dialectics which frame human existence: life/death; love/fear; faith/doubt; trust/anxiety; hope/despair; aspirations/limitations; connection/isolation. It presumes a general awareness of the social, cultural, political, intellectual, scientific, economic, artistic, religious and historical patterns of a collective human existence.

▪ ***Contextual theology:*** No theology occurs in a vacuum. That is the basic insight of contextual theology. Theology is conditioned by one’s context. Gerard Whelan notes that contextual theology enables theology to address a particular audience within the concepts and language of that audience.<sup>15</sup> Contextual theology both develops local theologies and aids in the cultural expressions of theology: Contextual theology “treats context as one of the sources of theology (a *locus theologicus*)” and provides a process through which “theological reflection should ‘bear fruit’ in offering direction for a religion on how to act within its culture”.<sup>16</sup> In this light, Stephen Bevans defines contextual theology as a “way of doing theology that takes into account four things: (1) the spirit and message of the Gospel; (2) the

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<sup>15</sup> Gerard Whelan, "Evangelii Gaudium as Contextual Theology", *Australian eJournal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (April, 2015): 3. Retrieved from: [http://aejt.com.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/741647/Evangelii\\_Gaudium\\_as\\_Contextual\\_Theology\\_Whelan\\_Apr15\\_Vol22.1.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/741647/Evangelii_Gaudium_as_Contextual_Theology_Whelan_Apr15_Vol22.1.pdf) on 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Whelan, "Evangelii Gaudium as Contextual Theology", 3.



tradition of the Christian people; (3) the culture of a particular nation or region; and (4) social change in that culture, due both to technological advances on the one hand and struggles for justice and liberation on the other”.<sup>17</sup> In a telling note for *NE*, Bevans describes the theological enterprise today as requiring a commitment to translating and inculturating the Gospel into new contexts; to finding fresh ways of listening to our contexts in order to proclaim the Gospel in ways that are comprehensible; to be open to the surprise of the Gospel as we engage in the work of ministry and justice; and to enter “into mutually enriching conversations or confronting our contexts with the power of the Gospel”.<sup>18</sup> *NE* requires particular forms of contextualisation, as a method of mediation of the gospel is the key to evangelisation. The context and style of mediation of the kerygma is a central concern of a mystagogical method.

▪ **Culture:** While the following chapter explores more fully the subject of culture, an introductory note is useful at this point. Lonergan’s two interpretations of culture provide a basis on which to proceed: The classicist notion perceived a “normative” form of culture, the “norms and ideals” to which the “uncultured” might “aspire”.<sup>19</sup> This is countered by the “empirical notion of culture” which engages with “a set of meanings and values” which form and inform a way of life.<sup>20</sup> This set of meanings and values may remain constant or “may be in process of slow development or rapid dissolution”.<sup>21</sup> An empiricist notion assumes that “culture” can be studied, interpreted and engaged with on its own terms and remain a fluid reality. It is this

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Bevans, "Models of Contextual Theology", *Missiology: An International Review* 13, no. 2 (April 1985): 186.

<sup>18</sup> Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 187.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), xi.

<sup>20</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*.

<sup>21</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*.

foundational interpretation of culture from which the cultural analysis in the next chapter will take its lead.

▪ ***Evangelisation:*** This is a term which has been introduced to the Catholic vocabulary by way of the Protestant and Reformed tradition term “evangelism”. It is a term which has undergone much development since the Second Vatican Council. Avery Dulles’ short history of the appropriation of the evangelisation by the Catholic tradition is a useful guide: The terminology re-entered Catholic literature toward the middle part of the twentieth century, due to the influence of Protestant thinkers such as Karl Barth. From that point on, “Catholic religious educators promoted a style of kerygmatic theology in which evangelization was taken to mean a confident proclamation of the basic message of God’s offer of salvation through Jesus Christ”.<sup>22</sup> The distinction between mission and evangelisation is an ontological and methodological one. Mission is the ontological posture of the Church. The Church is missionary by its nature.<sup>23</sup> Evangelisation is the method or engagement by which it lives out its mission. The following definition of evangelisation is a useful and accessible description and neatly summarises what the term “evangelisation” has come to mean in a Catholic context: “To evangelise [...] means to do the Gospel, to live it, to carry it out, as well as to proclaim it. To live the Gospel, to challenge others by one’s example and lifestyle, to uphold true values, to open people’s hearts to the saving power of God, to build community, to struggle against injustice, to work for the transformation of society – these are all vital elements of the activity known as

<sup>22</sup> Avery Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2009), 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> See Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus: The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity* (7<sup>th</sup> December, 1965): *The Documents of Vatican II*, trans. Vatican (Strathfield: St Pauls Publication, 2009), 2. (hereafter, AG.). “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin.”

evangelization”.<sup>24</sup> The New Evangelisation is focussed upon areas where the reception of the Gospel and active participation in Church life has dissolved and depleted. This provides pause for profound ecclesial reflection and discernment. A note of spelling: the standard Australian spelling of evangelisation uses an “s” while the American spelling uses a “z”. Both forms of spelling will be used in this thesis depending upon the original source. Evangelisation will be used as the default spelling.

▪ **Faith:** The author of the Letter to the Hebrews provides the basis for a theological description of faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”.<sup>25</sup> The classical three-fold movement of the one act of faith is described in the works of Thomas Aquinas: “It is one thing to say: “I believe (that) God (exists)”, (*credere Deum*), for this indicates the object. It is another thing to say: “I believe God” (*credere Deo*), for this indicates the one who testifies. And it is still another thing to say: “I believe in God” (*credere in Deum*), for this indicates the end. Thus God can be regarded as the object of faith, as the one who testifies, and as the end, but in different ways”.<sup>26</sup> Faith requires the voluntary movement of the will, anticipated and accompanied by grace.<sup>27</sup> The human will seeks one’s ultimate “good” or one’s ultimate fulfilment *in God*.<sup>28</sup> This requires more than intellectual assent, or exterior acknowledgement, but an interior conviction that one’s life, future and

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<sup>24</sup> *Catholic Update Guide to the New Evangelization*, ed. Mary Carol Kendzia (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2012), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 11:1. All scripture quotes from the NRSV translation.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. James A. Weisheipl (Albany: Magi Books, 1998): Ch. 6. Lectio 3, 901. Retrieved from: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/John6.htm> on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2015. See also: *Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars, 1974), II-II, 2, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, 2, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-I, 2, 8: “Now the object of the will, i.e. of man’s desire, is what is universally good; just as the object of the intellect is what is universally true. Hence it is evident that nothing can satisfy man’s will, except what is universally good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone, because every creature has participated goodness. Therefore, God alone can satisfy the will of man [...]”

completion is realised in God. *Credere in Deum* is the free response, through an active faith, to the fullness of life which is offered to each person, but this also simultaneously requires a faith that God exists and that God is faithful to the claims of faith. Belief in a more general sense, for example, in a testimony of a person (e.g. *credo Paulo* – I believe Paul), is distinct from *credere in Deum*, as only God can be the “end” or goal of faith, “for our mind is directed to God alone as its end”.<sup>29</sup> This unified, threefold movement of faith can also be applied to Christ, so that one can speak “about believing in Christ's existence (*credere Christum*), to believe Christ (*credere Christo*), and believing in Christ (*credere in Christum*)”.<sup>30</sup> A scriptural parallel can be drawn from John’s gospel. In the fourth gospel, only the Greek verb *pisteuein* - frequently coupled with the preposition *eis* - is used as a descriptor of faith: “to believe in(to) Jesus”.<sup>31</sup> Faith is never referred to in a static sense but, consistently, in an active sense. It must also be noted that the term “belief” (in Jesus) in Scripture denotes acknowledgement but does not necessarily imply acceptance. The Letter of James is frequently cited as a cautionary note: “Even the demons believe — and shudder.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the dynamics of faith implied here is a “rich, multi-layered concept” which engages an ever-deepening approach to and response of the whole person.<sup>33</sup> Faith in a Christian sense is realised explicitly as *credere in Christum*, a response to the “story of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ”.<sup>34</sup> This is the goal of evangelisation. Faith is present in the human person prior to explicit expression. In a theological sense, “God’s prevenient grace draws out from the very heart of human

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<sup>29</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary*, 6:3, 901.

<sup>30</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 4, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 87.

<sup>32</sup> James 2:19. See also Mark 1:23-24.

<sup>33</sup> Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Paul Gallagher, *Faith Maps: Ten Religious Explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010), 2-3.

freedom the ‘yes’ of faith”.<sup>35</sup> In a human sense, belief exists as a dimension of trust in human relationships and society. The human realm presumes a trustworthy and predictable element of existence, from the laws of physics to social conventions. In this thesis, belief and faith is presumed to be a potential dimension of every human person, while the acceptance of an explicit Christian faith is presumed to be the goal of evangelisation. *NE* is the task of entering into the on-going dynamics of faith as a movement through *credere Deum/Christum*, *credere Deo/Christo* and *credere in Deum/Christum*. Conversion is a closely-related theme. Connected to more ancient meanings, Nicholas Lash proposes an understanding of “religion” as a life-long school of conversion which “weans us from our idolatry” and purifies our desire.<sup>36</sup> As a key mystagogical insight, Lash states that all human beings venerate some god, even if in an idolatrous sense: “All human beings have their hearts set somewhere, hold something sacred, worship at some shrine.”<sup>37</sup> Lash states emphatically, “to worship (some entity) is, in the last analysis, what it *is* to be a human being”.<sup>38</sup> However, it is possible to “worship” without any claim of belief or religious adherence, for example, to “worship” human reason alone.

Detailing responses contrary to religious faith, Gallagher summarises the work of French-Canadian theologian André Charron, who noted the distinctions between “unbelief”, “non-belief”, and “indifference”.<sup>39</sup> According to Charron’s categories, unbelief is the “rejection of religious faith, as an option and as a system of belief”;

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<sup>35</sup> International Theological Commission, *Message of the International Theological Commission on the occasion of the Year of Faith* (16th October, 2012). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20121016\\_messaggio-anno-fede\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20121016_messaggio-anno-fede_en.html) on July 21, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21. See also Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), 102.

<sup>37</sup> Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*.

<sup>38</sup> Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Paul Gallagher, *What are They Saying about Unbelief?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 4. This summary is based on the André Charron, *Les catholiques face à l'athéisme contemporain: étude historique et perspectives théologiques sur l'attitude des catholiques en France de 1945 à 1965* (Montréal: Fides, 1973).

non-belief implies more “absence than denial”; and indifference is “the absence not only of beliefs and of religious faith but also of all questioning in matters of religion (which he sees as) the most radical form of unbelief”.<sup>40</sup> This form of indifference is summarised in *GS* 19: “Some never get to the point of raising questions about God, since they seem to experience no religious stirrings nor do they see why they should trouble themselves about religion.” As Gallagher notes, this statement identifies two different forms of indifference: “a radical ignoring of any religious search” and a “disinterest in the world of (church-mediated) religion”.<sup>41</sup> The second category is the more significant focus of *NE*, while the first must also be addressed, particularly in an Australian context.

▪ ***Gospel*:** Throughout this thesis, the proclamation of the gospel is intended in the sense of *Dei Verbum* (hereafter, *DV*) which holds that Scripture and Tradition flow from the “same divine wellspring”.<sup>42</sup> Throughout this thesis, the term “Gospel” implies a living word, which is measured by Scripture but not limited by Scripture. Tradition is the deepening reception of Scripture, as well as “the living voice” which, through the Holy Spirit, proclaims to the world “the word of Christ”.<sup>43</sup> The term “Gospel” looks towards the infinite horizon of liberation, salvation and fulfilment of the whole of creation in and through Christ. The Greek word, εὐαγγέλιον (*euangélion*) denotes “Good News” or gospel, and is frequently used throughout the New Testament.<sup>44</sup> The Latin translation, *evangelium*, is the root word of the English term

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<sup>40</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> Gallagher, *Struggles of Faith* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1990), 43.

<sup>42</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (18<sup>th</sup> November, 1965): *The Documents of Vatican II*, trans. Vatican Translation (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2009), 9.

<sup>43</sup> *DV*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> See Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14, 26:13; Mark 1:1, 1:14-15, 8:35, 10:29, 13:10, 14:9, 16:15. There are also multiple references in the Book of Acts and Pauline literature.

“evangelisation”. Gospel, good news and evangelisation are inter-related terms which imply the fullness of the Christian kerygma.

▪ ***Mystagogy***: A more thorough treatment is provided in chapter 4, but here is given a short introduction to the various contemporary liturgical usages of “mystagogy”. As it is most commonly-used, mystagogy is a form of post-baptismal catechesis incorporated as the final phase of *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. It is a time “for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the gospel, sharing in the eucharist, and doing the works of charity” and derives “from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community.”<sup>45</sup>

“Mystagogy” relates to the style of catechesis, while “mystagogia” relates to the period in which this reflection and illumination takes place. The Easter season is a stage of “mystagogia” for the neophytes. A “mystagogue” is a teacher who utilises a mystagogical style of teaching and reflection, but is not necessarily synonymous with the term “catechist”. “Mystagogical” is the adjectival form. Rahner used this term to describe the need for a renewed theological method which would form a bridge between the faith which is received and the faith which is lived.

▪ ***Practical Theology***: Practical theology provides one frame for a mystagogical approach to *NE*. Tom Beaudoin summarises the aim of practical theology as “making theological sense of how contemporary people practice relating to the sacred in their lives”.<sup>46</sup> This parallels Rahner’s mystagogical and missionary objective. Rahner’s

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<sup>45</sup> *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Approved for Use in Australia by the Australian Episcopal Liturgical Commission ed. (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2003), 234 and 237.

<sup>46</sup> Tom Beaudoin, “Secular Catholicism and Practical Theology”, *International Journal of Practical Theology* 15, no. 1 (2011): 27.

concern with practical theology as a theological discipline was ecclesiological. Practical theology is concerned with “the Church’s self-actualisation here and now – both that which *is* and that which it *ought to be*”.<sup>47</sup> Rahner names the ancillary sciences for practical theology as “sociology, political science, (and) contemporary history”.<sup>48</sup> Practical theology can supply “an element of creativity and prophecy and be engaged in critical reflection”.<sup>49</sup> While the agenda of this thesis has been identified as “pastoral,” the link between pastoral theology and practical theology requires re-visiting. Practical theology must be grounded in a thorough ecclesiology. Kathleen Cahalan proposes that practical theology in a Catholic vision draws together a number of diverse elements: “a sense of the sacramental in relationship to creation, the incarnation, and the Christian community; a social and communal theological anthropology; liturgical and spiritual practice as formations of the self; the witness of practice in intentional communities; the mystical tradition; and the communion of saints.”<sup>50</sup> This practical ecclesiological intention of drawing together diverse strands provides a mystagogical perspective of engagement in a contemporary context. Practical theologising presumes an “interplay of theology” with other disciplines in order “to make theological sense” of the experience of the sacred within the horizon of contemporary human experience, and seeks to engage these expressions as a theological discipline in its own right.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Karl Rahner, "Practical Theology Within the Totality of Theological Disciplines", in *Theological Investigations: Vol. IX - Writings of 1965-67 I* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1972), 102.

<sup>48</sup> Rahner, "Practical Theology", 105.

<sup>49</sup> Rahner, "Practical Theology", 105.

<sup>50</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Locating Practical Theology in Catholic Theological Discourse and Practice", *International Journal of Practical Theology* 15, no. 1 (2011): 20.

<sup>51</sup> Cahalan, "Locating Practical Theology."



▪ ***Secularisation/secularism/secularity***: Each of these inter-related terms is defined more fully in the succeeding chapter. However, in summary, secularisation refers to a neutral process of the separation of Church and State into areas of legitimate concern; Secularism refers to a more political and cultural process which seeks to sideline religion and religious concerns from the public square; and, secularity, in this thesis, is used to describe the dominant horizon against which the proclamation of explicit Christian faith and the receptive sensibility to transcendent experience are received. Secularity best describes a “cultural atmosphere” of resistance in the public square to organised religion and grand spiritual narratives. Secularisation, secularism and secularity are not self-explanatory categories, and in reality, these cultural and intellectual forms are far more complex than might first appear. As will be noted, many observers have identified both a “residual” and a “renewed” sense of the sacred within the secular horizon, despite attempts to rationalise such a receptive sensibility.<sup>52</sup>

Allied with this are concepts of pluralism. Rowan Williams offers a succinct definition of the pluralist state: It is “a particular cluster of smaller political communities negotiating with each other under the umbrella of a system of arbitration recognized by all”.<sup>53</sup> In a pluralist state, a religious body must recognise that its truth claims are “open to scrutiny, rebuttal and attack, and cannot be taken for granted”.<sup>54</sup> The Church is one voice among many.

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<sup>52</sup> Raimon Panikkar speaks of “sacred secularity” in which the eschatological transformation of “the entire ‘creation’” has already begun: “One has to discover that ‘this’ world, if the ‘this’ is not reduced to a rationally grasped ‘this,’ contains or rather *is* also ‘that’ world....One of the mature traits of our rightly criticized epoch is the acute awareness of what I call *sacred secularity*. This world (*saeculum*) is sacred and secular moves have transcendent repercussions.” Raimundo Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 350. As will be identified, Rahner also highlights the sacredness of the secular world in a more immediate sense. The more muted tones of GS 45 also recognise that the Church itself derived benefit from the development of human society.

<sup>53</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 50.

<sup>54</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 127.

▪ ***Transcendent and Religious experience:*** As a brief definition, Louis Roy describes transcendent experience as a moment, sensibility or event through which “individuals, by themselves or in a group, have the impression that they are in contact with something boundless and limitless, which they cannot grasp, and which utterly surpasses human capacities”.<sup>55</sup> Bernard Lonergan identifies transcendence with a sense of “going beyond”.<sup>56</sup> This sense of transcendence is a constant movement to the point where one can ask “whether human knowledge is confined to the universe of proportionate being or goes beyond it to the realm of transcendent being” which “may be conceived either relatively or absolutely” either as beyond the human or “as the ultimate in the whole process of going beyond”.<sup>57</sup> Lonergan describes this human sense of “transcendental subjectivity” as an “unrestricted” reaching which emerges from within our human capacity “for the divine”, a “region” described as “a shrine for ultimate holiness” and which “cannot be ignored”.<sup>58</sup> It is “the spark in our clod, our native orientation”.<sup>59</sup> This spark, orientation or capacity “becomes an actuality when one falls in love”.<sup>60</sup> “Being-in-love” is the fulfilment of all our reaching which brings “a radical peace” and “a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion”, and “manifests itself in changed attitudes, in that harvest of the Spirit” which is signified in a life of virtue.<sup>61</sup> This “spark in our clod” is a key theme in the work of Karl Rahner and forms the basis of a more comprehensive exploration of human capacity to experience self-transcendence in following chapters. It must also be noted that “religious experience” does not necessarily imply religion in

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<sup>55</sup> Louis Roy, *Transcendent Experiences: Phenomenology and Critique* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), xi.

<sup>56</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Insight*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, vol. 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 658.

<sup>57</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 658.

<sup>58</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 103.

<sup>59</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 103.

<sup>60</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105.

<sup>61</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105 and 108.

a structured or institutional sense. The relationship between “religious experience” and “religion” in the formal sense is not correlative nor does one necessarily presume the other. Those who practise “religious affiliation” might, in fact, eschew profound “religious experience”; those who resist commitment to organised religion might do so on the basis of a sincere spiritual conviction. A mystagogical approach argues that religious experience is a constant of human experience. *NE* aims to link this religious experience with explicit Christian faith.

- ***Western society:*** The terms “Western societies” and “Western cultures” as they appear throughout this thesis, imply a shared inheritance among the nations of Europe and North American. It also includes countries, such as Australia, established by political, military, economic and cultural expansion, the inheritance of common law, social customs, religious beliefs, philosophical, educational, political and economic systems, ethical and moral norms, and common cultural expressions. As noted earlier, ecclesial references are made to “churches of ancient origin” which implies the “Euro-centric” focus of *NE*. This reference to “churches of ancient origin” draws a distinction between the European heritage of Christianity and “younger churches” of missionary lands which have grown from the evangelising activity of the Church in a traditional sense.

This list does not exhaust the range of terminology, or the nuances of such terms. The tension between the Gospel vision and new cultural contexts generates energy for a renewed evangelising imperative. This tension provides the entry point into the themes of this thesis, and is developed further in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

***FAITH, GOSPEL AND CULTURE:***

***A Complex Drama***

## **Faith, Gospel and Culture: A Complex Drama**

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will concentrate on the historical, philosophical and cultural developments which have contributed to the conditions in which a new evangelisation is considered necessary. The question of the relationship between explicit faith and cultures in which faith is lived, at least from a Judeo-Christian perspective, stretches back to the Old Testament narratives of land and nationhood, purity and defilement, idolatry and fidelity.<sup>1</sup> Until the fourth century, the Christian Church maintained an uneasy relationship with the “empire” of the world. For much of the time since, the Church has been inextricably woven into the fabric of Western civilisation, and which, in turn, has facilitated an “environment” of faith. The Church has been the dominant force shaping the social, political and cultural developments of the West. The concern of this chapter is the evolving tensions between explicit religious faith and culture, which Paul VI called the “drama of our time”.<sup>2</sup>

Increasingly, the exploration of the relationship between faith and culture has become an important focus of theology. H. Richard Niebuhr’s work, *Christ and Culture*, established a useful framework of analysis.<sup>3</sup> GS was to introduce an examination of the word “culture” into

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Genesis 17:7-8; Exodus 6:2-8; Deuteronomy 28: 3-12; Hosea 2:1-23.

<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation the Gospel to the People of Today* (8<sup>th</sup> December, 1975), 20 (hereafter, *EvN.*). Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html) on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 50th Anniversary ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) was originally published in 1951. Niebuhr’s text on the dynamics of Christian engagement with culture has become a standard matrix of analysis. Niebuhr’s categories are designed to be “fundamental motifs”, not “straitjackets”, as he seeks to analyse the ways in which Christians have wrestled “with the dominate culture of their time” (Martin E. Marty, “Foreword”, xvi). The five motifs which Niebuhr lists are:

1. Christ against culture
2. The Christ of culture
3. Christ above culture
4. Christ and culture in paradox
5. Christ the transformer of culture

conciliar deliberations.<sup>4</sup> Words such as “faith” and “culture” are not self-evident terms. They contain layers of meaning which need to be disclosed and unpacked. There is no simple history which can be easily told. The scope of this discussion is vast, but this chapter will seek to establish some claims about the contemporary cultural environment and the conditions in which a decision for explicit religious faith is made.

## 2.2 DEFINING “CULTURE”

In the previous chapter, a distinction was made between “classicist” approaches to culture and “empirical” approaches to culture. In short, a “classicist” approach looks towards normative forms of human culture, and the “empiricist” approach discerns anthropological characteristics which form patterns of social activity. In so far as the terms “the world of human beings” and “the world of culture” can be interchangeable, the Church’s relationship with “the world” has been one of many variations. Through the course of history, the Roman Catholic approach to “the world” can be situated between two extremes: either retreat and rejection, or incorporation and appropriation. At various moments of the tradition, the Catholic response has been an ambivalent mixture of, on the one hand, suspicion and distrust demonstrated in forceful condemnations of the errors and corruptions of “the world”; while on the other hand, a sacramental vision which has placed a sacred value on “the world” and encouraged adaptation, inculturation and absorption, coupled with the imperatives of evangelisation. Between these two extremes is situated a full spectrum of stances, often co-existing. However, since the Second Vatican Council, an explicit, albeit evolving, Catholic theology of “the modern world” has emerged. Some have categorised this as a movement

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<sup>4</sup> *GS*, 53-62.

from “divinised sacralised world-view” to a “scientific secularised world-view”.<sup>5</sup> John Thornhill, quoting Johann Metz, identified this as a positive evolution in an historical unfolding process: Christianity “can acknowledge that ‘a genuinely Christian impulse is working itself out historically in this modern process of an increased secularization of the world’”.<sup>6</sup>

This historical narrative is coupled with a cultural narrative which is complex and fluid. Terry Eagleton situated the origin of the word “culture” in agricultural activity, as a “concept derived from nature”.<sup>7</sup> In Eagleton’s terms, “our word for the finest of human activities” emerges “from labour and agriculture, crops and cultivation”.<sup>8</sup> Understanding the concept of culture in a socio-political sense, Eagleton stated that culture’s semantic meanings chart the course of the history of Western civilisation itself: “Humanity’s own historic shift from rural to urban existence, pig-farming to Picasso, tilling the soil to splitting the atom”.<sup>9</sup>

However, interpreting “culture” in its “ends” is to miss the larger narratives of cultural life. Gerald Arbuckle credits English anthropologist, Edward Tylor, with developing the first extensive anthropological definition of the term “culture”. In 1871, Tylor argued that culture is a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.<sup>10</sup> In this definition, as Arbuckle identified, culture is seen as a human activity which is “learned and learnable” and

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<sup>5</sup> John Thornhill, *Christian Mystery in the Secular Age: The Foundation and Task of Theology* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1991), 10-15. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The God Question and Modern Man*, trans. Hilda Graef (New York: Seabury Press, 1967) and Johannes Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London: Burns & Oates, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> Thornhill, *Christian Mystery in the Secular Age*, 15. Internal quote: Metz, *Theology of the World*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*.

<sup>9</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper, 1871), 1. Quoted in Gerald Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012), 2.

which ultimately coalesces into a “complex whole” which promotes a social “unity and harmony”.<sup>11</sup>

Clifford Geertz’s study, *The Interpretation of Culture*, has continued to be a highly-influential method of cultural analysis. Geertz embraced Paul Ricoeur’s work on signs and symbols, texts and narratives, in which Ricoeur concluded that there “is no self-understanding that is not *mediated* by signs, symbols, and texts; [...] understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms”.<sup>12</sup> For Ricoeur, understanding culture was a hermeneutical task of interpreting the social narrative.<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, Geertz approached the interpretation of culture through a “semiotic” method. Geertz defined culture as “webs of significance” which humans have spun themselves and by which they are suspended.<sup>14</sup> Gallagher noted that the Latin word for ‘web’ is *textum*, likening the interpretation of culture to the reading of texts.<sup>15</sup> In the same vein, Geertz, echoing Ricoeur, concludes that anthropology is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning”.<sup>16</sup> Culture is an “interworked systems of construable signs” from which it does not derive “a power” to form social patterns of behaviour, but rather, “a context” which “can be intelligibly – that is thickly – described”.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in Geertz’s terms, culture:

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<sup>11</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 2. Michael Paul Gallagher also provided a useful summary of a classic work first published in 1952 by A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. Gallagher named six principal categories for defining human cultures: 1. Descriptive dimension of key elements that make up a complex whole; 2. Historical dimension; 3. Normative dimension; 4. Psychological, philosophical and cosmological dimension; 5. Socio-organisational dimension; 6. The human genesis of cultures. These six elements demonstrate the twentieth century anthropological emphasis on behaviourism, tribalism/nationalism and functionalism. A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969). Kroeber and Kluckhohn listed “164 definitions of culture, categorising them into six major groups and further sub-groups.” Cf. Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 16-18.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 14.



[D]enotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.

Don Browning acknowledges the contextual dimension of culture, while also acknowledging its formative “power”. Browning takes culture to mean “a set of symbols, stories (myths), and norms for conduct that orient a society or group cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally to the world in which it lives”.<sup>18</sup> Culture is the ground which provides “coherence, regularity, and commonality to a people, group, or society”.<sup>19</sup>

Culture can be understood as “a subtle and invisible presence”.<sup>20</sup> It can be summed-up as a complex whole of shared and normative actions, attitudes, values, aspirations, communications, history, and structures which, while historically inherited, continues to evolve in constant dialogue with other cultures and human experience: “Culture is not only what we live by. It is also, in a great measure, what we live for”.<sup>21</sup>

Post-modern analysis has called into question unifying and cohesive functions of culture, and has placed a greater emphasis on fluidity and fragmentation. In this view, the term “culture” does not necessarily point towards social harmony, but the tensions and limits of common understandings. The study of “culture” requires a more measured appreciation of engagement with social difference. Kathryn Tanner notes that the post-modern anthropologist “might still consider cultures as wholes; but they are now considered contradictory and internally fissured wholes”.<sup>22</sup> The tribal conflicts of the “culture wars” are seen as the dominant tone of public, cultural discourse:<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Don S. Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 73.

<sup>19</sup> Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*.

<sup>20</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 21.

<sup>21</sup> Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, 119.

<sup>22</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 56-7.

<sup>23</sup> The “culture war” (*kulturkampf*) originally referred to the 19<sup>th</sup> century disputes between the German State and the Roman Catholic Church. As a modern concept, it came to prominence in 1991 after the publication of *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* by sociologist James Davison Hunter highlighting the divisive

Culture forms the basis for conflict as much as it forms the basis for shared beliefs and sentiments. Whether or not culture is a common focus of *agreement*, culture binds people together as common focus for *engagement*.<sup>24</sup>

In a postmodern world, “consensus-building” remains an essential dimension of cultural activity. However, the level of achievable consensus is understood to be minimal. To speak of cultural in the empirical sense is to understand “culture” as patterns of engagement, “webs of significance”, which serve either to create and express elements of social harmony and common practice or fragment common meanings and values into narrower modes of public expression and private practice. Pope Francis was to draw attention to this new dynamic of cultural formation as “new cultures are constantly being born” in which Christianity is no longer the primary interpreter or generator of meaning: “Instead, they themselves take from these cultures new languages, symbols, messages and paradigms which propose new approaches to life, approaches often in contrast with the Gospel of Jesus”.<sup>25</sup> This is particularly true in urban settings.

This introduces a powerful dynamic of the fragmentation and the re-formation of cultures. These are often fissures within cultures which generate their own modes of communication, values and “webs of significance”. Pope Francis calls these new spaces “a privileged locus of the new evangelization”. These dynamic forces in cultures often out-strip the interpretative and analytical ability to understand and connect with new cultural

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and polarised nature of civic debate and social discourse. See James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 57. Given this post-modern view of culture as conflictual, with “engagement” rather than “agreement” as the cultural identifier, Tanner interprets Christian identity as based in the engagement of crucial questions: “Contrary to the famous opinion of Vincent of Lerins, all Christians have not everywhere and at all times believed the same things [...] Christian identity [...] is more a matter of form than of substance [...] But it is not the sharing of a particular account of their interpretation or organization that makes one Christian [...] What makes for Christian identity is the fact that such *investigation* is viewed as crucial, not *agreement* on its outcomes. Understood as a marker of practices that are social, a marker of a whole way of life with others, this view of Christian identity suggests social practices are identifiably Christian when they form a community among persons who share this same concern. Christian practices are ones in which people participate together in an argument over how to elaborate the claims, feelings, and forms of action around which Christian life revolves” (124-5).

<sup>25</sup> EG, 73. Following quotes taken from the same paragraph.

developments, thereby highlighting “the drama of the age” and reinforcing the seismic shifts of culture. It also provides a challenge for a Church which frequently lacks an institutional nimbleness and astuteness to identify points of contact and connection, as well as opening the spaces to listen and learn from the swirl of cultural change, if these new cultures are truly to become “a privileged locus of evangelization”. This requires an appreciation of the rhythms of cultural formation and evolution.

### 2.3 INTERPRETING CULTURE

To move from cultural theory to cultural dynamics, Rémi Brague proposes a thesis of European cultural synthesis based on the adoption and appropriation of what is “foreign”. It stands in contrast to the view of culture as the natural flowering of what is indigenous. For Brague, Europe is defined as a cultural “space”; a space which can be located on a map “with a vague sweep of the hand”, but it remains difficult to “delimit” this space, as the boundaries of Europe “are solely cultural”.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, culture is framework of interpretation and engagement with the world which moves beyond lines on a map. It encompasses what might be called “Western culture”.

Brague notes that the sources of European culture are “external” to what is conceived geographically as “Europe”:

Its profane culture is, in the last analysis, of Greek origin; its religion is of Jewish origin [...] According to an already ancient image, there are two cities that classically symbolize its roots: ‘Athens’ and ‘Jerusalem’. Now, what is less often noticed is that neither of these two cities belong to the space that historically called itself “European” and that was so called by its neighbors. European culture must look elsewhere than in itself for what defines it.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, trans. Samuel Lester (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Brague, *Eccentric Culture*, 148.

Brague observes that the foundational texts of Europe, the Bible and the works of the philosophers, did not emerge from a native tongue. The Bible was not written “in Latin, but in Hebrew and in Greek”, and ancient philosophy came to Europe as Arabic translations of “Greek works”.<sup>28</sup> Drawing on thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Brague unequivocally concludes that the sources of European culture are “exterior” and “irreducibly two”.<sup>29</sup> European culture distinguishes itself by “the appropriation of what is perceived as foreign”.<sup>30</sup>

When “Western culture” is named as defined space or heritage, it must be remembered that its foundations lie outside its own geographic, intellectual and religious spaces. “Western culture” has historically been a culture of appropriation and adaption. To focus more clearly on these dynamics of cultural transformation and development, the work of René Girard offers penetrating insights.

Girard plots a cyclical process of cultural evolution embedded in desire and violence. Scott Cowdell neatly summarises Girard’s mimetic triangle: “*instinct* or *appetite* + *mimesis* = *desire*”.<sup>31</sup> In Girard’s own words, the development of human culture is formed through the prism of the mimetic dimension of desire:

Desire is not something which is built into the body; appetite *is* built into the human body; we certainly have appetite. But for these appetites to become desires they have to find a model. In a way, mimetic desire would be the difference between animals and humans.<sup>32</sup>

This desire turns to rivalry and, as a consequence, generates violence. Gallagher crystallises Girard’s view of culture with this concise statement: Culture “is a huge school of

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<sup>28</sup> Brague, *Eccentric Culture*, 93.

<sup>29</sup> Brague, *Eccentric Culture*.

<sup>30</sup> Brague, *Eccentric Culture*.

<sup>31</sup> Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and Secular Modernity: Christ, Culture, and Crisis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 19. In a more lyrical interpretation, George Eliot’s nineteenth century humanist novel, *Middlemarch*, begins and ends with a nod towards culture’s mimetic desire. In the opening pages, the narrator observes that “sane people did what the neighbours did”, and later concludes on the final page, there is “no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it”. In short, this literary illustration forms part of the much larger, and more ancient, narrative and mythic reference of Girard’s proposal. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1994 ed., Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1871), 9 and 838.

<sup>32</sup> Phil Rose and René Girard, “A Conversation with René Girard (August 2006/May 2007)”, *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 18, no. 1 (2011): 25.

imitation, and if it is dominated by a spirit of enmity, then it becomes a school of collective violence”.<sup>33</sup> Culture “is shadowed from the beginning and remains secretly addicted to hostility”.<sup>34</sup> *Le système-Girard* is based in a narrative analysis of primitive religious myths, and he concludes that sacred violence plays a generative role in human culture. To ignore this is to risk even greater forms of violence.

From a linguistic perspective, Girard notes that the Latin word *sacer* is “sometimes translated ‘sacred’, sometimes ‘accursed’, for it encompasses the maleficent as well as the beneficent”.<sup>35</sup> In a primitive sense, the “sacred” is the mechanism by which human cultures regenerate themselves through “violence” for “the sacred cannot function without surrogate victims”.<sup>36</sup> This regenerative violence requires a “surrogate victim” or “scapegoat”, by which societies reconcile their differences “at the expense of a third party”.<sup>37</sup> Religion plays an essential role in shaping these violent energies:

The religious believer knows that the establishment of a human society is no simple matter and that the credit for its accomplishment cannot go to man [...] Religion instructs men as to what they must and must not do to prevent a recurrence of destructive violence. When they neglect rites and violate prohibitions they call down upon themselves transcendent violence [...] The surrogate victim alone can save them [...] To be sure, these modes of thinking must be considered mythic insofar as they attribute the enforcement of the law to an authority extrinsic to man. But the law of retribution itself is very real; it has its origins in the reality of human relationships.<sup>38</sup>

The “religious instinct” serves as a restraining force from within human cultures: “According to this hominization theory, man is a product of religious forms that are very crude, no doubt, but are religious nevertheless. This is a far cry from the usual modern view

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<sup>33</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Continuum, 2005), 271.

<sup>36</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 273.

<sup>37</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.

<sup>38</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 274.

of religion as mere ‘superstition’”.<sup>39</sup> In Girard’s system, religion, in its original form, served as a “pragmatic cultural expedient primarily concerned with social cohesion and the restraint of violence”.<sup>40</sup>

The Christian biblical vision overturns the scapegoat mechanism of culture.<sup>41</sup> In the Christian vision, mimetic desire is transferred into the way of the Gospel. The “Good News” is a moderation of the urge to violence through a re-consideration of what is desired. In Girard’s words:

Jesus advocates mimetic desire. Imitate me, and imitate the Father through me, he says, so it’s twice mimetic. Jesus seems to say that the only way to avoid violence is to imitate me, and imitate the Father. So the idea that mimetic desire itself is bad makes no sense.<sup>42</sup>

It is only by recognising the shady heart of violence, which infuses culture, that violence itself can be confronted. To ignore, reject or deny this violence is to risk its emergence in even more destructive ways. The Gospel is the liberative force which sets human beings free from “culture’s dark inheritance” and invites human beings to “live out another vision of who we are and who we can be”.<sup>43</sup> Evangelisation of culture for Girard is the conversion of the human will away from socially generated desire, and to the mimetic desire for fulfilment made manifest in the life of Christ. As Gallagher observes, Girard’s

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<sup>39</sup> Rebecca Adams and René Girard, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard”, *Religion & Literature* 25, no. 2 (1993): 21.

<sup>40</sup> Cowdell, *Girard and Secular Modernity*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> The Crucifixion exposes the innocent victim and the mimetic violence of the mob: “The bond that stood against us with its demands is human culture, which is the terrifying reflection of our own violence. It bears against us a witness that we do not even notice. And the very ignorance in which we are plunged seats the principalities and powers upon their thrones. By dissipating all this ignorance, the Cross triumphs over the powers, brings them into ridicule, and exposes the pitiful secret of the mechanism of sacralization. The Cross derives its dissolving capacity from the fact that it makes plain the workings of what can now only be seen — after the Crucifixion — as evil. For Paul (Col 2:13-15) to be able to speak as he does, *it is necessary for the powers of this world to operate in the same way as the Crucifixion does*. So it is indeed the Crucifixion that is inscribed in the gospel text and is demystified by Christ, stripped for evermore of its capacity to structure the work of the human mind.” René Girard, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, and Guy Lefort, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Continuum, 2003), 192-3.

<sup>42</sup> Adams and Girard, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice”, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 39.

system is “more penetrating and provocative” than many official statements on faith and culture.<sup>44</sup>

Girard’s anthropology also exposes another development in Western culture. There is, as Anthony Kelly notes, a “largely inexplicable moral awareness of responsibility to the victims of history”.<sup>45</sup> Girard interprets this awareness as unique to this age: “No historical period, no society we know, has ever spoken of victims as we do”.<sup>46</sup> This is grounded in the Gospel:

Our concern for victims is the secular mask of Christian love [...] Whether this humility is feigned or sincere, it is compulsory in our world, and there is no doubt that it stems from Christianity. The concern for victims does not operate on the basis of statistics. It operates on the Gospel principle of the lost sheep for whom the shepherd will abandon all his flock if need be.<sup>47</sup>

For Girard, ours is the best and worst of worlds; aware of its victims, yet creating more victims than any other era.<sup>48</sup> This observation points to the highly conflicted nature of contemporary Western culture. It is aware of its own high achievements, yet deeply anxious about the future; aware of its desire for a freer, deeper humanity, yet haunted by the faces of a broken humanity; a pervasive sense of justice, yet chained by unseen and concealed forces of exploitation; a greater awareness of ecology, yet increasing urbanisation; advancing technologically, yet naïve to its effects. Conflict lurks in the human heart and therefore in human culture. There is nothing new in this insight. However, *le système-Girard* ascribes to religion a particular cultural role in the transformation of this “generative violence”. In general, religion ritualised violence as a method of moderation and setting boundaries. In particular, Christianity transforms both the scapegoat narrative and the imagination of desire.

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<sup>44</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony Kelly, “Beyond Locked Doors: The Breath of the Risen One”, ed. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge, *Violence, Desire, and the Sacred: Girard's Mimetic Theory Across the Disciplines* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 74.

<sup>46</sup> Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 161.

<sup>47</sup> Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 165.

<sup>48</sup> Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*.

The modern cultural turn towards the voice of the victim opens up the common ground for a conversation with culture and the opportunity for evangelisation, even at the risk of being cornered by the standard rhetoric which regards the Church as “perpetrator” and “perpetuator” of violence in its many forms.

Girard offers a more sophisticated analysis of the religio-cultural consciousness of human societies which moves beyond the popular critique of interpreting religion as a manifestation of human ignorance grounded in superstition. At the same time, Girard tempers the open-ended Enlightenment optimism of the flourishing of human reason. For Girard, human reason is stalked by the shadow of its own hostile “unreason”. For this thesis, *le système-Girard* offers philosophical purchase into formative Australian myths which both ignore violence and sacralise it. The violent dispossession of the First Peoples of Australia remains the great silence of Australian history and Australian society is yet to comprehend the victimhood associated with dispossession. The mythology of the Anzac serves as a “sacred memory” of “generative violence” from which “a nation is born”; a mythology which Girard’s voice can counter or moderate. Girard provides an interpretive philosophical voice to understand the subterranean layers of violence and blood of Australian culture which remain quarantined in silence and concealed by lore. More will be said on this in later chapters.

It is now helpful to explore the relationship between culture and religion more specifically in a secular context. This is a complex relationship, yet it is necessary to plot a short course in order to enable a validation of the conclusion of Paul VI that evangelisation begins precisely at the point at which the Gospel and culture dramatically diverge.



## 2.4 SECULARISING CULTURE

In his significant work, *A Secular Age*, philosopher Charles Taylor offers three layers of meanings of the term “secularism”.<sup>49</sup> In the first sense, the term is used to describe the emptying of public spaces of a divine reference point.

As we function within various spheres of activity – economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational – the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally don’t refer us to God or to any religious beliefs; the considerations we act on are internal to the ‘rationality’ of each sphere.<sup>50</sup>

Life and its organisation is compartmentalised into specific categories, each with its own measures and regulation, free of religious claims of authority. As Taylor points out, this is in striking contrast to earlier centuries, where orthodoxy could be enforced or social contracts, such as usury, be banned.<sup>51</sup>

A second sense in which the word “secularism” is used is in the nostalgic references or descriptions of times with a greater sense of faith or piety. “In this second meaning, secularity consists in the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church”.<sup>52</sup> On this level, churches often speak of the present age as a moment of crisis where the reduction of participation, membership and

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<sup>49</sup> Taylor offers a brief history of the development of the term “secular”. “Its root is in ‘saeculum’, the Latin word for a big tract of time, an age. The Greek term it often translates is ‘aion’ (English ‘aeon’). More recently, the term in modern languages (*siècle*, *siglo*) comes to a fixed quantity, of 100 years, what in English we call a century. Now ‘saeculum’, and the adjective ‘secular’, come to be used in Latin Christendom as one term in a contrast [...] As a description of time, it comes to mean ordinary time, the time which is measured in ages, over and against higher time, God’s time, or eternity. And so it can also mean the condition of living in this ordinary time, which in some respects differs radically from those in eternity, the conditions we will be in when we are fully gathered in God’s time.” Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 264-5. Taylor also notes that how one understands “secularisation” as a process is directed by “the question of how to define ‘religion’.” Taylor offers two categories for defining ‘religion’: a functional account, based in terms of “what religion does for people and society” and a substantive account, based upon reference to a supernatural realm. One can come to different conclusions based upon these categories: “On a functional view, it is possible to argue that religion hasn’t declined in a ‘secular’ age, because one is willing to include all sorts of contemporary phenomena [...] On a substantive view, some decline is undeniable.” See, *A Secular Age*, footnote 19, 780-1.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

religious practice is measurable and observable. There can be many reasons for this reduction of Church practice and its causes are complex.

However, it is a third sense that provides the basis of Taylor's work. Not disconnected from the first or second sense, Taylor describes this sense of secularism as "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."<sup>53</sup> It was a similar observation which was to become central to much of the character of Karl Rahner's later theology, as will be explored in following chapters.

Herein lies the great challenge to religion in Western cultures. A choice for faith is no longer made easier by social and cultural mechanisms and structures that support a religious posture towards transcendence, the society and the meaning of human existence. As Taylor points out:

Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one's faith. There will be people who feel bound to give it up, even though they mourn its loss. This has been a recognisable experience in our societies, at least since the mid-nineteenth century. There will be many others to whom faith never even seems an eligible possibility. There are certainly millions today of whom this is true. Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place.<sup>54</sup>

A secular society is not necessarily antagonistic towards every expression of religious faith. The secular social contract is based on the agreement that faith is "personal", and insists on the silencing of the concerns of formalised religion and spiritual questions from public discourse. Gallagher observes that "it can be argued that only the richer world has the luxury of this question of meaning".<sup>55</sup> The converse is also true: only the richer world has the luxury of avoiding this question of meaning.

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<sup>53</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>55</sup> Gallagher, *What are They Saying about Unbelief?*, 8.

In a secular environment, answers to the great and pressing questions of human existence are reduced to private formularisations, found not through religious receptivity, but within personal constructs of meaning.<sup>56</sup> Fundamental questions themselves are deemed as irrelevant or inconsequential to the common good of society. At the heart of secularism lies an agnosticism regarding the value of ultimate meaning. This, in turn, limits all considerations to an immanent and immediate human realm. The rejection of anything “absolute” creates a social horizon where the quest for meaning, when it occurs, often becomes an eclectic, internal and subjective process of searching. The difficulty for Christianity is that it loses its power when it becomes a mere private faith or an internal, personalised matter; it is necessarily a communal and public faith.

Taylor identifies an historical “anthropocentric shift” as central to the emergence of a secular age. This “anthropocentric shift” moderates “God’s purposes for us, inscribing [...] an immanent order which allows for a certain kind of human flourishing, consonant with the order of mutual benefit”.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Taylor defines four facets of this “anthropocentric shift” which result in what he terms “Providential Deism”.<sup>58</sup> What occurs around the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth century is a compacted view of “human flourishing” which shrinks God’s goals for humanity to the order of common beneficence.<sup>59</sup> The Divine purpose

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<sup>56</sup> In *Clashing Symbols*, Gallagher cites the work of Stephen Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*, Stephen L Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994) : “[Carter] diagnoses how the pressures of contemporary culture keep religion impotent in the public sphere. The message is that ‘it is perfectly all right to *believe* that stuff’ provided you keep it to yourself”. Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 290.

<sup>58</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 221. Taylor identifies Deism with “a drift away from orthodox Christian conceptions of God as an agent interacting with humans and intervening in human history; and towards God as architect of a universe operating by changing laws, which humans have to conform to or suffer the consequences. In a wider perspective, this can be seen as a move along a continuum from a view of the supreme being with powers analogous to what we know as agency and personality, and exercising them continually in relation to us, to a view of this being as related to us only through the law-governed structure he has created, and ending with a view of our condition as at grips with an indifferent universe, with God either indifferent or non-existent” (270).

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 221-2. The shifts are propelled by “many factors”. These include “a kind of fatigue” from intense religious fervour, “a new idea of moral order”, through which morality is commensurate with social conduct, an increase in the importance of external religious conduct in the eighteenth century, and a general acceptance of an “economic” view of social good, “that is, ordered, peaceful, productive activity”, 224-230. Indeed, the memory of the heroic lives of Christian saints “threaten to disrupt the orderly exchange of

becomes confined to a narrowing human horizon which, in Taylor's analysis, can be discerned in "four directions of change" each of which reduces "the role and place of the transcendent".<sup>60</sup>

The first is "the eclipse of further purpose".<sup>61</sup> In this new frame, a life of virtue is fulfilled through "the achievement of our own good".<sup>62</sup> The obscure patterns of the Divine are lost to an immanent, practical proposition of human fulfilment.

The second anthropocentric shift is "the eclipse of grace".<sup>63</sup> Reason usurped the world of grace. God endowed the human race with reason through which the intentions and will of God can be followed. God is also the judge, who measures out either punishment or reward, and it is this awareness which focuses the reasoned mind in the present time.<sup>64</sup>

The third shift is the fading of mystery. This emerges as a consequence of the first two shifts. The natural order loses its sense of enchantment: "If God's purposes for us encompass only our own good, and this can be read from the design of our nature, then no further mystery can hide here".<sup>65</sup> As a consequence, Divine Providence is reduced to the pursuit of reason.<sup>66</sup>

The fourth shift comes "with the eclipse of the idea that God was planning a transformation of human beings".<sup>67</sup> Taylor speaks of here the theological concept of "*theiosis*", which is human fulfilment as the partaking or sharing in "divine life", which moves the human beyond the possibility of "merely human flourishing".<sup>68</sup> What God asks of the human person, God also accompanies with grace to achieve these purposes: "The call to

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services actuated by mutual interest. If God's purpose for us really is simply that we flourish, and we flourish by judicious use of industry and instrumental reason, then what possible use could he have for a Saint Francis, who in a great élan of love calls on his followers to dedicate themselves to a life of poverty?" 230.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 223.

<sup>66</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 224.

<sup>67</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

love God, and love Creatures in the fulsome way that God does, is matched by the promise of a change which will make these heights attainable for us”.<sup>69</sup>

Taylor is careful not to be overly stringent in his presentation of these four shifts. He speaks of them as a “humanizing trend”, or “a certain climate” which shapes the prevailing religious sensibilities of the time.<sup>70</sup> However, this flow towards “exclusive humanism” is at the centre of what Taylor describes as “the secular age” in which “the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable”.<sup>71</sup> The highest human aspirations become “the imposition of a disciplined order on personal and social life, [...] high standards of self-control and good behaviour in the individual, and peace, order and prosperity in society”.<sup>72</sup>

This development, “accompanied by an increased sense of human power”, established “the buffered identity, capable of disciplined control and benevolence”, which “generated its own sense of dignity and power” and “its own inner satisfactions”, tilting the mood of the age “in favour of exclusive humanism”.<sup>73</sup> This evolution occurred contemporaneously with the Enlightenment’s critical assessments of religion. The historical expressions and spiritualities of Western Christianity “ran afoul of purely immanent human good”:

[A]ll striving for something beyond [...], be it monasticism, or the life of contemplation, be it Franciscan spirituality or Wesleyan dedication, everything which took us out of the path of ordinary human enjoyments and productive activity, seemed a threat to the good life, and was condemned under the names of ‘fanaticism’ or ‘enthusiasm’.<sup>74</sup>

An impersonal order emerges as the hermeneutical key of interpreting human existence. This is enabled through: a mechanistic interpretation of the cosmic, moral and social world; a sense of “disengagement” reduces experience to the realm of “the mind” and

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<sup>69</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>70</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222 and 225.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 260-1.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 261-2.

<sup>74</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 263. Taylor describes Hume’s distinction between “virtues”, qualities which are “useful to others and oneself” and the “monkish virtues (celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude)” which “contribute nothing to, even detract from human welfare”, 263.

pre-empt a “withdrawal not just from the field of [all] cosmic meanings, but also from the body”; a ratification by an intellectual aversion to “popular religion”; a progressive view of human history.<sup>75</sup> The resultant dissolution of an unsustainable interpretation of human life and society paved the way for what we know as secularisation. The two spheres of the profane and the sacred, merged into one disenchanted world, until what remains is only “one relentless order of right thought and action, which must occupy all social and personal space”.<sup>76</sup> The compressing of the goals of human flourishing into the *saeculum* creates a “code of action” whereby the “main aim is to encompass the basic goods of life” in the civil order: “life, prosperity, peace, mutual benefit”.<sup>77</sup> The sacred horizon becomes gradually “wiped away” in Nietzschean terms.

While Taylor’s plotting of the rise of the secular age maintains an inner logic, others have countered that the spiritual sphere, and its associated philosophical and ethical strands, continue to shape Western societies.<sup>78</sup> Taylor’s course of secular development, read alongside

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<sup>75</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 280-89.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 266.

<sup>77</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>78</sup> Brad Gregory argues against Taylor’s theory. He suggests that Taylor’s “supersessionism” model of secularism supplanting a late medieval view of the world oversimplifies the complex nature of pluriform cultures. Gregory’s view is that “the prevailing picture of a strong historical supersessionism between the late Middle Ages and the present is seriously misleading if not fundamentally mistaken. Rejections rather than refutations – as well as selective appropriations – of ideas, commitments, norms, and aspirations have been common in the past half millennium. Inherited truth claims and values were often denounced without being disproven, just as worldviews and institutions were often *not* left behind. Rather, they frequently persisted in complex ways, in interaction with rival claims and new historical realities that differentially drew from them and influenced them in turn. Negligence of these facts yields supersessionist history that distorts our understanding of the present, perhaps most conspicuously with respect to religion, as if religious traditions actually had been left behind either as social realities or rendered intellectually untenable as competitors to secular ideologies. Despite their rejection beginning in the Protestant Reformation, central truth claims and related practices of medieval Christianity as embodied in Roman Catholicism, for example, have never gone away. These include – in addition to the many beliefs that early modern Catholics shared with most of their Protestant contemporaries – truth claims about papal and conciliar authority, the nature of the Church, the grace conferred through the Church’s seven sacraments, the reality of human free will despite original sin, and the necessary role of human actions in salvation, as well as practices such as participation in the Mass, sacramental confession of sins, intercessory prayer to the saints, and veneration of the Eucharist. These claims and practices have persisted to the present notwithstanding the dramatic transformations of modernity and the many influences of early modern and modern human realities on Catholicism. They today contribute to contemporary Western hyperpluralism [...] Ignoring such facts produces supersessionist history that cannot account for the present-day human realities. Some scholars in recent years have expressed a certain wonderment that “religion is back”; the wonder is rather that it was thought ever to have departed, apart from the ‘scholarly wish fulfilment’ or projections of those who accepted classic theories of modernization and secularization. Only those writing with a confessionally secularist agenda – one that ignores not only realities of religious and practice in the modern

works such as Michael J. Buckley's charting of the progression of modern atheism, demonstrates that the current personalist appreciation of spirituality has its roots in a reaction against notions of metaphysics and theological reasoning designed to "explain" the nature of created order rather than "express" its sacred rhythms.<sup>79</sup> A form of self-imposed disenchantment reached into theological formulations, and expressions of an impersonal order were largely overtaken by the focus on the social order and social good as the immanent and higher purpose of secular life and human fulfilment.<sup>80</sup>

This secular reasoning dominates public discourse. The public sphere is confined by the immanent realisation of human good, and any larger world, or other world, is partitioned to the realm of personal belief. The extension or embrace of the temporal order by another order is deemed to be an imposition upon human reasoning and freedom. The loosening of these constraints upon the spiritual imagination is the great task of mystagogy. At the same time, the social goals of the secular world – "prosperity, peace, mutual benefit" and one

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world but also intellectually sophisticated contemporary theology, biblical scholarship, and philosophy of religion – could pretend that even post-Enlightenment intellectual history, for example, might be responsibly be told as a story of incremental, inexorable Weberian disenchantment and a putatively inevitable growth of post-Darwinian atheism. Kierkegaard and Newman belong to nineteenth-century intellectual history no less than do Marx and Nietzsche. One of Edmund Husserl's most brilliant philosophical students, Edith Stein, converted to Catholicism and became a Carmelite nun in the 1930s; the ardently Catholic Elizabeth Anscombe was named in 1970 to the chair of philosophy at Cambridge previously occupied by her teacher, Ludwig Wittgenstein; Joseph Ratzinger went head to head with Jürgen Habermas over religion, philosophy and politics in Munich in January 2004. The twentieth century was marked – just as the early twenty-first continues to be – by brilliant Protestant and Catholic theologians and philosophers from Karl Barth and Henri de Lubac to Charles Taylor and Nicholas Wolterstorff. The plausibility of prevailing supersessionism picture of Western history depends on overlooking such facts and prompts ongoing questions about the precise sense in which our is 'a secular age'." Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012), 12-14.

<sup>79</sup> See Michael J. Buckley, *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Buckley details the historical European currents of the development of atheistic thought, and states that "the denial of God was generated by the very strategies that were constructed to combat it" (38). Buckley's thesis is that by becoming overly mechanical and theoretical, theology of the seventeenth to the nineteenth century gave modern atheism its basic claims for dialectic opposition. Buckley identifies the rise of modern, European atheism as a condition of rivalry with the Christian concept of God. The atheistic notion of "God" understood in this context is the denial and negation of human freedom. Nineteenth century atheism "bent its considerable energies to apotheosize the human; and for its mission, it was held necessary to counter, overthrow, and supersede the Judeo-Christian worship. Under this persuasion, atheism grew into a fanatical anti-theism" (71).

<sup>80</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 267.

might add “education and ethics” – serve as a constructive platform for productive dialogue and on-going ecclesial generativity and openness to the wider world.

Post-Enlightenment critiques of religion accused it of being nothing more than structured superstition.<sup>81</sup> In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx, among others, famously observed that “the struggle against religion is [...] the fight against *the other world*, of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*”, for religion itself “is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world [...] It is the *opium* of the people”.<sup>82</sup> The exile of this “illusory happiness” from the social landscape is required for the pursuit of “real happiness”.<sup>83</sup> Religion is the symptom of a deeper malaise: a “vale of woe”, a human condition “which needs illusions”.<sup>84</sup> The goal of history is to establish “the truth of this world”, not in another world, but in this earthly realm.<sup>85</sup>

Forty years later, Friedrich Nietzsche would declare that God is dead and “we” are the murderers.<sup>86</sup> This dramatic split between the world of faith and the world of human culture

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist is a prime modern example of this interpretation: “How swiftly the (moral) *Zeitgeist* changes – and it moves in parallel, on a broad front, throughout the educated world....Of course, the advance is not a smooth incline but a meandering sawtooth [...] But over the longer timescale, the progressive trend is unmistakable and it will continue”. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2006), 306-7. “Briefly put, critical examination of religion’s claims places it in the same class as astrology and magic. Like these systems of thought, religion dates from mankind’s less educated and knowledgeable early history, and like them it has been superseded by advances in our understanding of the world and ourselves”. A. C. Grayling, *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2. In this context, as was stated in the Introductory chapter, Nicholas Lash makes an interesting contribution to understanding the development of the English word “religion”: “In the Middle Ages, *religio* was a virtue, a kind of justice. Justice is the virtue of giving people and things their due. Religion is the virtue of giving God God’s due. On this account, there are two ways in which people may fail to be religious. They may fail by treating God as a creature: as some fact or feature of the world, some entity or idea which we might pick over, master or manipulate. (Dawkins is irreligious in this way, treating God, as he does, as a fictional feature of the world.) On the other hand, people may fail to be religious by treating some fact or feature of the world as God: by setting their hearts on, bowing down before, worshipping, themselves, their country, money, sex, or ‘reason’. (Dawkins is drawn to irreligion in this way as well, through idolisation of evolutionary processes.) In the fifteenth century, as the Latin word *religio* moved into English, it did so to name communities of men and women whose lives were specifically dedicated to the exercise of the virtue of religion [...] Then, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the sense of the word shifted from naming a virtue to naming a set of propositions or beliefs.” See Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims*, 14.

<sup>82</sup> Karl Marx, “Introduction. Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (1844)”, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: On Religion* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 42.

<sup>83</sup> Marx, “Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”.

<sup>84</sup> Marx, “Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”.

<sup>85</sup> Marx, “Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”.

<sup>86</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1887), trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), Book III, para. 125, 181-2.



was anticipated by Nietzsche's madman as he shouted in the market place: "Whither is God? [...] We have killed him [...] How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?"<sup>87</sup> In themes that would be echoed in more recent scrutinies of religious faith, Nietzsche added that mystical interpretations of existence were "not even superficial" because "they are not explanations at all; they only *seem* to explain something".<sup>88</sup> Not only was God dead, but religion was exposed as a trap which ensnares the human spirit. As is often observed, Nietzsche pre-eminently captured the depth and breadth of the modern mood which found itself uncoupled from its foundations and disorientated by that prospect.<sup>89</sup>

By the twentieth century, Max Weber would conclude that through rationalism, science and technology, human beings were masters of their own fate. There were "no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play", and all things could be deciphered and directed through "calculation"; the world was "disenchanted", and one "need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed".<sup>90</sup> In a disenchanted world, human culture is capable of merely being revelatory of its own limited, perfunctory nature. "Technical means and

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<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1887), 181.

<sup>88</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1887), para.126, 182.

<sup>89</sup> The split between two world views is particularly dramatic. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the death of God "in the bright morning hours" was not without some sadness for Nietzsche. The "death of God" left a void not easily filled. Nietzschean philosopher, Keith Ansell-Pearson, summarises the two-fold death that Nietzsche's words expressed: "Nietzsche lists what he takes to be now over for us moderns: looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and governance of a divine force; interpreting history in honor of a divine reason and a testimony of a moral world order; and interpreting one's experiences as if they were informed and guided by providence and ordained for the salvation of one's soul. What stands against all of these things is our modern intellectual conscience: such articles of faith have simply become unbelievable for us. In Nietzsche the death of God means two things. On the one hand, it means the death of the "symbolic God"; that is, the death of the particular God of Christianity. Although this God has held European humanity in bondage for two millennia and helped to breed a pathological hatred of the human and the earth, it has also served to protect the human will from theoretical and practical nihilism. On the other hand, it also means that the God of theologians, philosophers, and even some scientists is also dead, that is, the God that serves as a guarantor that the universe is not devoid of structure, order, and purpose." Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Gay Science", in *A Companion to Friedrich Nietzsche: Life and Works*, ed. Paul Bishop (New York: Camden House, 2012), 178-9.

<sup>90</sup> Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation", *Daedalus* 87, no. 1 (1958), 117. Reprinted from the book, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated, edited with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 134-156. Translated from "Wissenschaft als Beruf," *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen, 1922), 524-55. Originally a speech at Munich University, 1918, published in 1919, by Duncker & Humboldt, Munich.

calculations” supplant a world of wonder and surprise. These voices speak of the break between religion, or at least Western Christianity, and the world of Western culture.

## 2.5 RE-ORIENTATING CULTURE

The realities of this split continue to unfold. As Louis Dupré noted, modernity “is an ongoing creative process that even today has not reached completion”.<sup>91</sup> Yet, it has left its deconstructive mark, critiquing old forms of cultural symbolism while struggling to replace these social narratives with ones that offer any greater clarity of the world of the human person:

When a society no longer recognizes itself in the ideals that have traditionally directed it, and yet its members continue to feel beholden to them, a crisis originates. Hegel called this state of cultural ambivalence *alienation* (*Entfremdung*), a term that was to feature prominently in the revolutionary jargon of his unorthodox followers, Feuerbach and Marx. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he presented the entire Enlightenment as a state of profound social alienation. Insight and faith, Greek rationality and Christian faith, the two principles that had been fundamental in shaping Western culture, became engaged in a life-and-death struggle. Rationality hardened into rationalism; faith weakened into a belief incapable of justification.<sup>92</sup>

Yet the Enlightenment and Modernity have also advanced human society in many and varied ways. As Dupré recognises, the modern world is still grappling with the Enlightenment’s full implications.<sup>93</sup> Despite the “attempt to establish the priority of reason (albeit in an adulterated form)”, the Enlightenment and Modernity have left Western cultures with “a number of permanent benefits”.<sup>94</sup> Dupré summarises this “valuable legacy” with the following list:

Religious tolerance and, indispensable to it, separation between Church and state, respect for individual conscience, and the rejection of political coercion,

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<sup>91</sup> Louis Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2008), 5.

<sup>92</sup> Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture*, 37.

<sup>93</sup> Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture*.

<sup>94</sup> Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture*, 39.

social pressure, and cultural prejudice – these have become nonnegotiable items of Western belief. The historical critique of biblical texts at last forced the Church to qualify its unconditional literalism. Hume’s attack on the traditional arguments of the existence of God and Lessing’s exposure of the weakness of the historical ones for the truth of the Christian faith prove the inadequacy of a rationalistic approach in discussing transcendent principles. The critique proved painful particularly in the sarcastic form in which it was often administered. Yet it drove religion back to its spiritual home and prepared it for even more severe attacks of the nineteenth-century scientists....The Enlightenment has made us what we are today.<sup>95</sup>

This progression is not without some ambivalence and ambiguity. In the greater course of human history, religion and culture have been intimately connected. Geertz’s study paid particular attention to the place of religion in the cultural profile of a people.<sup>96</sup> Paul Tillich articulated the religious character of culture as its “meaning-giving substance”, succinctly expressed in his axiom: “religion is the substance of culture; culture is the form of religion”.<sup>97</sup> Religious imagination, language, ritual and form are cultural expressions:

Every religious act, not only in organized religion, but also in the most intimate movement of the soul, is culturally formed. The fact that every act of man’s spiritual life is carried by language, spoken or silent, is proof enough for this assertion. For language is the basic cultural creation.<sup>98</sup>

Following Tillich, Browning describes religion as culture’s “inner core”, “substance”, and “depth dimension”.<sup>99</sup> Browning observes that cultures are generally “maintained and articulated by myths, theologies, or certain coordinating models”.<sup>100</sup> In advanced societies, myths take on the form of theological reflection. In modern societies, “theologies give way to abstract models about the nature or function of things, people, and society”.<sup>101</sup> These re-interpretative models give “certain members of the society kinds of maps which orient them

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<sup>95</sup> Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture*, 40.

<sup>96</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 50. From an anthropological perspective, Geertz defined religion as: “[A] system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conception of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”.

<sup>97</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 42.

<sup>98</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 42.

<sup>99</sup> Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, 73.

<sup>100</sup> Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*.

<sup>101</sup> Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*.

to their worlds, tell them what to trust, what to hope for, and how to get what they have come to believe is the good”.<sup>102</sup> Whether in the form of myths, theologies or socio-political frames, these modes of interpretation offer people “some kind of orientation in the cognitive, affective, and behavioural spheres of life”.<sup>103</sup> Religious expression, language and imagination provide the symbolic framework of the cultural narrative, and in turn, cultural forms provide the tools to interpret this symbolic world. In Tanner’s words, an anthropological understanding of culture understands theology “as a form of cultural activity”.<sup>104</sup>

However, Christian theology is increasingly becoming a “counter-cultural activity”. As Dupré observes, it is the “conception” of the Enlightenment project that remains incomplete, not its “execution”. It has laboured under a “somewhat utopian idea of rationality”, which has limited rather than expanded the boundaries of human reason. For Dupré, “a broader idea of reason is needed, one in which rationality is conceived as being in accordance with the order inherent in the nature of things”.<sup>105</sup> In short, Dupré argues that the modern concept of reason is self-referential, confined to a form of evidential rationalism which limits truth to that which can be demonstrated, discounting knowledge drawn from the interplay of intuition and wisdom.

Larry Siedentop offers a thoughtful perspective on the “conception” of the Enlightenment and secular liberalism project. In contrast to Taylor’s view that humanism is a reaction against and reduction of the religious space, Siedentop insists that both Christianity and the contemporary West must see secularism as the child of religion. Siedentop proposes a parallel development of individual rights and freedoms through canon law in the first half of the second millennium with a similar development of secularism in the second half:

Christian moral intuitions played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse that gave rise to modern liberalism and secularism. Indeed, the pattern by which

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<sup>102</sup> Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*.

<sup>103</sup> Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, 73-4.

<sup>104</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 63.

<sup>105</sup> Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture*, 37-8.

liberalism and secularism developed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century resembles nothing so much as the stages through which canon law developed from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. The sequence of argument is quite extraordinarily similar. The canonists, so to speak, ‘got there first’.<sup>106</sup>

Siedentop provides an insightful alternative view to the generally-held proposition that religious belief and liberal secularism are incompatible partners. Secularism is “Europe’s noblest achievement” and “Christianity’s gift to the world”.<sup>107</sup> It is of benefit to both, Siedentop proposes, to recognise secularism as a child of the broad scope Judeo-Christian (and Greek philosophical) belief:

In its basic assumptions, liberal thought is the offspring of Christianity. It emerged as the moral intuitions generated by Christianity were turned against an authoritarian model of the Church. The roots of liberalism were firmly established in the arguments of philosophers and canon lawyers by the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries: belief in a fundamental equality of status as the proper basis for a legal system; belief that enforcing moral conduct is a contradiction in terms; a defence of individual liberty, through the assertion of fundamental or ‘natural’ rights; and, finally, the conclusion that only a representative form of government is appropriate for a society resting on the assumption of moral equality. These roots of liberalism were, however, dispersed in the fifteenth century. They had not yet been combined to create a coherent program or theory for reform of the sovereign state, into what we have come to call ‘secularism’.<sup>108</sup>

These moral intuitions crystallised around a secular notion of “equal liberty”.<sup>109</sup> Formed by the intellectual and canonical heritage of Christianity, “equal liberty” became the basis by which states reacted against authoritarian forms of Christianity during the Reformation. Belief could not be “enforced” and opposition to such approaches played a crucial role in the formation of modern liberalism.<sup>110</sup> This shaped liberalism “as a coherent doctrine directed against the idea of an authoritarian Church”, and “paved the way for a far more systematic separation of Church and State – that is, secularism”:

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<sup>106</sup> Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 359.

<sup>107</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 360.

<sup>108</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 332.

<sup>109</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 244.

<sup>110</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 333.

Indeed, the two terms became almost inseparable. Liberal secularism sought to limit the role of government through a structure of fundamental rights, rights that create and protect a sphere of individual freedom, a private sphere. Religion thus became a matter for the private sphere, a matter of conscience. Liberal secularism sought to protect that private sphere, moreover, by means of constitutional arrangements that would disperse and balance powers in the state.<sup>111</sup>

Given this inheritance, secularism is not the product of applied reason and evidential, scientific investigation alone, as it is frequently defined by social sciences. Siedentop rejects secularism as “non-belief” or “indifference”. In contrast, secularism shares the central moral insights of Christianity. Liberalism and secularism place a high moral value on individual rights and choices, and, while joining these “rights with duties”, it places “a premium on conscience rather than the ‘blind’ following of rules”.<sup>112</sup> Secularism “identifies the conditions in which authentic beliefs should be formed and defended”, and thus, “provides the gateway to beliefs [...] making it possible to distinguish inner conviction from mere external conformity”.<sup>113</sup> At its base, Siedentop’s thesis proposes that both Christianity and secularism must recognise their common beliefs and values, and forge a dialogue based in a recognition of “the moral depths” of Western traditions. Without an appreciation of this shared heritage, no such dialogue is possible.<sup>114</sup> Siedentop’s analysis presents a shared model of the public space, in which both religious faith and secular humanism co-exist. Taylor’s model proposes a reductionist model in which the religious space and spiritual aspirations shrink. One of Taylor’s key observations that Christian notions of human fulfilment have become contained by exclusive humanism provides a fundamental evangelising agenda, given that the Good News draws forth an anticipation of the larger prospects for creation in a world of grace. Siedentop’s common heritage model provides a dialogical basis for proceeding with a conversation regarding the nature of social good and human flourishing. As an understanding

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<sup>111</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 333-4.

<sup>112</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 361.

<sup>113</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*.

<sup>114</sup> Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 363.

of the ways of God receded, the social space was filled with the ideals and tools already available through the Christian vision. Nevertheless, without an attachment to an “alpha and omega”, an origin and destiny, these ideals only looked back to a human horizon.

## 2.6 THEOLOGISING CULTURE

*GS* was addressed to the situation of the “modern world”. *GS* explored some of the cultural, social and political realities of living in the modern world with a focus upon its pastoral complexities. John Paul II called the document a “kind of ‘magna carta’ of human dignity” and pointed to the central question at the heart of *GS*: is it possible to establish a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement?<sup>115</sup>

Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu, whose own theology of “the signs of the times” influenced the development of *GS*, wrote shortly after its promulgation:

This is the first time that the Church, in her solemn pronouncements, has stepped into history [....] This does not, of course, represent a concession to relativism, evolutionism or historicism, because we are still dealing with the same Word of God and the same Christ. Instead we are rediscovering the older theology of the Greek Fathers and their view of Christianity as an “economy”, a framework for the unfolding of God’s program in history [....] Human beings are the partner of God the creator in the development of the world.<sup>116</sup>

Chenu emphasised that the major aim of the constitution was not to establish a set of social principles, but rather to express the heart of the Church’s mission and articulate the meaning, purpose and character of its very existence *in* and *for* the world. Noting the concrete subject matter of the document (i.e. the dignity of the human person, the value of married life,

<sup>115</sup> John Paul II, *Discorso nel XXX Anniversario della Proclamazione della Costituzione Pastorale «Gaudium Et Spes»* (8<sup>th</sup> November, 1995). Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1995/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19951108\\_anniv-gaudium\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1995/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19951108_anniv-gaudium_it.html) on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2009. See also *GS*, 4.

<sup>116</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu quoted in Louis-Joseph Lebreton, “Economic and Social Life: The Community of Nations”, in *The Church Today: Commentaries on the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, ed. Group 2000 (New York: Newman Press, 1968), 160. Originally published in *Témoignage Chrétien*, December 16, 1965.

promotion of culture, economic and social justice, and international solidarity), Chenu observed that this was not a promulgation of “a social doctrine” but a real attempt “to delineate the root principles and the basic laws governing the *existence* of the Church *in* the world and *in* history”.<sup>117</sup>

Significantly, *GS* is addressed not only to the daughters and sons of the Church, and to all Christians, “but to people everywhere”.<sup>118</sup> The Council defined “the world” as “the whole human family in its total environment”.<sup>119</sup> In the mind of the Council, “the world” is the place of human and Divine encounter. Antony Nirappel summarised four dimensions which the Council understood as defining the world:

The term ‘world’ designates primarily [...] the human family with its total environment. The Constitution adds four notes which characterise this world: **1.** It is created and conserved by God; **2.** It had been enslaved to sin; **3.** It is redeemed and liberated by Christ through his death and resurrection; **4.** It is marching towards the eschatological accomplishment [...]. The accent is put on not the world of things but on the world of men and women or the human family.<sup>120</sup>

In service to “the whole of humanity”, the Council sought to enter into a “conversation” regarding the urgent problems which beset this human family. This theme introduces one of the most notable terms of the Council document: “the signs of the times”.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, “The Signs of the Times”, in *The Church Today: Commentaries on the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, ed. Group 2000 (New York: Newman Press, 1968), 46. The extensive and complex history of the drafting of this text gives testimony that a document such as this was new territory. Bernd Groth noted that *GS* marked a “fundamental turning point in the Church’s attitude to the world” and that this new approach could be described as “being a change from ‘opposition to dialogue,’ for since the beginning of the ‘modern age’ (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries), there had been a sometimes harsh contrast between the Catholic Church and ‘the world’.” Bernd Groth, “From Monologue to Dialogue in Conversations with Nonbelievers, or the Difficult Search for Dialogue Partners”, in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)* ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 185.

<sup>118</sup> *GS*, 2.

<sup>119</sup> *GS*, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Antony Nirappel, “Towards the Definition of the Term ‘World’ in *Gaudium et Spes*”, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 48(1972): 110 and 112.

<sup>121</sup> *GS*, 4: “The Church has a duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.”



In this context, reading the “signs of the times” is the work of discernment; a discernment of the “Christian meaning of events”.<sup>122</sup>

This phrase marked a decisive moment in the Church’s understanding of history. According to Giuseppe Ruggieri, this term moved the Church from a “*deductivist* outlook according to which a few principles yield conclusions valid for human activity in every age”, to “an *inductive* mindset that reads in and educes from facts the signs of a consistency between the gospel that is believed and proclaimed and the desires of human beings”.<sup>123</sup> In other words, the Church moved from establishing ahistorical universal propositions to a process of Christian discernment of human history based in concrete human experience.

The aim of “understanding the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel” was to enable the Church to respond appropriately to the “continual human questioning” on the meaning of this life and its relationship to the life to come.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, in order to communicate with “the world” there is an imperative for the Church to come to terms with “the world”.<sup>125</sup> No evangelisation can occur without “reading the signs of the times” and *NE* is intended to be an ecclesial response to interpreting the signs of the moment.

The concept of “culture” was explicitly developed in *GS*.<sup>126</sup> Although always central to the Christian vision, there was no developed theology of culture prior to the Council, certainly not in any way that was comparable to the magisterial content on “marriage and the family or the social teaching of the Church”.<sup>127</sup> For this reason, as Norman Tanner observes, the exploration of “culture” in *GS* is both “breaking new ground” and “somewhat

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<sup>122</sup> Charles Moeller, “Preface and Introductory Statement (*Gaudium et Spes*)”, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 99.

<sup>123</sup> Giuseppe Ruggieri, “Faith and History”, in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 95 and 97-98.

<sup>124</sup> *GS*, 4.

<sup>125</sup> *GS*, 4. “There is a need, then, to be aware of, and to understand, the world in which we live, together with its expectations, its desires and its frequently dramatic character.”

<sup>126</sup> *GS*, 53-62. It is contained in Part II, which is titled, “Some Urgent Problems”. In this sense, culture is seen in both problematic and – overwhelmingly – optimistic terms.

<sup>127</sup> Norman Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica, Rediscovering Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 52-3.

tentative”.<sup>128</sup> Arbuckle sees the presentation of culture in *GS* as “confusing” as the implied sense of culture drifts between “classicist” and “empirical” meanings.<sup>129</sup> Gallagher notes that *GS* shifted the understanding of culture from “high culture to a plurality of ways of living together in history”.<sup>130</sup>

*GS* brings together three distinct readings of culture – “humanist, empirical and local”.<sup>131</sup> In this sense, *GS* “balances three levels of meaning”: firstly, “the older sense of culture as self-cultivation” (humanist); secondly, a “phenomenological or anthropological view of culture as embodied in a whole range of social systems and expressions” (empirical); and thirdly, “an explicit recognition of the plurality of cultures” (local).<sup>132</sup>

*GS* defines “culture” as the means by which human beings and societies come to “a true and full humanity”. All human activity and endeavour involves “culture” in one form or another:

The word “culture” in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.<sup>133</sup>

The second half of the twentieth century generated an optimistic outlook, and *GS* described the contemporary age as a “new age of human history” embodying a “new

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<sup>128</sup> Tanner, *The Church and the World*, 53.

<sup>129</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 140: “The authors use the classicist or humanistic definition; thus ‘culture’ refers to ‘all those things which go to the refining and developing of man’s diverse mental and physical endowments’ (*GS*, 53). Then, in the same paragraph, they acknowledge its empirical meaning when they write that ‘culture’ often carries with it sociological and ethnological connotations.’ Overall, the emphasis in the document is on the classicist meanings of culture, but in a highly significant passage we read that evangelizers must ‘foster vital contact and exchange between the Church and different cultures’ (*GS*, 44). Here the reference is clearly to the empirical meaning of culture.”

<sup>130</sup> Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 374 (Summer, 2005), 145. *GS*, 53 speaks of a “plurality of cultures”.

<sup>131</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 54.

<sup>132</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 43.

<sup>133</sup> *GS*, 53.

humanism”.<sup>134</sup> *GS* enthusiastically embraced the cultural possibilities that the historical moment presented. As increasing numbers of people understood themselves as “the authors and the artisans of the culture of their communities”, there also developed signs of “spiritual and moral maturity”, which was advanced by a consciousness of the “autonomy as well as of the responsibility” for the world itself.<sup>135</sup> These cultural developments carried both contradictory moods of optimism and anxiety.

While acknowledging the progress of the betterment of human society and culture, “it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching”.<sup>136</sup> This would later be seen as “the drama of our time” in *EvN*, but *GS* interprets this as an opportunity for greater theological considerations. In what can be interpreted as a preliminary call for a renewed evangelisation, and as a direct result of Wojtyla’s intervention in the drafting committee, *GS* recognised that the contemporary cultural moment needed particular attention and reflection:

These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith, rather they can stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith. The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which effect life and which demand new theological investigations.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *GS*, 54 and 55.

<sup>135</sup> *GS*, 55.

<sup>136</sup> *GS*, 62.

<sup>137</sup> *GS*, 62. “Furthermore, theologians, within the requirements and methods proper to theology, are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another. In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith.” Yves Congar recorded an intervention by Wojtyla in this drafting committee meeting of *GS* in which he clearly articulated the growing awareness which would give birth to the concept of *NE*. Wojtyla noted that chapter 1 of the draft considered “only the questions posed by the new world situation” and failed to recognise “that this modern world also provides answers to these questions” which conflicted with the Church’s answers. For Wojtyla, this was the crux of the matter, and the document needed to address both these answers and the questions which they raised for the Church by their very existence. Here Wojtyla was particularly addressing the issue of Marxism, not singularly as an ideology but as a socio-political reality which “penetrates and shapes the whole of life in which humankind is called to live and work.” This will become an important connection in the development of *NE* and its connection to the Liberation Theology in the Latin American context. Congar was to follow these recollections with this prophetic assessment of Wojtyla’s character: “Wojtyla made a very great impression. His personality is imposing. A power radiates from it, an attraction, a certain prophetic force that is very calm, but incontestable.” See Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, trans. Mary John Ronayne, M. Cecily Boulding, and Denis Minns (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 714.

In a nod to the importance of mystagogy, literature and the arts were noted for their “great importance to the life of the Church”.<sup>138</sup> They convey the creative and imaginative power of humanity to foresee “a better life” amid “the miseries and joys, the needs and strengths” of our existence. The Church does not canonise a particular style of artistic expression and acknowledges “new forms of art which are adapted to our age and are in keeping with the characteristics of various nations and regions”.<sup>139</sup>

Prior to the precise term becoming part of the vocabulary of mission and evangelisation, *GS* spoke of the significance of “inculturating” the language, practices and theology of Church. Historically, the message of the gospel is cross-cultural, counter-cultural, and a source of mutual enrichment for both the Church and the cultures which it encounters.<sup>140</sup>

Arbuckle echoes the cautions of others regarding the optimistic tone of *GS* and its appropriation of modernity’s presumptions about human progress.<sup>141</sup> However, by the Council’s end, the Church was attempting a rapprochement with the modern world. As John O’Malley has noted, the “pastoral” nature of the Council meant a change of conciliar textual style. This, of itself, demonstrates the attempt to address the world of cultures in a new manner.<sup>142</sup> Gallagher describes this as a “new wavelength of conciliar language, one that

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<sup>138</sup> *GS*, 62.

<sup>139</sup> *GS*, 62.

<sup>140</sup> *GS*, 58. “There are many ties between the message of salvation and human culture [...] Likewise the Church, living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures so that in her preaching she might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, that she might examine it and more deeply understand it, that she might give it better expression in liturgical celebration and in the varied life of the community of the faithful. But at the same time, the Church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary way of life recent or ancient. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church herself.”

<sup>141</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 140.

<sup>142</sup> See John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008). “The epideictic genre is a form of the art of persuasion and thus of reconciliation. While it raises appreciation, it creates or fosters among those it addresses a realization that they all share (or should share) the same ideals and need to work together to achieve them. This genre reminds people of what they have in common rather than what might divide them, and the reminder motivates them to cooperate in enterprises for the common good, to work for a common cause [...] I will summarize in a simple litany some of the elements in the change in style of the

sought to describe rather than to judge” and to do so in a manner that would be accessible to the non-specialist.<sup>143</sup>

The style of conciliar texts communicated the style of engagement and partnership that the Church was seeking with the contemporary world deeply disorientated by war and anxious about new forms of destruction; a world being transformed through technology and communication; and a world exploring novel, if not contradictory, answers to the question of the human person. In this context, cultural communication would not occur through condemnation. A new age required new styles of language. In the first step towards an anticipated but unnamed “new evangelisation”, a re-proposing of the gospel for today required a new posture, a new vision and a new vocabulary. The instinct that “text” – language in its broadest definition – is key to entering into the cultural imagination is fundamental to the tone of the Second Vatican Council and, in particular, to *GS*. Nor was it an instinct lost on John Paul II who observed: “The Gospel lives always in conversation with culture [...] If the Church holds back from culture, the Gospel itself falls silent. Therefore, we must be fearless in crossing the cultural threshold of the communications and information revolution now taking place”.<sup>144</sup> The core imperative of *NE* is a mission of an imaginative and inventive engagement which reaches across this cultural divide. This, of course, is much easier said than done, but the fundamental principle that the “Gospel lives in conversation

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Church indicated by the council’s vocabulary: from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to conversation, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical and top-down to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from static to changing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from prescriptive to principled, from defined to open-ended, from behaviour-modification to conversion of heart, from the dictates of law to the dictates of conscience, from external conformity to the joyful pursuit of holiness.” O’Malley, “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?” *Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2006): 25 and 29.

<sup>143</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 42.

<sup>144</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications* (1<sup>st</sup> March, 2002), 4. Retrieved from:

[www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2002/march/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20020301\\_pccs\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020301_pccs_en.html) on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2013. It might also be observed that this is a fundamental characteristic of the communication of Pope Francis – when viewed, at least, through the lens of the early stages of his pontificate.

with culture” must remain at the heart of whatever is considered as *NE* or evangelisation for today.

The culture of communication is one of the many rapidly changing characteristics of the contemporary world. The internet has created new forms of communities and new methods of conversation. Although *GS* anticipated profound change, the social, political, economic, technological, ethical and religious spheres have transformed in ways that were barely imagined in the 1960s. In many Western countries, including Australia, the Church finds itself in the midst of a growing secular movement, where the religious quest is subsumed into, and subordinate to, what are regarded as the greater social and human goals of personal authority, autonomy and action. These personal values are balanced by the espoused common principles of tolerance, communitarianism, and the preservation of human rights. Forms of secularism, rather than atheism, are the great philosophical and theological challenges for the Church today.

## 2.7 CONTEMPLATING CULTURE

Michael Paul Gallagher’s major theological interest has been to discern the cultural themes of the contemporary age and to place them into a deeper theological conversation. Reading culture from a literary perspective, Gallagher identifies the discernment of culture as the primary theological task of the moment. Gallagher defines culture in a post-modern sense, often a “battle zone of conflicting meanings, values and images of life”.<sup>145</sup>

From an historical perspective, Gallagher agrees with Dupré’s interpretation that pre-Enlightenment modernity refashioned the relationship between the cosmos, its transcendent

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<sup>145</sup> Gallagher, "Religious Readings of Our Culture", 144.

source and its human interpretation, and therefore, culture.<sup>146</sup> Conventional images of God, space and self were transformed and initiated a spiritual revolution “that changed our perception of the real”.<sup>147</sup> Modernity arrived like a “long incoming tide”, as a “slowly accumulating phenomenon”, which gradually underpinned “assumptions that made religious adherence of an older kind untenable for masses of people”.<sup>148</sup>

Analysis of the link between modernity and twenty-first century perspectives reveals that the contemporary environment is the product of a slow evolution in which the defining features of human personhood have exploded into a new and vast “existential cosmos”, and “the self” has become a universe of its own design. Gallagher sums up this movement succinctly:

[Modernity] altered the cultural conditions of the possibility of ‘hearing’ from which Christian faith is born: not only did the supportive and cohesive society of pre-modern times fade away, but during these centuries churches found themselves fighting various rear-guard actions on several fronts and facing new challenges to the credibility of faith itself.<sup>149</sup>

The Church’s dominant response to modernity for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was a negative one, characterised by a “self-defensive ghetto” and complacent monologue, in which the Church was determined to remain an island of surety in

<sup>146</sup> Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 249.

<sup>147</sup> Gallagher, “Ecclesial Rereadings of Modernity”, in *L'uomo moderno e la chiesa: atti del congresso 16-19 novembre 2011*, ed. Paul Gilbert, *Analecta Gregoriana* (Rome: Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 2012), 22.

<sup>148</sup> *Clashing Symbols*, 76. “From both the Renaissance and the Reformation a new sense of the individual entered Western culture. Sometime later come the developments in philosophy associated with Descartes, significant for the parallel phenomena of rationalism and subjectivism. Intimately connected with this rationalism is the Scientific Revolution with its new stress on empirical criteria of truth, and the consequent clash with an unready older culture symbolised in the famous Galileo case. At the same period Francis Bacon proclaimed that knowing was power (*scire est posse*) and Machiavelli laid the foundations of a new politics without moral preoccupations. In this way modernity became a proud form of self-assertion and of human confidence in its own powers, and found itself, almost inevitably, in rebellion against older forms of order and of philosophy [...] Moving forward a century or so, many would see modernity as rooted in the so-called Enlightenment with its insistence on the right to freedom on various levels [...] Linked with this was the whole political movement most clearly embodied in the American and French Revolutions, which inaugurated different forms of democracy [...] One has to mention the Industrial Revolution, the arrival of capitalism as a dominant economic system, and the resulting upheaval of urbanisation [...] The nineteenth century also witnessed the birth of quasi-universal education and the consolidation of the new secular elites in the intellectual world [...] The twentieth century brought further developments that complete the complex accumulation that is modernity: electronic communications represent the biggest cultural revolution of recent times [...] The very rhythms of human consciousness have been altered by this world of fast-moving data and of images” (78-80).

<sup>149</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 80.

an otherwise compromised and corrupted world.<sup>150</sup> To quote Gallagher, the Church during this time, “remained absent from frontiers of history, seeming to prefer negative judgements of modernity to any positive effort to understand the new emerging world, including those three problematic areas of authority, autonomy and atheism”.<sup>151</sup>

Yet, as has been demonstrated by an analysis of *GS*, a posture of engagement marked the language of the Second Vatican Council. Gallagher understands this relationship of explicit faith and culture as primarily a question of religious imagination. In the background is John Henry Newman’s voice, who stated that:

The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us [...] [Real assent] is discerned, rested in, and appropriated as a reality, by the religious imagination.<sup>152</sup>

What is most pressing for Gallagher is the suppressed scope and range of the religious imagination which is constrained by the pressures of cultural forces. For Gallagher, culture “shapes the boundaries of the imaginable”.<sup>153</sup> Gallagher quotes the work of philosopher Will Kymlicka who proposes that culture serves to open the horizon of the possible choices in one’s life, for it is “only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value”.<sup>154</sup> Gallagher observes that if this observation regarding the nature of culture is true, then central religious criteria such as discernment and imagination “are being

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<sup>150</sup> Gallagher, “Ecclesial Rereadings of Modernity”, 22.

<sup>151</sup> Gallagher, “Ecclesial Rereadings of Modernity”, 22-3. Gallagher identifies three major fields of conflict between the Church and Modernity. These are epistemology (knowledge), subjectivity (“the self”) and atheism (ultimate meaning). These comprise the three “A-s” of authority, autonomy and atheism.

<sup>152</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, New Impression ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), 92-3 and 98. Ricœur’s definition of imagination is useful on this point: “The ultimate role of the image is not only to diffuse meaning across diverse sensorial fields, to *hallucinate* thought in some way, but on the contrary to effect a sort of *epoche* of the real, to suspend our attention to the real, to place us in a state of non-engagement with regard to perception or action, in short, to suspend meaning in the neutralized atmosphere to which one could give the name of the dimension of fiction. In this state of non-engagement we try new ideas, new values, new ways of being-in-the-world. Imagination is this free play of possibilities.” Paul Ricœur, “The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality”, *Man and World* 12, no. 2 (1979), 134.

<sup>153</sup> Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”, 144.

<sup>154</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Liberualism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 165. Quoted in Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”, 144.



transformed by forces outside its control”.<sup>155</sup> In turn, therefore, it can be expected that there will be a range of responses: “Some will bemoan the disaster, others will want to defend and preserve the tradition, and others again will hear a healthy wake-up call to forge a new language for faith”.<sup>156</sup>

Gallagher suggests that Western culture faces a “spiritual-cum-anthropological crisis,” in which “fragility and loss seem to be everywhere”.<sup>157</sup> In a rapidly changing epoch, with contemporary culture expressing “its new autonomy and pluralism”, the key “anthropological question” needs to focus on “where people find fullness of meaning for their lives”.<sup>158</sup> As Gallagher notes, this anthropological question is crucial for understanding methods of evangelisation:

If there is a new searching or floating culture around us, this calls for a different quality of lived faith within the community of the Church, and if this fresh religious culture were to be born gradually, it could be a key source of radiation outwards. This would seem a wiser religious response to culture than ‘purely activist understanding of evangelisation’.<sup>159</sup>

Gallagher is alert to the evangelising possibilities of the present moment. However, this also requires an alertness to the searching, wounds and sensitivities of the postmodern age.<sup>160</sup> The great drama of the age – the split between religious reception and culture – is summed-up well, if somewhat bleakly, by Gallagher:

Indeed I would argue that this postmodernity of the street wounds people in three crucial dimensions of their humanity of particular importance for religious identity: a wounded imagination, a wounded memory, and a wounded sense of belonging. The imagination, which according to Newman is the highroad of faith, can become colonised by junk food and shrink into superficiality. The memory, which is the receiver of the word through a living tradition, simply

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<sup>155</sup> Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”.

<sup>156</sup> Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”, 145.

<sup>157</sup> Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”, 149.

<sup>158</sup> Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”, 145.

<sup>159</sup> Gallagher, “Religious Readings of Our Culture”. Internal quote from Jozef De Kesel, “Annoncer l’Évangile Aujourd’hui”, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 126, no. 1 (2004): 10.

<sup>160</sup> Gallagher distinguishes between the intellectual school of “post-modernism” which contains “deconstructive” elements “associated with Lyotard or Derrida, or even tracing its origins as far back as Nietzsche”, and patterns of “post-modernity” which is a cultural sensibility “of the street”, better understood as a phenomenon that has two dimensions: “one of existential lostness and one of ‘reconstructive’ exploration of new frontiers”. See *Clashing Symbols*, 99.

loses its powers and 'alienated immediacy' takes over. Belonging with others in some kind of cohesive community is undermined when complexity reigns, when anchors are lost and when an imposed loneliness goes hand in hand with a frenetic lifestyle. Even to talk like this can be unworthy of the real numbness of vision and horizon that this version of postmodernity can provoke. That is why I think the expression 'cultural desolation' a fruitful one. Desolation, in its spiritual sense, involves a dangerous and impotent restlessness. When it becomes a cultural paradigm, it can kill the roots of imagination, memory and relationship, and thus make Christian faith not so much incredible as unreal and unreachable.<sup>161</sup>

Nonetheless, Gallagher sees the potential in the midst of the spiritual malaise. "The spiritual imagination of our time" does "long to believe" but is paralysed "on the threshold of faith".<sup>162</sup> The issue for Gallagher is that the wisdom of established traditions "remains attractive but unreachable", and seems "too simple for this problematic world".<sup>163</sup> In Gallagher's view, what is needed today is an "agenda of spiritual nourishment and reflection", through which people "discover their souls first", "awaken the surprise of the Gospel" and "retrieve the desires that a dominant lifestyle can smother".<sup>164</sup> It is this agenda of spiritual nourishment, the awakening of the soul, which Gallagher points towards as the meaning of "the new evangelisation".<sup>165</sup>

Gallagher's model is based in what he describes as "pre-religious" language, which is closely tied to Rahner's mystagogical instinct. Pre-religious language connects with "an inner core of Spirit-guided desire" prior to any "explicitly Christian interpretations of our experience".<sup>166</sup> In Gallagher's words, the institutionalised language of faith can be a barrier to effective evangelisation because it is precisely this "pre-religious" sense which needs nourishment, stimulation and awaking:

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<sup>161</sup> Gallagher, "Christian Identity in a Postmodern Age: A Perspective from Lonergan", in *Christian Identity in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Declan Marmion (Dublin: Veritas, 2005), 150-1.

<sup>162</sup> Gallagher, *Faith Maps*, 148.

<sup>163</sup> Gallagher, *Faith Maps*.

<sup>164</sup> Gallagher, *Faith Maps*, 5 and 4.

<sup>165</sup> Gallagher, *Faith Maps*, 4.

<sup>166</sup> Gallagher, *Dive Deeper*, 120.

Our hearts are being drawn towards love prior to finding the face of Love in Christ. There is a risk of rushing into the world of explicit religion without pausing on what is more fundamental in each of us – the experience of searching, of struggling to live genuinely, of being slowly transformed by the adventure of life. Here in silence and even in secret we are being shaped as lovers [...] The majority of people around who have abandoned regular contact with Church have not done so because of some intellectual argument against faith. They have drifted away because their imagination was left untouched and their hopes unawoken by their experience of Church. They leave less in anger than in disappointment with hollow words that claim to speak of the holy. The crisis is on the level of the ‘mediation’ between a tradition of faith and a new cultural sensibility. The language of the Churches seems stuck in an older mode and unable to speak imaginatively to the desires of now. People need to feel themselves part of a larger Story. Like the parables of Jesus, what is needed are traps for depth, moments of human poetry that give voice to the language of desire. And this would be a response on the level of pre-religious spiritual imagination.<sup>167</sup>

The above quotation captures much of the reasoning for a mystagogical approach to new evangelisation that will be argued in this thesis. The ‘crisis of mediation’ requires not merely different methods, but a renewal of conceptual language of faith itself. Mediation cannot take place without receptivity, and this requires more than evangelical energy. It also requires a surprising and subversive quality which reframes that which is received as fatigued and exhausted with a “newness” that triggers curiosity and enchantment. The heart of the question is not, “What does it mean to be religious?” Rather, the question is, “What does it mean to be human?” It is here, at this entry point, that the “pre-religious” or mystagogical sense can provide the conceptual mediation for evangelisation.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Gallagher, *Dive Deeper*, 120 and 122.

<sup>168</sup> Regarding this proposition, Taylor makes an interesting point. Frequently in the modern age, people are drawn by various spiritual practices prior to being drawn into particular forms of Church membership: “Now if we don’t accept the view that the human aspiration to religion will flag, and I do not, then where will the access lie to the practice of and deeper engagement with religion? The answer is the various forms of spiritual practice to which each is drawn in his/her own spiritual life. These may involve meditation, or some charitable work, or a study group, or a pilgrimage, or some special form of prayer, or a host of such things. A range of such forms has always existed, of course, as optional extras as it were, for those who are already and primarily embedded in ordinary Church practice. But now it is frequently the reserve. First people are drawn to pilgrimage, or a World Youth Day, or a meditation group, or a prayer circle; and then later, if they move along in the appropriate direction, they will find themselves embedded in ordinary practice.” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 515-6.

## 2.8 AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW

Measures demonstrate a portion of the picture, but not the whole canvass. Census data provides one piece of the puzzle. In the 2011 Australian census, those who identified as having “no religion” rose to 22.3%, an increase of 7% in a decade. This rise was more striking in the 15-34 age bracket with 28% recording “no religion”. It is a sobering fact the second-largest “religious affiliation” in Australia is “no religion”. Catholicism, the largest single denomination (25.3%), also registered a decrease of around 2% over a decade. Immigration plays a part in maintaining this relatively high proportion of religious identification.<sup>169</sup> Overall, this data offers a measurement, but the greater question is a diagnostic one – or to use a religious term, it is a cause for profound discernment.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> “One of the most striking features of the Catholic population is its ethnic diversity. Nearly a quarter of Australia’s Catholics (23.6 per cent) were born overseas, and about three-quarters of those people (17.9 per cent of all Catholics) were born in non-English speaking countries. A further 124,618 Catholics are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin – that’s 2.3 per cent of all Australia’s Catholics. Most Italian Catholics arrived in Australia in the 1950s and 60s, so that now almost two-thirds of them are aged 60 or more. In contrast, almost 90 per cent of Catholics born in the Philippines are aged *under* 60, so that it is highly probable that by the time of the next Census in 2016, the Philippines will have displaced Italy as the overseas country contributing the highest number of Catholics to the Australian population. Catholics born in the Sudan or South Sudan (7,983 in 2011) have the youngest age profile, with almost 80 per cent being under the age of 40.” Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference (Pastoral Research Office), *A Profile of the Catholic Community in Australia* (March, 2013), 1. Retrieved from: <http://pro.catholic.org.au/pdf/ACBC%20PRO%20Catholic%20profile%202013.pdf> on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2015.

<sup>170</sup> All data is taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website: [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf). “No Religion” was first used as a category in the 1971 census when 6.7% declared no religious affiliation. Despite the decline in percentage terms, the number of Catholics increased, and has increased in every census since the first census in 1911. In 2015, the Australian Bureau of Statistics announced a change to the religious affiliation question for the following census in 2016: “During the 2016 Census topic review process, many submissions recommended changes to the Religious affiliation question due to perceived bias in the question format and consequent potential underestimates of the number of people who stated they had no religion. After user consultation and testing, the ABS has decided to move the No religion response category to be the first response category in the question, so it will be more consistent with other questions and the order of their response categories. This approach is consistent with that of a number of other countries.” Retrieved from: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2008.0~2016~Main%20Features~Religious%20Affiliation~111> on the 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2015. Another measure of institutional decline is regular Mass attendance. Of the 5,439,268 Catholics identified by the 2011 census, around 10.6% (578,000) attended Mass weekly. Accounting for those who attend on a monthly basis, around 12.5% of Catholics connect with their local parish community: “In the 50-year period, 1961-2011, when Australia’s Catholic population more than doubled, the number of Catholics who regularly attended Mass more than halved. And in the 5-year period, 2006-2011, more than 130,000 Catholics across Australia, or 18.4% of all regular weekly Mass goers, ceased to attend.” Peter Wilkinson, “Who goes to Mass in Australia in the 21st Century?” *The Swag* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2013), 30.

To what extent do these measures point to the formation of “a secular nation”? As a short answer, Renae Barker concludes that the answer lies in what one considers to be “secular”.<sup>171</sup> Australia has no favoured or established religion.<sup>172</sup> This does not mean that there is no interface between Church and State. As Barker asks, “Is permitting halal certification, the wearing of Islamic headscarves, religious chaplains in state schools or political lobbying by religious organisations inconsistent with a secular Australia?”<sup>173</sup> These occur with a degree of tolerance and acceptance, yet key to understanding the form of secularism that dominates Australian society is personal choice. “Unbelief”, “non-belief” and “religious belief” are all valid options, as long as these choices enhance, or at least do not jeopardise, perceptions of the common good and social harmony. “Secular”, in this sense, implies an expectation that faith-based groups will engage in productive forms of social activity and service which arise from individual choice and not impose values and beliefs. Barker’s description of the “secular” in the Australian context is helpful and informative. Even if each census suggests otherwise, the majority of the population have not “turned their backs on religion”, nor are the State and religions strangers:

Secularism in Australia means no state church. It means giving people a choice between belief and un-belief. It means religious leaders may lobby for their point of view but so too may leaders of atheist, humanist and rationalist organisations [...] Australia is still secular, but it has a form of secularism where religion is allowed in the public sphere. As long as religion remains one voice among many and one option among many Australia will remain a secular country.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Renae Barker, “Is Australia a Secular Country? It Depends What You Mean”, *The Conversation* (May 14th, 2015). Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/is-australia-a-secular-country-it-depends-what-you-mean-38222> on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

<sup>172</sup> Section 116 of *The Australian Constitution* states that: “The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.” *The Australian Constitution*, 2nd ed. (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988), Ch. 5, Section 116.

<sup>173</sup> Barker, “Is Australia a Secular Country? It Depends What You Mean”.

<sup>174</sup> Barker, “Is Australia a Secular Country? It Depends What You Mean”.

In contrast to Barker's conclusion, Timothy Jones, based on a purely institutional analysis, questions the secularity of Australian society. Religion remains a leading, publicly-funded service provider:

Over the past 60 years, in particular, religious institutions have come to provide a very large proportion of Australia's social services. Nearly 40% of secondary students in Australia now attend private schools. Most of these are religious. Australia has reached a point where the secular state is funding religious institutions to provide essential public services. In fact, on an institutional level, it is now questionable how secular Australian society is.<sup>175</sup>

It may be concluded that this describes a "pluralist" rather than a "secular" nation. The above observations do suggest that there are no precise definitions or clear lines of separation. There is, indeed, the expectation that religions will contribute to the common welfare of the citizenry. This is a fluid relationship which creates opportunities for conversation, dialogue and the possibility of evangelisation.

## 2.9 CONCLUSION

*NE* must enter into the complex relationship between faith and culture. This was a constant theme of the pontificate of John Paul II, the author of *NE*. John Paul II was aware of both the ancient rhythms of evangelisation and the novel challenges of the contemporary world:

Certainly, the concern for evangelizing cultures is not new for the Church, but it presents problems that have an aspect of novelty in a world characterized by pluralism, by the clashing of ideologies and by profound changes in mentality. You must help the Church to respond to these fundamental questions for the cultures of today: how is the message of the Church accessible to new cultures, to contemporary forms of understanding and of sensitivity? How can the Church of Christ make itself understood by the modern spirit, so proud of its

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<sup>175</sup> Timothy W. Jones, "Religious Freedom Should Not Necessitate Sexual Discrimination", *The Conversation* (June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/religious-freedom-should-not-necessitate-sexual-discrimination-43068> on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

achievements and at the same time so uneasy for the future of the human family?  
Who is Jesus Christ for the men and women of today?<sup>176</sup>

Evangelisation begins with these questions. This chapter has attempted to map some small seas in the vast ocean of cultures and present a précis of this larger whole. No one theory of culture is able to synthesise the pluriform expressions and manifestations of culture into a singular schema. It is a complex history, but it is enough to recognise that liberal secularism did not emerge suddenly – or even inevitably – and that religion (Western Christianity) is responsible as an active agent, and not solely as an opponent. As public, ethical structures have grown in Western societies, forms of religious spiritualities have become less convincing.

To understand this is to understand some of the necessary elements and approaches which will comprise *NE* in a secular age. Religious faith is as pluralist as the culture in which it lives. *NE* must consider this reality with “the eyes of faith”. The Biblical and Christic question of every age remains fundamental to this age: “Who is Jesus Christ for the men and women of today?” As an evolving ecclesial enterprise, *NE* has many meanings and styles. The next chapter will review *NE* as both an ecclesiological concept and the subject of theological reflection and missionary endeavour. *NE* has developed myriad forms depending upon one’s interpretation of the relationship between culture and religious belief.

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<sup>176</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture: Evangelizing Today's Cultures* (15<sup>th</sup> January 1985), 3. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/cultr/documents/rc\\_pc\\_cultr\\_doc\\_20000126\\_jp-ii\\_addresses-pccultr\\_en.html#3on](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_doc_20000126_jp-ii_addresses-pccultr_en.html#3on) 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2014.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### ***READINGS OF THE NEW EVANGELISATION***



## **Readings of the New Evangelisation**

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The genesis of the term *NE* is found in a series of papal exhortations given to local episcopal conferences in the early years of the pontificate of John Paul II. Its initial reception was confined to Latin American due to two major factors: the controversy concerning liberation theology, and the quincentennial commemoration of the colonisation and evangelisation of the South American continent. Only after the publication of *Redemptoris Missio* (hereafter, *RM*) in 1990 did *NE* find its way into a broader context, particularly in the English-speaking world. Central to this second phase of reflection was an interpretation of the Christian anthropology of John Paul II. This was seen by some writers as the “content” of *NE*.

The third movement in the interpretation of *NE* occurred during the first decade and a half of this new millennium. The death of John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI in 2005 inevitably meant some change to the interpretations of *NE*. The resignation of Benedict XVI ushered in the papacy of Pope Francis who has recalibrated the focus of *NE* within the whole context of the Church’s mission. The establishment of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization in 2010 signalled a shift from a question of Christian anthropology to cultural anthropology.

This chapter will explore the theological literature and its development in five distinct stages:

- Firstly, the background to the “evangelising turn” in the Catholic tradition;
- Secondly, the Latin American reception of the early papal exhortations and their historical context;

- Thirdly, the initial theological reading of *NE* in the English-speaking world;
- Fourthly, the interpretation and application of *NE* as an evolving theological activity;
- And fifthly, the re-framing of mission and evangelisation during the pontificate of Francis.

### 3.2 CONTENDING WITH “THE NEW”

At the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI addressed the relationship between the Church and the world. Paul VI summarised the struggle of the Council, as a desire to “to know, to draw near to, to understand, to penetrate, serve and evangelize the society in which she lives; and to get to grips with it, almost to run after it, in its rapid and continuous change”.<sup>1</sup> The Second Vatican Council marked a change in tone, language and style. The Church understood that the dramatic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had not left the world untouched or unaltered. Europe, in particular, was no longer the Europe of old.

The Catholic embrace of the term “evangelisation” coincided with a diminishment of the Church’s traditional base in European countries, the rise of the Church in mission territories and changing conceptions of human nature, human freedom and the human person. As Mark Coleridge points out, the “twin apocalypse” of war signalled both the collapse of Christian Europe and “cast doubt upon the grand promises of the project of modernity”.<sup>2</sup> This left the Western mind “spiritually eviscerated, with a widespread evaporation of meaning and a loss of confidence in institutions” and “brought to birth a postmodernity fraught with deep uncertainties and ambiguities”.<sup>3</sup> The closing address of Paul VI gave voice to a Church in

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<sup>1</sup> Paul VI, “Address at the Last General Meeting of the Second Vatican Council (7<sup>th</sup> December, 1965)”, in *Doing Theology*, ed. Jared Wicks (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2009), 166.

<sup>2</sup> Coleridge, “A Different Fire”, 129-30.

<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, “A Different Fire”, 130.

uncertain yet hopeful transition. The Church was “running after” a world which was not slowing down. A new epoch required a “vital, attractive, and persuasive” approach to the modern age.<sup>4</sup> A new evangelisation would also require more than this.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, terms such as “apostolate” designating a particular or generic work of the Church, and “mission” referencing a first and geographic evangelisation, were the key terms for naming the Church’s engagement with the old and new worlds. Catholics were reluctant to embrace the term “evangelism” because of its Reformation overtones. However, it was the work of Protestant theologians, particularly the theology of Karl Barth as appropriated by Hans Urs von Balthasar, which encouraged Catholic thinkers to re-evaluate the term.<sup>5</sup> Dulles’ analysis of the conciliar usage of “evangelisation” and associated expressions is informative regarding its ecclesial appropriation:

Building on the kerygmatic theology of the preceding decade, Vatican II made use of evangelical terminology. A comparison with Vatican I, which reflected the 19<sup>th</sup> century mentality, is instructive. Vatican I used the term “Gospel” (*evangelium*) only once and never used the terms “evangelize” or “evangelization.” Vatican II, by contrast, mentioned the “Gospel” 157 times, “evangelize” 18 times and “evangelization” 31 times. When it spoke of evangelizing, Vatican II seems generally to have meant what the kerygmatic theologians meant by the term: the proclamation of the basic Christian message to those who did not yet believe in Christ.<sup>6</sup>

“Evangelisation”, old or new, has supplanted these prior terms precisely because it breaks with a neo-Scholastic propositional model and opens up an increasingly theologically-rich framework of engagement and proclamation. In parallel to this, and as the age of colonialism came to an end, the missionary efforts of all Christian traditions were called into question. The negative effect of missionary expansion upon local cultures was seen as the

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<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, “Address at the Last General Meeting of the Second Vatican Council”, 169.

<sup>5</sup> Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, 2-3: “Catholics shied away from speaking about the gospel and evangelization, since Protestant churches had appropriated these terms [...] The terminology of evangelization re-entered Catholic literature toward the middle of the (twentieth) century, thanks in part to the influence of Protestant thinkers such as Karl Barth.”

<sup>6</sup> Dulles, “John Paul II and The New Evangelization”, *America* 166, no. 3 (1992): 53.

dark side of “Christianisation”. The whole question of what it meant to evangelise was being redefined on two practical fronts.

As Stephen Bevans described it, in the second half of the twentieth century, current and former missionary territories were developing a growing sense of nationalism and self-determination, and therefore traditional concepts of mission *ad gentes* were no longer adequate to address this changing face of the “younger churches”.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, old catechetical approaches failed to adapt to the significant shifts in the nature of belief and its cultural settings in “evangelised” societies. Missionaries, catechists and “evangelisers”, in so far as that term was used, faced new and evolving contexts. A robust and lucid rearticulation was needed.

As well as this cultural fluidity, there were profound theological shifts emerging from the Council itself. The missionary urgency of proclamation was somewhat blunted by a renewed soteriology which held that “the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers every person the possibility of being associated with (the) paschal mystery”.<sup>8</sup> The necessity and pastoral purpose of evangelisation was in need of clarification. Bevans observed that missionary zeal in its traditional form lost its impetus: “In the time before Vatican II, women and men were willing to sacrifice their comfort and even their lives to ‘save the poor heathen,’ and now they were being told that there was really no urgent need”.<sup>9</sup> It was in the context of the reclaiming of cultural identities, a growing rejection of institutional expressions of faith, and a reframing of the activity of the Church in old and new fields, that the Synod on Evangelisation was held in 1974.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bevans, “Witness to the Gospel in Modern Australia: Celebrating Thirty Years of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*”, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 6 (February 2006): 2-4. Retrieved from: [http://aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/395184/AEJT\\_6.2\\_Bevans\\_Witness.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/395184/AEJT_6.2_Bevans_Witness.pdf) on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> *GS*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Bevans, “Witness to the Gospel in Modern Australia”, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Bevans, “Witness to the Gospel in Modern Australia”.

Since the Second Vatican Council, two ordinary general synods have been held on the topic of evangelisation.<sup>11</sup> Almost forty years apart, the questions remain the same, expressed with a greater sense of urgency and complexity as the years advanced. At the closing address of the synod in 1974, Paul VI spoke of “unanimous desire” of the synod fathers for a “new impulse” of evangelisation.<sup>12</sup> The synod itself was “muddled and indecisive”, and after a failed attempt by the Relator, Carol Wojtyla (later John Paul II) to draw together some conclusions, its final deliberations were left to Paul VI.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Wojtyla would remain a key interpreter of the synod discussions, and according to synod President, Franz Koenig, Wojtyla was the primary hand in the composition of *EvN*.<sup>14</sup> This is an essential link in understanding the development of the concept of “new evangelisation” as it moved from an impulse in the Second Vatican Council, and in particular *GS* - a document which Wojtyla helped craft - to an emerging concept in the pontificate of John Paul II. Personality merged with ecclesial reality; the evolution of *NE* accompanied the immense contribution of Papa Wojtyla.

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<sup>11</sup> *Evangelization in the Modern World*, 27<sup>th</sup> September-26<sup>th</sup> October 1974 and *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, 7<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Paul VI, *Closing Address to the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* (26<sup>th</sup> October, 1974) Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1974/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19741026\\_allocazione-finale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1974/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19741026_allocazione-finale.html) on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2014. “One fact, however, dominates these particular observations, and it is the unanimous desire to instil in the Church a new impetus to the work of evangelisation, one that is widespread, harmonious, bountiful. The Church is conscious of this fundamental duty, perhaps to an extent and with such clarity as never before. It seems truly a moment worthy of the recent Council; in conformity with the essential vocation of the Church, answering the needs of the world, remedying certain negative phenomena, which we know all too well.” (My translation).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Franz Koenig interviewed by Gianni Licheri, *Where is the Church Heading?*, trans. Thomas Kala (Slough: St. Paul’s, 1985), 55-6: “The main difficulty was that there was not enough time to agree on a document that would have been acceptable to the whole assembly. Cardinal Wojtyla’s paper clearly showed a vast pastoral experience. Although definitely interesting, it was too wide ranging and reflected too markedly the forceful personality of its author. All told, the document looked more like a personal thesis rather than the findings of a commission, and the synod rejected it [...] The truth is that the synod, after a negative vote, preferred to close without an approved document, leaving the whole matter to the Pope [...] It is a well known fact that, by the express wish of the Pope, Cardinal Wojtyla was the author of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Obviously, Paul VI read it and retouched it.”

Ten years after the Council raised questions of the Church in relation to the modern world, the post-Synodal exhortation of Paul VI named evangelisation as the Church's core ecclesial identity:

Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.<sup>15</sup>

Evangelisation is not an added extra to the nature of the Church; rather, it is the authentic activity of the Church. A key insight of *EvN* is the realisation that evangelisation is both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. The Church's first task is to be evangelised "herself". Only through personal and communal renewal can the Church be a credible witness to the world: "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself."<sup>16</sup>

The aim of evangelisation is defined as a conversion of "the personal and collective consciences of people", which also transforms social and cultural dimension of human life.<sup>17</sup> It is this relationship between the human person, culture and the Gospel that is the key triad of *NE*. In the famous phrase of Paul VI, "the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time".<sup>18</sup> If Paul VI named the drama, then *NE* is the contemporary attempt to engage the actors and performers. The evangelising task of *NE* is to move within this "split", this fragmentation, this separation between the lived experienced of the contemporary person and the promise of the Gospel. It is this role of evangelisation that Paul VI envisioned when he stated:

What matters is to evangelize culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots) [...] always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God. The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by people who are profoundly

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<sup>15</sup> *EvN*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> *EvN*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> *EvN*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> *EvN*, 20.

linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures.<sup>19</sup>

As outlined in *EvN*, the method of evangelisation “is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative”.<sup>20</sup> Evangelisation is brought about through a combination of personal commitment, communal witness, and missionary service.

*EvN* acknowledged the reality of secularism as a contemporary phenomenon, as distinct from “secularisation” which was understood in neutral terms as the “just and legitimate” autonomy of science, social enrichment and political development. In contrast, secularism is “a concept of the world according to which the latter is self-explanatory, without any need for recourse to God, who thus becomes superfluous and an encumbrance”.<sup>21</sup> Focusing purely on the power and potential on the human person, “this sort of secularism [...] ends up [...] doing without God and even [...] denying Him”.<sup>22</sup> However, even this form of secularism was understood to have elements that contained an evangelising potential:

In this same modern world, on the other hand, and this is a paradox, one cannot deny the existence of real steppingstones to Christianity, and of evangelical values at least in the form of a sense of emptiness or nostalgia. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there exists a powerful and tragic appeal to be evangelized.<sup>23</sup>

The term “steppingstones”, while lacking precise examples, suggests that it is possible to identify and engage with contemporary concerns amid the profound human search for meaning. This, therefore, represents a hint of a methodology for *NE* and the consideration of a “mystagogical” enrichment of the evangelising task.

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<sup>19</sup> *EvN*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> *EvN*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> *EvN*, 55. This definition parallels Taylor’s third form of secularism.

<sup>22</sup> *EvN*, 55.

<sup>23</sup> *EvN*, 55.

The second sphere of evangelisation identified by Paul VI was “those [baptised] who do not practice”.<sup>24</sup> Defining this reality as symptomatic of a form of contemporary social and cultural irreligious contagion, Paul VI planted the seed of *NE* without providing any particular evaluation or consideration of the profound philosophical, social, cultural and spiritual shifts which have resulted in institutional disengagement.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, a “new” manner of evangelisation was needed. The Church’s mission in these times must involve the discernment of new methods and new language “for presenting, or representing,” the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

While “re-presenting” or “re-proposing” the Gospel would become a key theme of *NE*, *EvN*, principally, described evangelisation in terms of common and personal witness.<sup>27</sup> This “re-presenting” of Gospel would occur through the faithful living, and in turn, be a source of admiration and inquisitiveness for others.<sup>28</sup> Authenticity, rightly identified as a “thirst” of the contemporary age, is identified as a key characteristic of witness which promotes the “progress of the Gospel”.<sup>29</sup> People listen more readily “to witnesses than to teachers” and if they do “listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *EvN*, 56.

<sup>25</sup> *EvN*, 56. “Today there is a very large number of baptized people who for the most part have not formally renounced their Baptism but who are entirely indifferent to it and not living in accordance with it. The phenomenon of the non-practicing is a very ancient one in the history of Christianity; it is the result of a natural weakness, a profound inconsistency which we unfortunately bear deep within us. Today however it shows certain new characteristics. It is often the result of the uprooting typical of our time. It also springs from the fact that Christians live in close proximity with non-believers and constantly experience the effects of unbelief. Furthermore, the non-practicing Christians of today, more so than those of previous periods, seek to explain and justify their position in the name of an interior religion, of personal independence or authenticity”.

<sup>26</sup> *EvN*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> *EvN*, 21. “Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness”.

<sup>28</sup> *EvN*, 21. “Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization”.

<sup>29</sup> *EvN*, 76. “It is often said nowadays that the present century thirsts for authenticity. Especially in regard to young people it is said that they have a horror of the artificial or false and that they are searching above all for



While actions make speak more powerfully than words, Paul VI was alert to this crucial dimension of culturally-appropriate language. Continuing the historical and cultural consciousness which was central to the work of Vatican II, *EvN* recognised the “anthropological and cultural” force of language. In cautious tones, perhaps with an eye towards the introduction of the use of vernacular language and “legitimate adaptation” in the liturgy, Paul VI stated that the task of inculturation was “delicate”, needing to hold in tension both particular and universal elements:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it.<sup>31</sup>

While *EvN* is conscious of a modern world that had changed, and therefore, that the transmission and reception of the Gospel faced new social conditions, the extent of “the drama of this age” was only emerging by degrees. In Australia and other Western cultures, religious connection has continued to diminish, while a spiritual eclecticism has filled this void. As will be examined, much of the theological project in Australia since that time has been an attempt to address this situation.

Ten years after the closing of the Council, *EvN* re-visited the Church’s place in the modern world. The term “evangelisation” was more thoroughly embraced as a descriptor for a renewed form of missionary enterprise. It described a practice that was needed much closer to home rather than in far-off missionary lands. *EvN*, perhaps even more clearly than the Second Vatican Council, foresaw a world which was cooling towards institutional religious

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truth and honesty. These “signs of the times” should find us vigilant. Either tacitly or aloud – but always forcefully – we are being asked: Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching. Precisely because of this we are, to a certain extent, responsible for the progress of the Gospel that we proclaim”.

<sup>30</sup> *EvN*, 41.

<sup>31</sup> *EvN*, 63.

expressions. The remedy for this was a more energetic Christian witness. It could not foresee that substantial cultural forces would further challenge fundamental notions of the human person, human community and the search for meaning. These challenges would not simply dissipate in the face of kerygmatic witness.

### 3.3 LATIN AMERICA AND THE BIRTH OF *NE*

The running definition of *NE* is taken from the now-famous address of John Paul II to *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (Latin American Episcopal Conference) in 1983 when he called for a fresh evangelisation, “new in its ardour, methods and expression”.<sup>32</sup> Two years later, addressing the bishops of Peru, John Paul II used the term again, particularly in reference to the promotion of human dignity and labour: “The new evangelisation must pay great attention to the dignity of the human person, their rights and just aspirations.”<sup>33</sup> In the same vein, during a visit to Peru in 1988, John Paul II again placed *NE* within the context of economic liberation:

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<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, “Discourse to the XIX Assembly of CELAM (9<sup>th</sup> March, 1983)”, in *L'Osservatore Romano (English Edition)* (18<sup>th</sup> April, 1983), 9. “New Evangelisation” was first coined by CELAM (*Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* – Latin American Episcopal Conference) in their message to “Message to the Peoples of Latin America” following their meeting in Medellín in 1968. The Latin American bishops spoke of the need to “alentar una nueva evangelización [...] para lograr una fe lúcida y comprometida” (“encourage a new evangelisation [...] to develop a lucid and committed faith”). CELAM, *Mensaje a los pueblos de América Latina*, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1968, 6 (My translation). It would be another decade before “new evangelisation” would become a papal exhortation. “New Evangelisation” enters the papal lexicon, “without any specific emphasis or idea of its future role,” through a homily of John Paul II in Poland in 1979. XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (Rome 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2011), 5. Retrieved from:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20110202\\_lineamenta-xiii-assembly\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xiii-assembly_en.html) on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2012. In themes that would resonate throughout the whole of his pontificate, John Paul II saw both “the threshold of the new millennium” and the “new conditions of life” as the context for a new missionary endeavour. “A new evangelization has begun, as if it were a new proclamation, even if in reality it is the same as ever”. John Paul II, *Homily at the Sanctuary of the Holy Cross, Mogila, Poland* (9<sup>th</sup> June, 1979) (*L'Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1979), 11.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, “Encuentro con los Miembros del Episcopado del Perú”, (2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1985), 4: “La nueva evangelización ha de prestar gran atención a la dignidad de la persona, a sus derechos y justas aspiraciones.” (My translation). Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1985/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19850202\\_episcopato\\_sp.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1985/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19850202_episcopato_sp.html) on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2013.

The new evangelisation, driven by the commandment of love, will bring forth the desired promotion and development of justice in its fullest sense, as well as the fair distribution of wealth and the respect for the dignity of the person.<sup>34</sup>

John Paul II was to re-visit this theme in an address in 1992 on “New Evangelisation, Human Development and Christian Culture”. John Paul II stated that the “newness of the evangelising activity that we have called for is a matter of attitude, style, effort and planning”, outlining “three axes of the new evangelisation: Christology, ecclesiology and anthropology”.<sup>35</sup> Given the Roman opposition to the political elements of liberation theology, *NE* was offered as a theological corrective:

We must certainly point out that some positions on what constitutes truth, freedom, conscience are unacceptable. Some have even gone so far as to justify dissent by invoking “theological pluralism” [...] Some think that the documents of the magisterium reflect nothing more than a debateable theology; “in opposition to and in competition with the authentic magisterium, there thus arises a kind of ‘parallel magisterium’ of theologians.” Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that “attitudes of general opposition to Church teaching which even come to expression in organized groups,” contestation and discord, besides “presenting serious harm to the community of the Church,” are also an obstacle to evangelization.<sup>36</sup>

As *NE* developed as an ecclesiological concept, papal statements such as those above framed much of the theological literature which ensued. John Paul II’s positioning of *NE* as an alternative to liberation theology found a ready, but contested environment for its reception within the Latin American church. An example of Latin American commentary is captured in this analysis from Anna Peterson and Manuel A. Vásquez:

The call for a new evangelization came at a time of significant ideological and institutional realignment within the Church. Seeking to reaffirm the Church’s unity, universality, and hierarchical authority against the radically historicizing

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Homilía* (Salto, Uruguay. 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1998), 8. “*La nueva evangelización, impulsada por el mandamiento del amor, hará brotar la deseada promoción de la justicia y el desarrollo en su sentido más pleno, así como la justa distribución de las riquezas y el respeto de la dignidad de la persona.*” (My translation) Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/homilies/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19880509\\_salto\\_sp.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19880509_salto_sp.html) On 21st June, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, “Opening Address: Fourth General Council of Latin American Bishops (Santo Domingo, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1992)”, in *New Evangelization, Human Development, Christian Culture* (Washington: United States Catholic Conferences, 1992), 10 and 5.

<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, “Opening Address”, 8.

consequences of the Second Vatican Council, the Vatican has undertaken a “restoration.”<sup>37</sup>

On this point, Peterson and Vásquez concluded that *NE* was intended to provide a new hermeneutic to re-orientate the Latin American church and re-assert a form of clerical authority which basic ecclesial communities and liberation theology had down-played:

The new evangelization [...] gives rise to a “culturalist” reading of the key liberationist concept of praxis. Post-Medellin progressive Catholics interpreted praxis through Marxist historicist lenses (often drawing on the work of Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci) as a religiously inspired social empowerment closely connected with the politico-Utopian notion of the reign of God. In contrast, John Paul II, while acknowledging the creativity of the human self, sees this praxis as mainly cultural and religious, as the capacity of individuals to transcend existential despair and alienation. Praxis is the means through which humanity can build a Christian culture of love.<sup>38</sup>

Against this background, *NE* was a paradoxical summons in the Latin American context and constituted, in the eyes of some, a “conservative Catholic restoration”: “The new evangelization reformulates notions and methods such as the faith-life link, the see-judge-act pedagogy, and *conscientización* in ways that restore the clerical power lost through progressive pastoral reforms”.<sup>39</sup>

*NE* gained some impetus as an ecclesiological project in Latin America.<sup>40</sup> In 1990, CELAM published *Nueva evangelización: Génesis y Líneas de un proyecto misionero* which

<sup>37</sup> Anna L. Peterson and Manuel A. Vásquez, “The New Evangelization in Latin American Perspective”, *Cross Currents* 48, no. 3 (1998): 316.

<sup>38</sup> Peterson and Vásquez, “The New Evangelization in Latin American Perspective”, 324. “The Latin American church’s recent transformations, known collectively as the “new evangelization,” are both incomplete and paradoxical. They entail a partial break with some progressive currents unleashed by the Second Vatican Council and a conservative redeployment of others, which gives post-Vatican II pastoral methods an alternative reading that supports the institutional church’s drive to affirm its unity, authority, and universality. In other words, the conservative trends within Catholicism stem from concerns by the hierarchy and especially Pope John Paul II about both ecclesial structure and broader social and political currents. They represent an effort to make pastoral method more effective — and to bolster the institutional church — in the context of increasing religious fragmentation, the growth of evangelical Protestantism, and political and economic changes” (312).

<sup>39</sup> Peterson and Vásquez, “The New Evangelization in Latin American Perspective”, 327.

<sup>40</sup> An early example of the Latin American reception of the term was by Colombian Darío Castrillón Hoyos. Speaking at a symposium at the Opus Dei University of Navarra in Spain in 1989, Hoyos identified the central issue at stake as “a cultural crisis”, and spoke of the need for “una nueva evangelización para una nueva cultura (*a new evangelisation for a new culture*)”. Ideologies, whether manifested in democratic or totalitarian societies, were the result of wounded cultures which were contaminated by “el miedo a la verdad (*the fear of the truth*).” Hoyos understood this as a deep cultural division and a great social challenge, in which he names some of the

explored the new missionary endeavour of *NE*.<sup>41</sup> This was followed two years later by

*Indiferentismo y Sincretismo: Desafíos y Propuestas Pastorales para La Nueva*

*Evangelización de América Latina* which identified *NE* as a renewal of religious culture.<sup>42</sup>

Within the context of the quinquennial anniversary of the colonisation of the Americas, Rubén Darío Gracia published “La ‘primera evangelización’ y sus lecturas: desafíos a la ‘nueva evangelización’”, and concluded that *NE* in Latin America must be alert to the lessons of the first evangelisation.<sup>43</sup> Highlighted here is the vastly different context in which *NE* was received in Latin America from later English-speaking interpretations.<sup>44</sup> By examining the contextualised roots of *NE*, the emergence of various ideological agendas, which can accompany its interpretation, is more clearly understood.

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tensions of the Latin American church and society: “Considerada la profundidad y la vastedad de la crisis cultural y la falla de la civilización, las exigencias de un futuro más humano de la sociedad originan, con distintas perspectivas y proyecciones, una nueva época que comienza a ser postmoderna, postcapitalista y postmarxista. Este es el impresionante desafío para los arquitectos de una nueva sociedad, en una nueva era, en los orígenes difíciles y promisorios de una nueva cultura y de una nueva civilización (*Considering the depth and breadth of cultural crisis and the failure of civilization, the demands of a more humane future emerge, with different perspectives and projections, a new era that is postmodern, post-capitalist and post-Marxist. This is the great challenge for architects of a new society, a new era, with the difficult and promising beginnings of a new culture and a new civilization*).” Darío Castrillón-Hoyos, “Ante el Reto de una Nueva Evangelización”, in *10 Simposio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra* (Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 1989), 1550 and 1555.

<sup>41</sup> Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *Nueva Evangelización: Génesis y Líneas de un Proyecto Misionero* (Bogotá: El Consejo, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Jaime Vélez Correa, *Indiferentismo y Sincretismo: Desafíos y Propuestas Pastorales para la Nueva Evangelización de América Latina*, vol. 8 (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Rubén Darío Gracia, “La ‘primera evangelización’ y sus Lecturas: Desafíos a la ‘nueva evangelización’”, *Teología: Revista de la Facultad de Teología de la Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina*, no. 56 (1990) 111-152. “En fin, la Nueva Evangelización debe prestar atención a los desafíos de la Primera Evangelización y a sus actuales lecturas (In short, the new evangelization must pay attention to the challenges of the first evangelisation and its current readings)”, 139. (My translation).

<sup>44</sup> In a further indication of the reception in Latin America, the Mexican Archdiocese of Guadalajara commenced preparations for a diocesan synod in 1989 which later evolved into a synod on new evangelisation. By the synod’s end in 1995, its conclusions were an attempt to weave together both the ambitions of John Paul II and the local circumstances of the people: “La Nueva Evangelización requiere nuevos métodos de trabajo pastoral que partan de un objetivo y maduro análisis de la realidad, para así descubrir - a la luz de la Palabra de Dios y del Magisterio de la Iglesia- las acciones evangelizadoras que debemos emprender, para hacer presente el Reino de Dios en nuestras circunstancias concretas (*The New Evangelisation requires new methods of pastoral work which departs from an objective and mature analysis of reality and discover - in the light of the Word of God and the Church’s Magisterium – the evangelising activities that we must undertake to make the Kingdom of God present in our specific circumstances*).” La Arquidiócesis de Guadalajara, *II Sínodo Diocesano para la Nueva Evangelización* (12th December, 1995), 26. (My translation). Retrieved from: [www.arquidiocesisgdl.org/documentos\\_sinodo\\_diocesano\\_nueva\\_evangelizacion.htm#arriba](http://www.arquidiocesisgdl.org/documentos_sinodo_diocesano_nueva_evangelizacion.htm#arriba) on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. Beyond Latin America, the Spanish church was also becoming alert to the need for a new evangelisation. The title of Fernando Aguilar’s 1991 book drew together faith, politics and culture under the umbrella of *NE*. Fernando Sebastian Aguilar, *Neuva Evangelización: Fe, Cultura y Política en La España de hoy*, vol. 68 (Mayo: Ediciones Encuentro, 1991).

### 3.4 REDEMPTORIS MISSIO: FROM LOCAL TO UNIVERSAL

The Pontificate of John Paul II embodied a new style of evangelisation. His prolific body of teaching and energetic international engagement left a papal imprint on global politics, economics, moral issues, local cultures, and local churches. Coleridge noted:

Through his long pontificate, John Paul II spent much time and energy spelling out what he meant by a new evangelisation. In a sense, one could see his twenty-six years in the papal ministry as a single long exegesis of that phrase. His papacy had about it a profusion which at times made it seem bewilderingly complex. Yet at its heart the papacy of John Paul II had great simplicities, and this new evangelisation was one of them.<sup>45</sup>

*Redemptoris Missio* (hereafter, *RM*), which established *NE* as a broad ecclesiological strategy, was aimed at re-invigorating the whole missionary activity of the Church.<sup>46</sup> The Holy Spirit is the “principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission”.<sup>47</sup> The urgency of the missionary task derives from the “radical newness of life brought by Christ and lived by his followers”.<sup>48</sup> John Paul II placed the work of *NE* within the broader historical context of the Church’s missionary efforts. *RM* established a distinction between the initial missionary endeavour *ad gentes* and the task of “the new evangelisation to those who have already heard Christ proclaimed”.<sup>49</sup> Yet, this was understood as part of the broader picture of new challenges and new frontiers which the Church had always historically encountered. This contemporary reality was “extremely varied and changing” and included “the de-Christianisation of countries with ancient Christian traditions”, which had been noted before

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<sup>45</sup> Coleridge, “A Different Fire”, 132.

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio: Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (7<sup>th</sup> December, 1990), 5. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html) on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2015. John Paul II, developing themes of *Ad Gentes* (hereafter *AG*) and *EvN*, placed mission as an ontological posture of the Church: “In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has [...] revealed to mankind *who he is*. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature.” See also Second Vatican Council, *AG*, 2. “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin”.

<sup>47</sup> *RM*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> *RM*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> *RM*, 30.

Vatican II, with the effect that “some Christian cities and countries had become ‘mission territories’ (and) the situation has certainly not improved in the years since”.<sup>50</sup>

Drawing on the analogy of the Athenian public space of the Areopagus John Paul II identified that the “new cultures” and new public spaces which have come into existence. This included new social communication, which creates “new languages, new techniques and a new psychology”.<sup>51</sup> This instinct has come to fruition through the Internet and the emerging global connections which this new technology enables. Other emergent *areopagi* within the public sphere were identified as: a “commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples”; “the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities”; “the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world”; and the areas of “culture, scientific research, and international relations which promote dialogue and open up new possibilities”.<sup>52</sup> John Paul II noted an opportune and optimistic moment: “People sense

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<sup>50</sup> *RM*, 32. See also *RM*, 33. In a general sense, evangelisation was defined in three “situations”: “Firstly, proclaiming the gospel *ad gentes* (a first proclamation); secondly, the on-going work of evangelisation in the ordinary life of the Church (“witness” and “pastoral care”); and thirdly, an “intermediate situation” where “entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization’.” John Paul II also noted the interdependence between these three stages and circumstances of evangelisation. The conclusions of the Synod on New Evangelisation reiterated these distinctions and described *NE* as “permanent missionary dimension of the Church”: “Evangelization can be understood in three aspects. Firstly, evangelization *ad gentes* is the announcement of the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ. Secondly, it also includes the continuing growth in faith that is the ordinary life of the Church. Finally, the New Evangelization is directed especially to those who have become distant from the Church”. XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Propositiones (List of Final Propositions): The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, vol. 33 (Synodus Episcoporum Bollettino, 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2012), 7. Retrieved from:

[http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02\\_inglese/b33\\_02.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b33_02.html) on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2012. See also *RM*, 34. “Also to be noted is the real and growing *interdependence* which exists between these various saving activities of the Church. Each of them influences, stimulates and assists the others. The missionary thrust fosters exchanges between the churches and directs them toward the larger world, with positive influences in every direction. The churches in traditionally Christian countries, for example, involved as they are in the challenging task of new evangelization, are coming to understand more clearly that they cannot be missionaries to non-Christians in other countries and continents unless they are seriously concerned about the non-Christians at home. Hence missionary activity *ad intra* is a credible sign and a stimulus for missionary activity *ad extra*, and vice versa.”

<sup>51</sup> *RM*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> *RM*, 37.

that they are, as it were, travelling together across life's sea, and that they are called to ever greater unity and solidarity".<sup>53</sup>

While this optimism was tinged with caution, John Paul II recognised what might be described as foundational characteristics of a "mystagogical" approach to *NE*, and the potential of the contemporary human moment to be a meeting place between the Gospel and human experience:

Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization. This phenomenon - the so-called "religious revival" - is not without ambiguity, but it also represents an opportunity. The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind [...]: it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life's meaning. Here too there is an 'Areopagus' to be evangelized.<sup>54</sup>

Even in secularised societies, "the spiritual dimension of life" manifests a deeply human desire and hope. The first invitation of evangelisation is the invitation at this human level, as the striving for a more human way of life remains central to the spiritual search in a world which is increasingly driven by market forces and technological advancement.

At the beginning of the new millennium, John Paul II spoke of the need for "a new sense of mission" which is the "responsibility of all the members of the People of God".<sup>55</sup> This is grounded, not in "some magic formula" or "new program" but in the Christ-centred "plan found in the Gospel and the living Tradition", and which must take into account history and cultures "for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *RM*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> *RM*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte: At the Beginning of the New Millennium*, Australian ed. (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2001), 40 (hereafter, *NMI*).

<sup>56</sup> *NMI*, 29.



Evangelisation has remained a constant of theology since the Second Vatican Council. *NE* is an evangelising response to a particular cultural circumstance. In a papal sense, what Paul VI foresaw, John Paul II initiated, Benedict XVI institutionalised and Francis embodied.<sup>57</sup> More will be said of the contribution of Pope Francis that has generated more urgent questions and directions of mission and evangelisation. The focus of this chapter will now turn towards the reception of *NE* as a missionary concept.

### 3.5 READINGS OF *NE*

For some writers, *NE* reset the anthropological concerns of theology and pastoral practice. For others, this focus was to be resisted and they offered other interpretations of the need for a new evangelisation. As a result, diverse approaches and responses to *NE* have emerged with particular, yet overlapping, agendas. In general and broad terms, four groupings can be identified, mirroring the primary description of *NE* as a recognition that evangelisation today operates in a “new context” which requires “new ardour”, “new methods”, and “new expressions”:

1. The Catechetical Renewal Approach (New Ardour)
2. The Pastoral Reform Approach (New Methods)
3. The Ecclesial Identity Approach (New Expressions)
4. The Cultural Engagement Approach (New Context)

These broad bands signal a particular emphasis, scope and presentation of evangelisation. These approaches are not discrete and overlap in many features and

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<sup>57</sup> See Appendix: Table 2.

characteristics. While their assumptions, objectives, sphere of interest, and ecclesial vision may vary, for the most part they serve a complementary rather than a conflicting agenda. The range of approaches can be explained by diverse ecclesiological visions which situate responses to the vexed contemporary questions of faith and culture. Even within groupings, the agenda may reflect diverse assumptions and objectives. Examples of each approach will now be explored.

### 3.5.1 The Catechetical Renewal Approach (New Ardour)

In the English-speaking world, the earliest promoters of *NE* tended to embrace a renewed approach to catechetical formation.<sup>58</sup> In this approach, *NE* is interpreted as a vehicle to re-assert Catholic practice and teaching with the aim of re-establishing Roman Catholicism as a resilient social, cultural and political force. As a parallel focus, this model also identifies the centrality of the individual evangeliser in the work of evangelisation, cultivated through a deep and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As a form of evangelisation, it tends to be less concerned with the world of culture in general, and more insistent upon the promotion of a robust cultural world of Catholicism. The primary argument is that many have drifted away from church affiliation because the Church has drifted from its historical and doctrinal anchors. In this model, clearer teaching in matters of faith and morals, more vigorous public statements and institutional loyalty have their own evangelising effect. Its weakness is that it tends to interpret “the deposit of faith” in propositional, a-historical terms.

As an example of this early interpretation, Roch Kereszty defined *NE* as a “renewal of the whole Church”.<sup>59</sup> This renewal consists of greater cultural visibility, courageous witness,

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<sup>58</sup> In line with this, the final of five aims of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation is the promotion of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. *US*, 3.5.

<sup>59</sup> Roch Kereszty, "Why a New Evangelization? A Study of its Theological Rationale", *Communio* (Winter 1994): 607.

inculturation, clearer differentiation with non-Christian traditions by emphasising the Church as the “sacrament of salvation”, and finally, a life of charity. Kereszty’s interpretation of *NE* makes an appeal for new missionary champions in the style of missionaries in generations past:

Rejection of a missionary vocation is indeed an act of opposing the Holy Spirit [...] Evangelization, then, is even today, or perhaps more than ever today, a matter of life and death – eternal life and eternal death – both for those to be evangelized and for the evangelizer.<sup>60</sup>

Speaking from a North American perspective, David Schindler is less convinced of the need for a new evangelisation and speaks consistently of a “re-evangelization”.<sup>61</sup>

Schindler places *NE* firmly within a reading of the Christian anthropology of John Paul II. Unequivocally, Schindler states that “John Paul II’s ‘new evangelization’ [...] amounts to nothing less than a comprehensive presentation of the historical and metaphysical meaning of human existence”.<sup>62</sup>

Schindler understands the “newness” offered by John Paul II is found in his “Trinitarian Christocentric” reading of *GS* which “offered a new – or renewed – understanding of the human person in terms of God, the concrete Trinitarian God revealed in Jesus Christ”.<sup>63</sup> This is also understood by Schindler as John Paul II’s “explicit intention of retrieving the authentic meaning of the Second Vatican Council”.<sup>64</sup> While not directly refuting the praxis model of liberation theology, Schindler holds that “new evangelization entails a ‘new’ theology of liberation” and, therefore, a renewed catechetical framework.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Kereszty, “Why a New Evangelization?”, 610-1.

<sup>61</sup> David L. Schindler, “Reorienting the Church on the Eve of the Millennium: John Paul II’s ‘New Evangelization’”, *Communio* 24(Winter 1997): 740. “My presupposition is that America represents the ‘intermediate’ situation identified by the pope as needing a ‘re-evangelization’.”

<sup>62</sup> Schindler, “Reorienting the Church”, 773.

<sup>63</sup> Schindler, “Reorienting the Church”, 729 and 736-7.

<sup>64</sup> Schindler, “Reorienting the Church”, 737.

<sup>65</sup> Schindler, “Reorienting the Church”, 745. For Schindler, *NE* is the call to personal holiness: “The remarkable shift occurring in John Paul II’s anthropology is revealed especially in his anchoring of the call to holiness, and indeed to mission, already in the primitive identity of each human person [...] It is more accurate to say that mission is something I already *am* than something I will eventually *have*”.

Lorenzo Albacete explicitly linked *NE* with John Paul II's response to liberation theology. Albacete observed:

The questions about the relation between evangelization and culture posed by liberation theology remained to be addressed. Criticism is not enough.... I shall presuppose that the magisterium of John Paul II has in fact offered a response to the question of evangelization and culture posed by liberation theology. *It is this response that is called the "new evangelization"*.<sup>66</sup>

Like Schindler, Albacete's thesis is centred on "the theological anthropology of John Paul II".<sup>67</sup> In this regard, the task of *NE* is to demonstrate that the anthropology behind liberation theology is inadequate. *NE* must reposition the quest for liberation from a social-praxis model to a theological-anthropological one; from an exterior liberation to interior liberation. In Albacete's words, "the new evangelization must make clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the gospel of salvation through ethics; it is the gospel of salvation through a personal communion with him".<sup>68</sup> For Albacete, *NE* is a new form of Christian humanism and community which creates "'ecclesial spaces' of life", and shaped not "through ideas and concepts and programs", but through a personal encounter with "someone whose humanity has been 'cultivated' by the Incarnate Son of God".<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the clearest manifestation of the mode is the "evangelical Catholic" model promoted by Avery Dulles, Robert Barron and George Weigel.<sup>70</sup> Avery Dulles was one of the first to write a substantial theological reflection in English on the theological vision of John

<sup>66</sup> Lorenzo Albacete, "The Praxis of Resistance", *Communio* 21(Winter 1994): 615. (Italics original).

<sup>67</sup> Albacete, "The Praxis of Resistance".

<sup>68</sup> Albacete, Albacete, "The Praxis of Resistance", 625.

<sup>69</sup> Albacete, "The Praxis of Resistance", 628.

<sup>70</sup> According to William Portier, the phrase "evangelical Catholic" entered the theological vocabulary in 1983 "when David O'Brien applied it to Isaac Hecker, the nineteenth-century founder of the Paulist Fathers". For Portier, evangelical Catholicism emerges from the cultural ruins left by pluralism. Observing the attitudes and values of a younger generation of Catholics in the 1990s, Portier described a small number of students who were "interested in Catholic-specific issues [...] the Pope [...] pro-life [...] and] service". This evangelical turn was made possible because there was no Catholic "sub-culture to buffer...pluralism's ordinary dynamics". Evangelical Catholicism can be understood as a re-intensification of Catholic identity and cultural practice as a response (or reaction) to the diffusion of formative cultural identifiers in a secular, pluralist, consumerist society. In his words, evangelical Catholics "will not only embrace Catholic identity voluntarily, but will also have to struggle to differentiate the freedom of faith from the culture of choice encouraged by contemporary pluralism". See William L Portier, "Here Come The Evangelical Catholics", *Communio* (Spring 2004): 35, 37 and 41.

Paul II and *NE*. Dulles saw John Paul II as “the principal evangelizer in the Catholic Church”, who embodied the new energy for evangelisation.<sup>71</sup> Utilising a “synoptic” approach, Dulles provides an historical survey of the term, and underlined the strong continuity between Vatican II, Paul VI and John Paul II.<sup>72</sup>

Dulles captures the emerging novelty of the word “evangelisation”, describing the “evangelical turn” as “one of the most surprising and important developments” in post-Conciliar theology.<sup>73</sup> Dulles’ major objective is to situate the term “evangelisation” firmly within the Catholic tradition rather than exploring the meaning of “new evangelisation” as such. He takes as his starting point the wry observation that the “majority of Catholics are not strongly inclined toward evangelization”.<sup>74</sup> *NE* is envisioned as the task of mobilising a Catholic energy for proclamation of the Gospel within particular cultural settings. At this early stage of commentary on *NE*, scant attention is paid to the deep cultural shifts in religious affiliation and practice which later would become a core focus.

In Dulles’ view, Catholics have been slow to recognise the importance of evangelisation and its demands. His focus is on the activity of the evangeliser and less on those who are to be evangelised; the message of the Gospel is more or less self-evident and simply requires greater fidelity and witness. Dulles considers that while there is a tendency to

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<sup>71</sup> Dulles, “John Paul II and The New Evangelization”, 55.

<sup>72</sup> Dulles, “John Paul II and The New Evangelization”, 57. Cf. Peter John McGregor, “New World, New Pentecost, New Church: Pope John Paul II’s Understanding of ‘New Evangelisation’”, *Compass* 46(Autumn 2012), 20-1. McGregor identifies two modes of interpreting *NE*. The first is the “historical” view situating *NE* in its original setting of Latin America, which he identifies with the approach of Lorenzo Albacete *et al*, and the second is this “synoptic approach” by Dulles. While both approaches are identifiable, neither is significantly divergent to offer a distinctive view of *NE* as both take the Christian anthropology of John Paul II as their hermeneutical key.

<sup>73</sup> Dulles, “John Paul II and The New Evangelization”, 70. “This development [...] did not take place without a degree of preparation in Vatican II and preconciliar kerygmatic theology. But Paul VI went beyond the council in identifying evangelization with the total mission of the Church. John Paul II, with his unique familiarity with world Catholicism, assigns the highest priority to evangelization in the mission of the Church. While both popes have notably broadened the concept of evangelization, they have retained the main emphasis of the earlier kerygmatic concept.”

<sup>74</sup> Dulles, “John Paul II and The New Evangelization”, 52.

“blame the prevalent culture for our lack of (evangelising) success”, the real issue lies in the lack of a Catholic instinct for evangelisation.<sup>75</sup>

Dulles lays the foundation for what was to become “evangelical Catholicism”. He spoke of an “evangelical theology” which emphasises “the joy and freedom that come from a personal relationship to Christ”.<sup>76</sup> Dulles understood “Catholic evangelical theology” as a form of corrective theology and as a means to overcome the deficiencies of the contemporary theological scene.<sup>77</sup> For this very reason, *NE* has been received by some with scepticism and interpreted as a means for promoting a particular expression of Catholicism and Catholic theology. As Angel Suquia suggests, *NE* is viewed with some suspicion from both *ad intra* and *ad extra* perspectives because it is thought to conceal “more or less surreptitiously the desire to recover the privileges that the Church had in the past, or to impose upon the pluralistic society of today the particular values of the faith.”<sup>78</sup>

Another exponent of this catechetical renewal approach, Robert Barron, describes himself (as per the subtitle of his book) as a “post-liberal, post-conservative evangelical Catholic”.<sup>79</sup> Distinct from, yet modelled on, evangelical forms of Protestantism, evangelical Catholicism seeks to present a clear expression of the Catholic tradition based in magisterial fidelity, clear catechetical pedagogy, liturgical mysticism, moral certainties and cultural religious practices. Its aim is to reach beyond political divisions of “conservative” and

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<sup>75</sup> Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, 78. “One wonders why, with all the official encouragement given to evangelization [...] Catholics for the most part are ready to leave the task to Protestants, some of whom are overtly hostile to Catholicism”.

<sup>76</sup> Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, 88.

<sup>77</sup> Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, 80-1. “Catholic evangelical theology will seek to distance itself from a number of crosscurrents in contemporary Catholicism. In a laudable attempt to meet the modern mind on its own terms, Catholic theology has sometimes failed to guard sufficiently against certain deviations that inhibit a vigorous program of evangelization. Seeking to avoid the alleged triumphalism of the past, some theologians have cultivated an attitude of hypercriticism and debilitating doubt, verging on defeatism. In their efforts to recognize the failures of the Church and the truth present in other faiths, they have often tended to substitute dialogue for proclamation, and have hesitated to confront their hearers with the challenge of the gospel”.

<sup>78</sup> Angel Suquia Goicoechea, “The New Evangelization: Some Tasks and Risks of the Present”, *Communio* 19(Winter 1992): 521.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Barron, *Bridging the Great Divide: Musings of a Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative Evangelical Catholic* (New York: Rowman & Little, 2004).

“liberal” and attempt to re-establish a firm Catholic cultural base through clear identifiers which owe more to classicist categories of culture than empirical.<sup>80</sup>

Evangelisation is elevating human culture into the Supernatural order. Barron, following Hans Urs von Balthasar among others, defines the Divine relationship with the created world through the “three great transcendentals” – truth, goodness and beauty.<sup>81</sup> Barron parallels the three transcendentals with three cultural expressions: science (truth), politics (goodness as justice) and the arts (beauty). In this area, Barron’s approach is more dialogical than propositional as he identifies common ground and *logoi spermatikoi* (seeds of the Word) in contemporary culture. Barron provides an image that captures the evangelical Catholic model: the Church, he says, “must come out from behind its walls [...] with confidence and panache”.<sup>82</sup> This approach presumes that the Church has little to learn from culture; culture, on the other hand, requires elevation through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Another exponent is George Weigel for whom evangelical Catholicism “is first and foremost a call to conversion”.<sup>83</sup> Weigel, like Barron, wishes to move on from dialectic labels such as “progressive” and “traditional” and embrace a version of evangelical Catholicism which is “born from a new Pentecost, a new outpouring of missionary energy for a new historical and cultural moment”.<sup>84</sup> In this light, evangelical Catholicism “is a counterculture

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<sup>80</sup> This is clearly seen in Barron’s description of the evangelisation of culture: “It is to declare to the representatives and practitioners of the various cultural forms that Jesus Christ is their Lord and that their work and efforts belong finally to him and find their surest fulfilment in him [...] [T]he evangelization of culture is an ingredient in the overall commission to bring ‘all things under the feet of Christ’ and to assure that every knee bends at the sounding of his name.” Barron, “To Evangelize the Culture”, *Chicago Studies* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 11.

<sup>81</sup> Barron, “To Evangelize the Culture”, 12. See also Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 50 (fn. 17): “‘Transcendentals’ are distinguished as attributes not just of some beings, but of all. The term goes back to Aristotle (the ‘transcendentals’ transcended his division of beings into ten categories), and took on importance in medieval thought. ‘Beauty’ is in fact a relative late-comer to traditional lists of transcendentals; unity, truth, and goodness are the most consistently named. Transcendentals are spoken of by medieval thinkers as ‘convertible’ with each other and with being – you cannot have one without the others. Balthasar’s trilogy as a whole is focussed around the three transcendentals of beauty (*Theological Aesthetics*), goodness (*Theo-Drama*), and truth (*Theo-Logic*).”

<sup>82</sup> Barron, “To Evangelize the Culture”, 27.

<sup>83</sup> George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 107.

<sup>84</sup> Weigel, *Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, 18.

that seeks to convert the ambient public culture by proclaiming certain truths, by worshipping in spirit and in truth, and by modelling a more humane way of life”.<sup>85</sup> The end of this form of proclamation is clear: “Evangelical Catholicism does not seek to ‘get along’; it seeks to convert”.<sup>86</sup>

Weigel leaves little room for a dialogical dimension since this has been one of the great impediments to proclamation. The first four decades after the Second Vatican Council was a period of accommodation and a misguided “lust” for relevance which was an “impediment to the maturation of Evangelical Catholicism and authentic Catholic reform”.<sup>87</sup> Weigel understands this search for relevance as born from a misreading of the cultural crisis of the West in the late twentieth century. The “crisis”, as defined by Weigel, is an intellectual one, unforeseen by the post-Vatican II currents of openness and dialogue.<sup>88</sup>

Weigel presents evangelical Catholicism as *the* method of *NE* through “gathering up and incorporating into the Church’s proclamation all the bits and pieces of modernity and post-modernity that can aid the Church’s mission”.<sup>89</sup> Describing *NE* as “the grand strategy” for the new millennium, Weigel argues that evangelical Catholicism provides its template and pattern.<sup>90</sup>

Evangelical Catholicism is representative of a number of narratives of *NE*. It is limited by its self-referential nature and makes little distinction between the Gospel, Tradition, traditions and cultural practices. In this model, faith is presented as a pre-

<sup>85</sup> Weigel, *Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, 19.

<sup>86</sup> Weigel, *Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*.

<sup>87</sup> Weigel, *Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, 102. “Its originating image – some might say, its original sin – was to imagine Vatican II as the Council that “opened the Church’s windows to the modern world” in order to initiate a “dialogue” with secular modernity – a dialogue it imagined secular modernity craved, and which it thought had been impeded by mid-twentieth-century Catholic intellectual intransigence (usually called ‘Neo-Scholasticism’).”

<sup>88</sup> Weigel, *Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, 103-4. “The enthusiasts of dialogue in the immediate aftermath of Vatican II did not imagine a Western world that would, within a few decades, become nihilist in its overall philosophical position, radically sceptical about the human capacity to know the truth of anything, and thus wholly relativist in its theory of morals.”

<sup>89</sup> Weigel, *Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, 104.

<sup>90</sup> Weigel, *Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, 10 and 41-2. “Evangelical Catholicism, with the Gospel at the centre of its life, is not a sect within Catholicism, nor a movement of Catholics, but a way of understanding the vocation of every Christian to be a true disciple and faithful missionary witness.”



formulated reality marked by a strong ecclesial identity. Discipleship is identified with a renewed Catholic culture in which faithful adherence and cohesion are the defining elements of religious formation. It also presumes that evangelical Catholicism operates within a mostly (or still) religious culture. It fails to account for ecclesial forms, structures, doctrines and language which require change, nuance or abandonment. Accordingly, the Church has little to learn from the world; conversion is essentially ecclesial.

Andrew Hamilton identified both positive and negative aspects of evangelical Catholicism and concluded that the future for evangelisation lies beyond particular styles of evangelisation and labels such as “Liberal Catholicism” or “Evangelical Catholicism”. The issue, Hamilton notes, is that such terms are inherently “reactive”:

If it is to be more than a slogan Evangelical Catholicism must also be a radical Catholicism. Not for sociological reasons but to show that it is rooted in the following of Jesus Christ. And that implies attitudes to human life, to the use of wealth and power, to conflict, to relationships to one another and to the environment, which will be counter-cultural in any society and in any economic or political order.<sup>91</sup>

One of the pitfalls of certain styles of *NE* is their over-emphasis of a particular form of church culture as the means for evangelisation. Evangelical Catholicism understands the primary objective of *NE* as the revitalisation of Catholic culture. In turn, this renewed Catholic culture is presumed to demonstrate clearer witness and greater influence in modern society. For some, this may be an attractive form of evangelisation. The weakness may be that it is predominantly attractive to those who are already active members of the Catholic Church or those connected to other Christian dominations. The extent to which evangelical Catholicism is capable of self-critique by entering into greater dialogical with both the Church *ad intra* and *ad extra* will determine its prospects and continuing pastoral effectiveness.

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<sup>91</sup> Andrew Hamilton, "Catholicism Beyond Slogans", *Eureka Street* (1st May 2013). Retrieved from: [www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=35997](http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=35997) on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2013.

While not necessarily sitting neatly in this category, Ron Witherup explores an apostolic approach to *NE* through the lens of the missionary activity of St. Paul. Witherup identifies six characteristics of *NE* which details a process of ever-increasing circles of engagement and transformation. This process:

- focuses on “promoting a personal relationship with Jesus Christ” which is both “Personalistic and Christocentric”;
- promotes the “missionary spirit of all believers”;
- addresses both believers (*ad intra*) and nonbelievers (*ad extra*);
- aims to bring “modern cultures into contact with Jesus Christ”;
- encompasses the activity of “the entire Church”;
- envisions “an entire process of Christianization” embracing the Pauline concept of a “new creation” *in* Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).<sup>92</sup>

Witherup’s aim is to place *NE* within a scriptural context.<sup>93</sup> The transmission of faith from one generation to the next is a key consideration, and the apostolic activity and pastoral creativity of St Paul establish a model of evangelisation. Witherup contributes an important scriptural dimension to the development of *NE* and promotes biblical imagination as a critical factor shaping missionary activity.

In similar creative fashion, Robert Imbelli offers a “more meditative than discursive” ‘mystagogical’ reflection on the Christic dimensions of *NE*.<sup>94</sup> This mystagogical sense is developed through Imbelli’s use of poetry and art to “not only engage the intellect, [but also] touch and stretch the heart’s affections”.<sup>95</sup> Imbelli also engages the work of Taylor and Benedict XVI to argue for a renewed Christological and Incarnational vision for evangelisation. This “Christic Center”, to use Imbelli’s terminology, is personal, sacramental,

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<sup>92</sup> Ronald Witherup, *Saint Paul and the New Evangelization* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 12-14.

<sup>93</sup> Witherup, *Saint Paul and the New Evangelization*, 15.

<sup>94</sup> Robert P. Imbelli, *Rekindling the Christic Imagination: Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014), xix.

<sup>95</sup> Imbelli, *Rekindling the Christic Imagination*, 92.

ecclessial, cosmic and eschatological.<sup>96</sup> While this contribution to *NE* is rich with Christological reflection, it remains a work directed to the already ecclesially minded and engaged. Nevertheless, the mystagogical inclination of his work shares a similar interest to this thesis. Imbelli's reflections suggest that there is much scope for imaginative catechetical "rekindling" and renewal.

### 3.5.2 The Pastoral Reform Approach (New Methods)

The pastoral paradigm of evangelisation draws the Church more actively and positively into the public sphere. The Second Vatican Council was a pastoral council and, in this light, the pastoral reform approach positions *NE* as part of the on-going work of interpreting the Council. *NE* is incorporated into the continuous mission of the Church; not as a *new* evangelisation of *older* effective practices, but as an evangelisation for new contexts and emerging social realities. The pastoral reform approach seeks to generate an evangelising atmosphere which anticipates the possibility of a gradual acceptance of the Gospel through a profoundly personal experience of liberation and social praxis.

An early example of this approach was the work of Brazilian liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff. Reacting against the destructive impacts of colonisation and the first evangelisation in Latin America, Boff aligned *NE* with "liberative evangelization". For Boff, *NE* meant an endorsement of the methodology of liberation theology.<sup>97</sup> Boff stressed that

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<sup>96</sup> Imbelli, *Rekindling the Christic Imagination*, 104 (fn. 15). "I use the term "Christic Center" in this book to evoke the extension of the personal reality of the resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ to embrace his real presence in the Eucharist and his incorporation of believers into his Body, the Church. As in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, it points to the cosmic significance of what is most uniquely personal: Jesus Christ, Alpha and Omega (see Rev 1:17-18").

<sup>97</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Good News to the Poor: A New Evangelization*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1992), xiv. "The new evangelization must generate life for the great masses who languish in foul, scandalously inadequate living conditions. The first thing that evangelization will mean in Latin America is saving the lives of the poor. Without this liberative dimension, there will be no good news worthy of the name, no good news re-presenting the memory of the practice of Jesus and the apostles."

evangelisation must exercise both a “charism of prophecy” which denounces “historical oppression”, and also a “charism of liberation” which creates the “new” and “alternative” expressions of faith understood as “ecclesiogenesis”.<sup>98</sup>

At the Synod on *NE* in 2012, several voices stressed the need for pastoral reform as a key dimension of *NE*, anticipating the agenda of Pope Francis. Luis Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, called on the Church to discover “the power of silence”:

Confronted with the sorrows, doubts and uncertainties of people she cannot pretend to give easy solutions. In Jesus, silence becomes the way of attentive listening, compassion and prayer [...] The seemingly indifferent and aimless societies of our time are earnestly looking for God. The Church’s humility, respectfulness and silence might reveal more clearly the face of God in Jesus.<sup>99</sup>

In similar terms, Tagle’s fellow Filipino bishop, Socrates Villegas, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, urged the need for a new evangelising humility:

The task of new evangelization must begin with a deep sense of awe and reverence for humanity and her culture. Evangelization has been hurt and continues to be impeded by the arrogance of its messengers.<sup>100</sup>

Italian bishop and member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, Bruno Forte, commented that the role of the parish is given scant focus in the Synod preparatory papers. Speaking from his own episcopal experience of pastoral visitation,

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<sup>98</sup> Boff, *Good News to the Poor*, 67-8. “The hunger for God awakened by the colonial evangelization, joined to the hunger for bread we see around us today, gives birth to an evangelization of liberation [...] That is, it must not be the mere repetition of what has already been said and taught; it must be something vital, flexible, something that demonstrates the humanizing potential of the Christian proposition [...] What is under way in Latin America, under the impulse of the Spirit, is an immense ecclesiogenesis – the genesis of a church, from the confrontation of the gospel with a world of injustice and poverty, in which the gospel demonstrates its liberative power.”

<sup>99</sup> Luis Tagle, *Intervento* (*Synodus Episcoporum Bollettino*, 7: 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2012). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012\\_index\\_xx.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012_index_xx.html) on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Socrates Villegas, *Intervento* (*Synodus Episcoporum Bollettino*, 7: 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012\\_index\\_xx.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012_index_xx.html) on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2012.

Forte noted that “without the new missionary zeal of the parish, in which the agents are its own pastoral workers, it will be difficult to live a radical new evangelization”.<sup>101</sup>

In an Australian context, Michael Putney identified two broad streams of evangelisation that have emerged in pastoral practice, which he loosely names as “the more evangelical model” and “the more incarnational model”.<sup>102</sup> As Putney states, “these are not watertight categories” and “neither approach is better than the other” as both have their strengths and weaknesses.<sup>103</sup> Yet, despite the limits of these categories, Putney’s two models are helpful distinctions in the spectrum of approaches to evangelisation and serve to reinforce the reality that there is no “one-size-fits-all” template. Quoting *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Putney is strong in his affirmation that the first task of evangelisation is the renewal of the Church itself:

One can evangelise people but if the ecclesial community into which they are being invited is not ready to receive them and has to their eyes very little to offer, our efforts may well come to nothing in the long run. Only a renewing Church will have the passion to evangelise and in turn will have the credibility for those who are being evangelised.<sup>104</sup>

More negatively, an influential Australian priest over many years, Eric Hodgens, though seeing the renewal of the Church as the primary task of *NE*, describes it in far more critical tones as “a new apologetic for the old evangelisation”.<sup>105</sup> Hodgens identifies

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<sup>101</sup> Bruno Forte, *Intervento* (*Synodus Episcoporum Bollettino*, 11:11<sup>th</sup> October, 2012). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012\\_index\\_xx.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012_index_xx.html) on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Putney, “Evangelisation in Australia”, *The Australasian Catholic Record* 84, no. 1 (2007): 83. The “evangelical model” is both similar and dissimilar to evangelical Protestantism. It is similar in its methodology and modes of expression; it is dissimilar in its emphasis on “distinctly Catholic spiritual traditions and ecclesial elements.” Meanwhile, the “‘incarnational’ approach tends to recognise that grace builds on nature and is open to seeing signs of the Holy Spirit or the action of God’s grace in the lives of those whom it is approaching.”

<sup>103</sup> Putney, “Evangelisation in Australia”, 83.

<sup>104</sup> Putney, “Evangelisation in Australia”, 84.

<sup>105</sup> Eric Hodgens, *New Evangelisation in the 21st Century: Removing the Roadblocks* (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 2008), 18.

“hierarchical” and “institutional” barriers unable to adapt to a new cultural environment as the obstacle to *NE*.<sup>106</sup>

Pope Francis’ missionary outreach and pastoral concerns give clear shape to an “ecclesial reform approach”. A more extensive examination of the contribution of Francis to the development of *NE* is offered later in this chapter.

### 3.5.3 The Ecclesial Identity Approach (New Expressions)

Catholic identity is one of the key themes of *NE*. Catholic institutions are under pressure to manifest clear signs of identification with the fundamentals of the Catholic tradition. Catholic schools and tertiary institutions, aged and health care facilities, social welfare and mission agencies all demonstrate symptoms of “ecclesial stress” in the search to fill these organisations with committed members of the faithful. The result is frequently a diluted sense of Catholic ethos which fails to offer a distinctive Catholic presence.

The work of Richard Rymarz is a prime example of the ecclesial identity approach to *NE*. Rymarz’s doctoral thesis, *Principles of the New Evangelization: Analysis and Directions*, has laid the foundations for his body of work.<sup>107</sup> Rymarz’s interpretation of *NE* is based in a reading of the Christian anthropological model of John Paul II. Rymarz’s later appraisals have been more strongly analytical, focussing upon sociological readings of declining Church affiliation and, in particular, the impact upon Catholic Education and Catholic identity.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Hodgins, *New Evangelisation in the 21st Century*, 36. “The upshot of this is that the loss of membership affiliation and the collapse of priestly vocations is the result of culture wide changes that were beyond the control of the Church. However, the way in which the official Church responded intensified the loss. So many still wanted to remain and build community which could adapt to the new cultural situation. They were alienated by the inability of Rome and the bishops to adapt. The leadership response was tragic and remains so.” Hodgins lists three key issues for *NE*. These are new methods of scriptural and theological interpretation, new scientific knowledge and a renewal of sexual ethics. See Hodgins, *New Evangelisation in the 21st Century*, 37-47.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Rymarz, *Principles of the New Evangelization: Analysis and Directions* (Australian Catholic University, 2010).

<sup>108</sup> Rymarz, *Principles*, 262. Rymarz’s focus in his later work is pre-empted in this quote from his thesis in which he describes the justification of *NE* in terms of a strong corporate identity and purpose: “On a more

These more narrow yet complex questions provide a much clearer focus for Rymarz, as it does for *NE* more generally.

Rymarz's later works have been more focussed on the limitations of religious culture, and, in particular, its impact on Catholic Education and Catholic identity. For example, Rymarz offers this guideline:

In terms of the new evangelisation, in general, it may be more appropriate to proceed on the basis that those to be evangelised have only ever encountered a weak religious socialisation, one that was never challenged or quickly transformed.<sup>109</sup>

As a product of this loosened sense of religious affiliation, Rymarz identifies a “consumerist approach” to faith in terms of a “Spiritual Quest Paradigm” (SQP) and “Modified Secularization Theory” (MST).<sup>110</sup> The SQP Catholics have a loose affiliation with the Church but continue to carry a Catholic sensibility which can be the mechanism for reconnection with the Church in later years.<sup>111</sup> The outlook is bleaker for MST Catholics whose religious sense can be summarised as “deconversion” through a steady sliding away from any formal religious connection “to a highly personalized, eclectic range of beliefs that

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sociological level, to recast many Catholics today as (diffusely) spiritual rather than having a low level of commitment does nothing to address the rationale for the new evangelization, namely, that any organization or group that does not have a critical mass of individuals who are able to participate fully in its life and work faces serious challenges. Many Catholic agencies face a problematic future if their ranks are filled with those who express this diffuse spirituality.”

<sup>109</sup> Rymarz, *The New Evangelisation: Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools* (Ballan: Modotti Press, 2012), 92. Rymarz indicates that *NE* requires the recognition of a weakened religious sense in those with whom the Church is attempting to connect: “Lack of socialisation and the currency of diffuse spirituality have important consequences. One of the most significant is that many younger Catholics do not disassociate from the Church completely. For many, the weak positive experience, whilst not cultivating strong commitment, does not close the door to a more fragile connection. All of this is indicative of what can be called a new Catholic mentality. The discussion around the new evangelisation in countries such as Australia needs to take serious account of this change in basic narrative and assumptions. The experience of transition, which was so formative of older Catholics, is no longer a dominant discourse. What has replaced it is far more effable, and more easily typified by what is absent and, as such, is not reactive or hostile. Many people today, especially younger ones, are aware of the options available to them, and can be typified as consumers” (93).

<sup>110</sup> Rymarz, “A Fork in the Road: Religious Quest and Secularization”, *Australasian Catholic Record* 87, no. 3 (2010): 261-2.

<sup>111</sup> Rymarz, “A Fork in the Road”, 261.

although hard to categorize share at least one unifying characteristic, that is, they are not life shaping and are indeed relatively inconsequential".<sup>112</sup>

A re-occurring conclusion offered by Rymarz in many of his contributions can be summarised by this assessment:

There needs to be recognition that in countries such as Australia, the Church is not at a historically strong or powerful moment. By no means is it facing an unprecedented crisis or low point. It does not, however, have limitless resources and energy. It must, therefore, give much thought on how best to deploy its energies, bearing in mind that not all activities and new initiatives can be supported. If we follow MST then many Catholic institutions face an uncertain future largely because the highly committed and motivated individuals that are required to animate these bodies are in short and decreasing supply. The Church must develop a strategic sense toward its pastoral ministry. Although the task ahead is difficult it can be mitigated by intelligence and resourcefulness.<sup>113</sup>

Rymarz's significant body of work is also an analysis of how *NE* has been theologised through the lens of Christian anthropology, social analysis, cultural engagement and ecclesial regeneration. As Rymarz concedes, deep questions remain regarding ecclesial identity and engagement with the secular world.<sup>114</sup>

A useful summary of this general drift in Western culture has been provided by the contribution of Tom Beaudoin. Using the term "secular Catholics" as a less pejorative term than "lapsed" or "nonpracticing", Beaudoin, through the lens of practical theology, examines the lived experience of Catholics today and notes that the majority of Catholics in Western societies "find their Catholicism existentially 'in play' at some level that cannot be dispensed

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<sup>112</sup> Rymarz, "A Fork in the Road", 262.

<sup>113</sup> Rymarz, "A Fork in the Road", 270.

<sup>114</sup> Some efforts have been made to qualify and quantify Catholic identity, more recently through the Catholic Identity Schools Project co-ordinated through the Catholic University of Leuven: "In recent years, the Centre for Academic Teacher Training of the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) has been developing a new empirical methodology to frame the identity structure of Catholic educational organisations. This methodology allows us to investigate in detail the kind(s) of Catholic institutional identity and the level(s) of Catholicity present in an organisation, today and towards the future. To this end, we developed [...] theoretical models into multivariate attitude scales that allow us to quantify a Catholic organisation's identity in a statistically responsible way." Didier Pollefeyt and Jan Bouwens, "Framing the Identity of Catholic Schools: Empirical Methodology for Quantitative Research on the Catholic Identity of an Education Institute", *International Studies in Catholic Education* 2, no. 2 (2010): 193.



with, but do not or cannot make of it a regular and central set of explicit and conscious practices”.<sup>115</sup>

While speaking more directly of an American context, much is easily recognisable within the Australian sphere. This observation would be true of many of those families who present their children for sacramental initiation or have children enrolled in Catholic schools: “Secular Catholics are trying to live their secularity, which often includes their own sense of spirituality, with much more investment than their ecclesiality”.<sup>116</sup>

Beaudoin emphasises that theology must not only speak of “conversion” but also hold in tension the possibility of “deconversion” – an ebbing away of faith. This process, which can be understood from a number of different perspectives, provides legitimate scope for pastoral and theological reflection:

“Ex-Catholics” or “Recovering Catholics” make many Catholic theologians and pastoral workers uncomfortable, and so have yet to be generally seen as a potential source of real insight about the adult life of faith, indeed as one possible outcome of a Catholic theological life.<sup>117</sup>

As Beaudoin points out, this elastic sense of lived faith is as much a fact of religious history as it is the experience of the present moment. Kathryn Tanner’s observation as noted by Beaudoin is pertinent to this point: sociologists and anthropologists have pointed to the historical reality of “the often messy, ambiguous and porous character of the effort to live Christianity”.<sup>118</sup> There was no golden age of religious commitment and adherence. In this context, definitions of “Catholic identity” are subjective, fluid and generic. Those to whom *NE* is directed may well see no necessity to be evangelised. In the contemporary world, “identity” is often understood as a self-created reality, rather than as a gift bestowed and received. The very concept of “identity” itself has become subjectified and relativised.

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<sup>115</sup> Beaudoin, “Secular Catholicism and Practical Theology”, 24.

<sup>116</sup> Beaudoin, “Secular Catholicism and Practical Theology”, 25.

<sup>117</sup> Beaudoin, “Secular Catholicism and Practical Theology”, 35.

<sup>118</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 110. Quoted in Beaudoin, *Secular Catholicism*, 35.

### 3.5.4 The Cultural Engagement Approach (New Context)

In an age when catechetical teaching is no longer sustained by its own self-evident logic, another methodology of formation is required. The ecclesial instinct for *NE* recognised the emergence of a new moment in which deeper, tectonic shifts in the foundations of culture were being manifest in new anthropological, sociological, and ethical patterns. As an example of an interpretation of this approach, Karl Lehmann saw *NE* in terms of a “second proclamation” because “Europe has experienced such a progression in the process of de-Christianization”.<sup>119</sup>

Lehmann believed the aim of *NE* was “to promote the infectious testimony of every individual Christian”.<sup>120</sup> Written against the backdrop of a newly-emerging Europe after the fall of Communism, Lehmann mentioned three opportunities for *NE*: firstly, ecclesial “places, groups, movements and congregations” which provide spaces of learning, support and ecumenical dialogue and witness; secondly, outreach to embrace “new allies, people who are sympathetic to certain causes” and who by this association become prospective new members; and thirdly, the opportunity to re-connect the origins of civic and ethical values and convictions of Europe to their Christian roots.<sup>121</sup> This final point was to become a major focus of the pontificate of Benedict XVI.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Karl Lehmann, “The Meaning of a New Evangelization of Europe”, *Communio* 19(Winter 1992), 544.

<sup>120</sup> Lehmann, “The Meaning of a New Evangelization of Europe”, 546.

<sup>121</sup> Lehmann, “The Meaning of a New Evangelization of Europe”, 547.

<sup>122</sup> For example, Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Convention Organized by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (Comece)* (Clementine Hall, 24 March, 2007 ). Retrieved from: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070324\\_comece.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070324_comece.html) on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2015. “From all this it clearly emerges that an authentic European ‘common home’ cannot be built without considering the identity of the people of this Continent of ours. It is a question of a historical, cultural, and moral identity before being a geographic, economic, or political one; an identity comprised of a set of universal values that Christianity helped forge, thus giving Christianity not only a historical but a foundational role vis-à-vis Europe. These values, which make up the soul of the Continent, must remain in the Europe of the third millennium as a ‘ferment’ of civilization [...] I know how difficult it is for Christians to defend this truth of the human person. Nevertheless do not give in to fatigue or discouragement! You know that it is your duty, with God’s help, to contribute to the consolidation of a new Europe which will be realistic but not cynical, rich in ideals and free from naïve illusions, inspired by the

The re-positioning of *NE* from a renewed theological method for Latin America to a deeper questioning of the relationship between evangelisation and culture, particularly in Western cultures, began with the series of regional synods leading up to the Year of Jubilee in 2000.<sup>123</sup> Recalling the assessment of Bernard Lonergan three decades earlier, the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Oceania notes that “the crisis of evangelization is more than just a crisis of faith; it is also a crisis of culture”.<sup>124</sup> Gerard Hall addresses this “crisis of culture” and its implications for evangelisation:

Dialogue between the Gospel and culture is an essential component of Christian mission [...] This problem is compounded by two realities: many ‘left’ the Church on account of its perceived rejection of modernity and modern values; increasingly, secularized people have little knowledge of — and even less interest in — Christianity, the Church or its teachings. We can no longer begin this dialogue on the basis of shared religious language given that belief in God itself is now considered a dubious proposition. Nonetheless, as we enter the new phase of post-modernity, there is genuine awakening to the need for spirituality and spiritual experience. Here is an entrance point for dialogue — not in the traditional sphere of religion, but in the secular search for spiritual meaning and values.<sup>125</sup>

In this context, Philip Gibbs indicated a theological shift from interpreting *NE* as personal conversion to cultural engagement in accord with three aspects of *NE* for Oceania. Firstly, evangelisation will feature a certain “boldness” that demonstrates “an irrepressible enthusiasm for the task of announcing the Gospel”.<sup>126</sup> Secondly, the methods of *NE* in Oceania will present “the Good News in a way that offers a life-giving alternative to the dehumanising effects of modern technical culture”, which, as Gibbs notes, “is easier said than

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perennial and life-giving truth of the Gospel. Therefore, be actively present in the public debate on a European level, knowing that this discussion is now an integral part of the national debate.”

<sup>123</sup> Rymarz, “The New Evangelization: A Look at the Growing Range of Reference”, *Compass* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2010), 24-26.

<sup>124</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Special Assembly for Oceania: Instrumentum Laboris (Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth and Living His Life)* (1998), 21. Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_24081998\\_oceania-instrlabor\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_24081998_oceania-instrlabor_en.html) on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2013. Lonergan had previously named this crisis of culture as a feature of the modern world. Cf: Bernard Lonergan, *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 266.

<sup>125</sup> Gerard Hall, “Christian Mission Today”, *Compass* 41, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 8.

<sup>126</sup> Philip Gibbs, “The Transformation of Culture as New Evangelization (for the Third Millennium in Oceania)”, *Studia Missionalia* 48(1999): 333.

done”.<sup>127</sup> Finally, in a region such as Oceania, particularly “with its great diversity”, evangelisation presents a “challenging task”.<sup>128</sup> No one pattern of evangelisation is able to address every context. This is also applicable to the more specific multi-cultural environment of Australia.

Grounded in the theology of *EvN*, Gibbs proposes that “a new evangelisation will mean a cultural transformation”.<sup>129</sup> Gibbs understands evangelisation – with no clear distinction between “old” or “new” – primarily in cultural terms:

The most urgent challenge for evangelization [...] entails entering into dialogue, challenging the forces of death, listening to the Spirit working within the culture, infusing life-giving values that are shared by the Gospel.<sup>130</sup>

The regional synods accompanying the Year of Jubilee and the publication of *RM* shifted the focus of *NE*. In 2005, with the death of one pope and the election of another, a necessary shift in interpreting *NE* took place: a movement from the phenomenological interpretations of John Paul II to the historical-cultural agenda of Benedict XVI. The new millennium saw the theologising of evangelisation emphasising the cultural settings and obstacles for the transmission of faith today.

Stephen Bevens has made a significant contribution to the theology of mission in recent decades. Bevens understands *NE* as “renewed evangelization” and places it within the broader framework of any form of evangelising activity.<sup>131</sup> Noting that there is no longer any “Christian center”, Bevens concludes that “every church exists in a ‘missionary situation’”.<sup>132</sup> Bevens, beginning from an ecclesiological rather than a cultural perspective, holds that *NE* is an imperative, not as a program but as a missionary methodology:

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<sup>127</sup> Gibbs, “The Transformation of Culture”.

<sup>128</sup> Gibbs, “The Transformation of Culture”, 333-4.

<sup>129</sup> Gibbs, “The Transformation of Culture”, 345.

<sup>130</sup> Gibbs, “The Transformation of Culture”.

<sup>131</sup> Bevens, “Revisiting Mission at Vatican II: Theology and Practice for Today's Missionary Church”, *Theological Studies* 74, no. 2 (2013): 263.

<sup>132</sup> Bevens, “Revisiting Mission at Vatican II”, 274.

In theology, this recognition of today's missionary church calls for radical rethinking of theological methods and content in the light of its missionary task. Theology has to serve an evangelical purpose.<sup>133</sup>

The contextual theological method of Bevens emphasises a continued inculturation of liturgy as the mark of *NE*, accompanied by "accommodated preaching" – a term taken from *GS* (44) – which he defines as "any church communication" shaped by the "signs of the times".<sup>134</sup> This "inculturated preaching" requires "a deep respect for the opinions of people of apparent good will", while at the same time, proclaiming the Church's own, "perhaps countercultural, position in ways that are clear and well argued, based on scientific and philosophical truth, and presented clearly and nonjudgmentally".<sup>135</sup>

A renewed evangelisation also demands a "new ecumenism" which transforms a "teaching church" into a listening church and "learning church".<sup>136</sup> Bevens acknowledges that one of the great obstacles to evangelisation today is the damaged credibility of the Church. This can only be overcome through a renewed witness to justice:

A new, renewed evangelization can in no way be reduced to witnessing to and working for justice, but it surely is the condition of the possibility for the believability of a church that preaches and lives the gospel with the new ardor, new methods, and new expression that the New Evangelization calls for.<sup>137</sup>

In an earlier contribution, Bevens outlined a number of developments since *EvN*. These include the role and status of women, the practice of "prophetic dialogue", the necessity of cultural reconciliation, the emergence of ecological consciousness, migration and the burgeoning numbers of refugees world-wide.<sup>138</sup> Each of these developments must be integrated into the Church's evangelising task. While noting these as global shifts, Bevens recognises that each has particular significance in an Australian setting. These human, social,

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<sup>133</sup> Bevens, "Revisiting Mission at Vatican II".

<sup>134</sup> Bevens, "Revisiting Mission at Vatican II", 279.

<sup>135</sup> Bevens, "Revisiting Mission at Vatican II", 279-80.

<sup>136</sup> Bevens, "Revisiting Mission at Vatican II", 282.

<sup>137</sup> Bevens, "Revisiting Mission at Vatican II".

<sup>138</sup> Bevens, "Witness to the Gospel in Modern Australia", 11-22.

cultural, religious and political concerns map the crossroads at which the proclamation of the Gospel takes place in contemporary Australian society and form the contextual agenda for evangelisation today.

Frank O'Loughlin offers an overview of inculturated evangelisation and provides a presentation of *NE* in an Australian context. In his view, *NE* arises "in the face of the experience of a breakdown in the handing on of the faith in Western countries".<sup>139</sup> Because of this, "something more seems to be needed than the simple handing on of the truths of the faith if that faith is to have impact on people living in our contemporary culture".<sup>140</sup> Offering a number of historical "cameos of evangelization", O'Loughlin illustrates the dynamic relationship between the Gospel and culture and concludes that the contemporary situation is both "new and not new".<sup>141</sup> Evangelisation can no longer be presumed to occur through "social osmosis" whereby faith is handed on through a process of socialisation into a sub-culture. The present situation has been shaped by many factors over decades and, indeed, centuries.<sup>142</sup> The cultural penetration of evangelisation anticipated by *EvN* is the central hermeneutical concern of O'Loughlin's investigations. He observes that the Church is encountering a fundamental cultural change "which has taken the rug out from under us" and removed that "taken for granted, social atmosphere upon which we relied even if unknowingly", and, in turn, led to a dissolution of the meaning of the term "Christian":

This is not to say that there are not Christian values embedded in such post-Christian societies. It is to say, however, that such values are no longer named as Christian and so will not lead people to see themselves as Christian [...] Many people continue to call themselves Christian, but they give that word a meaning so weakened that the traces of its roots in Christ and his Gospel are hard to find.

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<sup>139</sup> Frank O'Loughlin, "The New Evangelisation of the Twenty First Century", *The Australasian Catholic Record* 84, no. 4 (2007): 401-2.

<sup>140</sup> O'Loughlin, "The New Evangelisation of the Twenty First Century", 402.

<sup>141</sup> O'Loughlin, "The New Evangelisation of the Twenty First Century", 403-7.

<sup>142</sup> O'Loughlin, "The New Evangelisation of the Twenty First Century", 406-7. "This situation is both new and not new. We can hear voices that have been speaking about this back to the end of the Second World War and beyond. To mention but one example, Cardinal Suhard, the Archbishop of Paris at the end of the Second World War, called France, often known as 'the eldest daughter of the Church', a Mission country. It is new in that the message has come home to us more clearly, it has been taken up by the highest authorities in the Church and it is seen as crucial for the Church's future."

In such situations the name 'Christian' is already being re-defined to mean 'good' or 'decent' or even 'law-abiding'.<sup>143</sup>

With the establishment of the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization in 2010, *NE* continued its three decade evolution from its origins as a localised exhortation to a fully institutionalised ecclesial agenda. *NE* was now regarded as a form of apologetic engagement with secular culture. There is no clearer example of this than the publication by the President of this Council, Rino Fisichella, of his manifesto for the dicastery, *The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*.

Fisichella is keen to demonstrate that *NE* is a careful development of the papal magisterium under both John Paul II and Benedict XVI. He stresses that, in the "jungle of interpretation" of *NE*, the evangelisation intended is not a "re-evangelisation" but a "new evangelisation", which is the product of a "new enthusiasm", "a new language", and "new methodologies".<sup>144</sup>

Fisichella's cultural analysis is bleak. He sees the present as a moment when a sense of God has been lost from the centre of society, which in turn undermines the value and orientation of the human person:

The 'eclipse' of the meaning of life reduces the person to the point of no longer knowing where he fits in, of not being able to find his place in the midst of creation and society [...] The crisis through which we are living is, first of all, a crisis of culture and [...] we should add anthropological. The human being is in crisis. We are no longer capable of finding ourselves.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup> O'Loughlin, "The New Evangelisation of the Twenty First Century", 407-8. O'Loughlin proposes a grounded pastoral sensibility necessary for evangelisation today. Imagining evangelisation as a pilgrimage in a "spirit of solidarity and friendship", O'Loughlin views the role of the parish, school and family as increasingly important (411-12).

<sup>144</sup> Rino Fisichella, *The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference* (Balwyn: Freedom, 2012), 23.

<sup>145</sup> Fisichella, *Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, 29-30. He begins his analysis of the contemporary moment by tracing the roots of the "God is dead" movement, attributing some responsibility toward Dietrich Bonhoeffer despite that fact that this reception of his fragmented thoughts from prison belong to later generation of interpreters. "More than half a century has gone by since the 'manifesto' of modern secularisation emerged, re-worked and modified on the basis of the ideas of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from Professor Harvey Cox of the American Baptist church in his book *The Secular City*. There followed almost immediately a second text, *Honest to God*, by the Anglican bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson [...] The program was focused upon the proclamation, now reduced to a technical formality: to live and to build up our world *etsi Deus non daretur*, as if God did not exist" (25-6).

Here, Fisichella links the two great themes of *NE* – Christian anthropology and culture development. In the secular world, “God becomes a useless hypothesis and a competitor not only to be avoided, but to be eliminated”.<sup>146</sup> This situation has arisen “in a relatively easy fashion” with the aid of an “often weak theology” and a sentimental approach to religion “incapable of demonstrating the broader horizon of faith”.<sup>147</sup> In this environment, *NE* is the call to develop a “more innovative pastoral action” for the conditions of today.<sup>148</sup> Fisichella identifies several fields of evangelisation which include liturgy, works of charity, ecumenism, outreach to immigrants, and the use of media and social communications.<sup>149</sup>

Fisichella frequently defines “culture” in classicist terms from which emerges an ambivalent picture. There is limited development of *EvN* in Fisichella’s work and one is left with the impression that the Church stands outside or beyond culture, and, from this vantage point, the Church “must insert” itself into the cultural with greater intentionality. In reality, the relationship between Church and culture is more symbiotic and fluid. *EvN* speaks of various “strata of humanity” presuming levels of engagement with culture. This is a necessary proposition for the work of *NE*. Fisichella resists these insights of *EvN* in favour of a diagnostic and curative interpretation of evangelisation:

The pathology which is afflicting our world today is of a cultural character; it is essential, therefore, to come to know it and that we find the right remedy to overcome it and, if this does not happen, pastoral initiatives will be multiplied, but they will be ineffective because they will be incapable of reaching their objective.<sup>150</sup>

Francis George echoes much of this view, but adds a more positive tone in his assessment. While culture, he asserted, “is the object of our evangelization”, we are also in a

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<sup>146</sup> Fisichella, *Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, 29.

<sup>147</sup> Fisichella, *Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*.

<sup>148</sup> Fisichella, *Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, 64.

<sup>149</sup> Fisichella, *Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, 64-76.

<sup>150</sup> Fisichella, *Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, 80.



reciprocal relationship as our “culture is as much in us as we are in it”.<sup>151</sup> Cultural evangelisation rests on the gift of discernment grounded in the Gospel which sees culture, “despite its deficiencies and [...] obstacles”, as something finally “lovable”.<sup>152</sup> For George, “culture” and “faith” are distinct realities and exist in symbiotic fashion. “Faith” is understood in a universalist, supernatural sense, ultimately absorbing cultures into a singular expression: “Culture is terribly damaged by human sinfulness, but seldom is it hopelessly corrupt. A culture is a field that offers plants from native seeds for grafting onto the tree of the universal faith”.<sup>153</sup> Culture can be “lovable” at some level, but George does not see this reciprocal relationship as one which enhances the Church through mutual exchange.

Coleridge prefers the term “new surge of Gospel energy” to describe what is needed today.<sup>154</sup> For Coleridge, this requires a continuous evolution of ecclesial priorities which began at the Second Vatican Council. Taking a long view of Church and world history, Coleridge declares that *NE* in Australia must recognise that cultural and socialised Catholicism has run its course, at least for the present:

In the West at least, the world will not come to the Church at this time. Therefore, the Church must go to the world, since the only alternative is for the Church to retire to some introverted, supposedly self-protective world where we Christians speak only to ourselves; and we are surely forbidden to do that. The question now is, How do we go to the world? What does this kind of new mission mean? What does it require? It requires, at least in this country, a recognition that tribal Catholicism is at an end [...] But whatever being Catholic may mean in Australia [...] it no longer means belonging to an Anglo-Celtic tribe.<sup>155</sup>

The dynamic nature of culture has increasingly become a central focus of *NE*.

Hosffman Ospini identifies three critical points in the reflection on Church and culture through the lens of *NE*: firstly, the Church is undergoing a time of development to better

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<sup>151</sup> Francis George, “Evangelizing Our Culture”, in *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*, ed. Steven Boguslawski and Ralph Martin (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 44.

<sup>152</sup> George, “Evangelizing Our Culture”, 44-5.

<sup>153</sup> George, “Evangelizing Our Culture”, 45.

<sup>154</sup> Coleridge, “A Different Fire”, 135.

<sup>155</sup> Coleridge, “A Different Fire”, 136.

understand the relationship between culture and evangelisation; secondly, cultural diversity is a gift “instead of a problem to be solved”; and thirdly, the growing hum of a variety of voices transforms theology.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, Timothy O’Malley defines evangelisation as “nothing less than shorthand for how the Church is to relate to the world”, through an ecclesiology that seeks the redemption of all humanity by proclaiming “the agapic pedagogy” of the Church.<sup>157</sup> The Church’s “commitment to evangelization is not a sectarian strategy by those seeking to coerce the culture to believe in the Gospel at all costs” but an expression “of her deepest identity”.<sup>158</sup>

While not strictly speaking of *NE*, Arbuckle describes evangelisation in general as a process of cultural interaction:

If evangelization aims to respect the cultures of people, then the Christian churches must realize that they themselves have been formed into cultures. Evangelization will then be an interaction between the cultures of churches and those of the people being evangelized. This interaction must then lead to changes of identity for all concerned.<sup>159</sup>

Arbuckle’s primary focus is inculturation; and foundational to this end is an anthropological analysis of culture, myth and narrative. Arbuckle is critical of recent theological and ecclesiological approaches to culture. He describes Vatican II’s approach as “culturally naïve”.<sup>160</sup> Later statements, too, drift between classical and empirical notions of

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<sup>156</sup> Hosffman Ospini, “The New Evangelization in a Diverse Church: Culture Matters”, *Pastoral Liturgy* 44, no. 3 (2013): 6. “Why is this an appropriate moment for Catholic pastoral leaders, educators, and theologians to think about matters of culture in the context of the New Evangelization? The answer to this question is threefold. First, much has been learned about culture since the Second Vatican Council and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, placing us in a better position to understand its centrality in the evangelizing process. Second, Catholics are increasingly embracing cultural diversity as a gift to the Church instead of a problem to be solved — a true sign of conversion with still a long road ahead to be traveled. Third, in our globalized world, we see a growing polyphony of voices, in an amazing process of cross-cultural fertilization, transforming the way we do Catholic theology, how we celebrate and share our faith, and how we build ecclesial communities. This growing awareness about the value and potential of cultural diversity should be interpreted as a *kairos* in the work of evangelization.”

<sup>157</sup> Timothy P. O’Malley, *Liturgy and the New Evangelization: Practicing the Art of Self-Giving Love* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>158</sup> O’Malley, *Liturgy and the New Evangelization*, 14.

<sup>159</sup> Arbuckle, “Christianity, Identity, and Cultures: A Case Study”, *Australasian Catholic Record* 90, no. 1 (2013): 34.

<sup>160</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 36.

culture, or a modern and postmodern view.<sup>161</sup> Explorations of cultures are essential to *NE*, and Arbuckle's end-point is to detail an anthropologically-grounded approach to inculturation. According to Pedro Arrupe's definition, inculturation is a process of "the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular local cultural context".<sup>162</sup> This is more than cultural adaption, for what is at stake is "a principle that animates, directs, and unifies a culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about 'a new creation'".<sup>163</sup>

Accordingly, he argues for an "anthropological model" of inculturation. This model, which Arbuckle recognises in the "incarnational emphasis" of the Second Vatican Council, "relies significantly on the social sciences and interreligious dialogue to uncover the presence of the Word acting within cultures".<sup>164</sup> Arbuckle proposes a method of "dialogue through correlation with cultures".<sup>165</sup> The aim is to make connections between two poles: the foundations of Christian faith (scripture and tradition), and the lived-experience and questions that arise in the complex cultural sphere of human society.<sup>166</sup> This making of cultural connections forms the basis of a "mystagogical approach" to *NE*.

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<sup>161</sup> See Arbuckle, chapter 9 in *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 138-151. Arbuckle uses the terminology of Bernard Lonergan who describes two interpretations of cultural: The "contemporary notion of culture is empirical. A culture is a set of meanings and values informing a common way of life, and there are as many cultures as there are distinct sets of such meanings and values. However, this manner of conceiving culture is relatively recent. It is the product of empirical human studies. Within less than one hundred years it has replaced an older, classicist view [...] [Culture] was a matter of acquiring and assimilating the tastes and skills, the ideals, virtues and ideas, that were pressed upon one in a good home and through a curriculum in the liberal arts." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 301.

<sup>162</sup> Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation", *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits* 7(June 1978), 2.

<sup>163</sup> Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation", 2. With this definition in mind, Arbuckle presents five principles of inculturation. These consist of acknowledging that: 1. The Holy Spirit is the source of all truth, no matter where it is found; 2. No one culture has normative status in expressing the truths of faith, (therefore) those truths are translatable into all cultures; 3. Inculturation must embrace all human endeavours; 4. Inculturation is the call to relive the incarnation and paschal mystery; 5. The model of the Church most suited to inculturation is that of the people of God. Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 169-171. John Paul II identified two criteria for inculturation: "Properly applied, inculturation must be guided by two principles: 'compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church'." *RM*, 54.

<sup>164</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 174-5.

<sup>165</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 175.

<sup>166</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods", in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 41. In a broader Roman Catholic perspective, the missionary impulse has always necessitated some form of

### 3.6 POPE FRANCIS AND THE NEW EVANGELISATION

Pope Francis has been measured in his use of the term *NE*, mentioning it only ten times in *Evangelii Gaudium* (hereafter, *EG*).<sup>167</sup> He has shifted *NE* from a catechetical and apologetical strategy to dual Christological and pneumatological foci directed towards ecclesial renewal and missionary intent. Quoting St Irenaeus, Francis identified an ever-present “newness” with the person of Christ:

“By his coming, Christ brought with him all newness”. With this newness he is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always “new”.<sup>168</sup>

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what might be identified as “mediation theology”, “correlation theory”, and “inculturation.” The missionary fields of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries produced various forms of integrating traditional cultures with a European expression of faith. These had varying degrees of success, and were also a source of ecclesial tension. Matteo Ricci’s missionary effort in China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a classic example. While not from a missionary context, John Henry Newman, in his work “On Certainty, Intuition and the Conceivable” (1863) articulated the “two poles” in which language about God must function: “We can only speak of Him, whom we reason about but have not seen, in the terms of our experience. When we reflect on Him and put into words our thoughts about Him, we are forced to transfer to a new meaning ready made words, which primarily belong to objects of time and place. We are aware, while we do so, that they are inadequate. We can only remedy their insufficiency by confessing it. We can do no more than put ourselves on the guard as to our own proceeding, and protest against it, while we do adhere to it. We can only set right one error of expression by another. By this method of antagonism we steady our minds, not so as to reach their object, but to point them in the right direction; as in an algebraical process we might add and subtract in series, approximating little by little, by saying and unsaying, to a positive result. We lay down that the Supreme Being is omnipresent, and yet nowhere; that He is everlasting, yet not for ages upon ages; He is ineffably one yet He is exuberantly manifold. We draw lines, which seem to us parallel, because the point at which they meet is so distant; and we do not ever see that they do meet in it, we only know by calculation that they must.” John Henry Newman, *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty*, ed. J. Derek Holmes, Hugo M. De Achaval, and Charles Stephen Dessain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 102.

<sup>167</sup> *EG*, 14, 73, 120, 126, 198, 239, 260, 284, 287-8. It is also noteworthy that this Exhortation does not carry the title “Post-Synodal Exhortation”, as does *EvN* for example. While the document is rich with considerations for mission and evangelisation gleaned from the synod discussions, much of the document is clearly intended to strike a new tone and missionary posture.

<sup>168</sup> *EG*, 11.

Therefore, *NE* is not an ecclesial program, but a participation in the “eternally new” Divine initiative. “New” is a designation which describes the task of evangelisation in every age. For Francis, “new” has particular implications for ecclesial reform.

Ecclesial reform for Francis is both institutional and pastoral. This is clear in the tone of *EG* in which the precise term of “new evangelisation” is given limited exploration, while ecclesial reform, pastoral and missionary renewal are identified as fundamental dimensions of evangelising action and public witness:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.<sup>169</sup>

Preaching and homiletics are given specific treatment and identified as cornerstones of forming evangelising communities.<sup>170</sup> For Francis, evangelisation begins with a particular attention towards aspects of the Church’s life, governance, doctrines and practices which inhibit evangelisation and fail to evoke the promise of Good News. Francis’ pastoral reform approach begins with Church culture as the first arena of evangelisation.

The synodal process on “the family” throughout 2014 and 2015 is a prime example. The synod engaged in a genuine process of discerning social factors and pastoral questions which impact upon families’ ability to connect and flourish both socially and pastorally. One dimension of *NE* is to examine Church practice with a renewed intensity and urgency. Evangelisation cannot be separated from the concrete concerns of the contemporary world. For evangelisation to be authentic, the Church must first ask profound questions of itself. This is the crucial pneumatological dimension of ecclesial conversion.

Nor can *NE* be content with a narrow agenda of returning the disconnected to the practice of faith. It must also consider the broader ecclesial vocation of communal witness in

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<sup>169</sup> *EG*, 27.

<sup>170</sup> *EG*, 135-159.

the public square and the role of the Church in service to the human family in a secular, pluralistic society. The Church has a privileged and vital role as the voice of the “conscience of humanity”.<sup>171</sup> *Laudato Si’* (hereafter, *LS*), Pope Francis’ encyclical on “the care of our common home”, makes a particular effort to prompt the consciences of the whole human family toward care for the planet. He envisages a “new synthesis”, and a common pathway “of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity”.<sup>172</sup> A new synthesis and an “integral ecology” recognise the inseparable bond “between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace”.<sup>173</sup>

“Integral ecology” has mystagogical dimensions, in that it invites human beings to be open “to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human”.<sup>174</sup> This evangelising dialogue takes into account “environmental, economic and social ecology”, “cultural ecology”, the “ecology of daily life”, the ecology of “the common good”, and the ecology of justice “between the generations”.<sup>175</sup> Evangelisation becomes “grounded” and “earthed” in the tangible and concrete. Integral ecology is a summons to participate in the contemplation of mystery because there is “a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face”.<sup>176</sup>

While evangelisation is not specially at the heart of the encyclical, Francis focuses the gaze of the Church on the “common ground” that is shared with all humanity. The encyclical is informed with an evangelising zeal which seeks to “find God in all things”.<sup>177</sup> It is rich

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<sup>171</sup> John Paul II, *Meeting with the Representatives of Catholic Universities* (Xavier University of New Orleans 12<sup>th</sup> September 1987), 8. Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19870912\\_xavier-university\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19870912_xavier-university_en.html) on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2015.

<sup>172</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si’: On the Care of our Common Home* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2015), 112, 121 and 201.

<sup>173</sup> *LS*, 10.

<sup>174</sup> *LS*, 11.

<sup>175</sup> *LS*, 137-162.

<sup>176</sup> *LS*, 233.

<sup>177</sup> *LS*, 233.

with evangelising possibilities both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, through the offer of dialogue “with all people about our common home”.<sup>178</sup>

The leadership of Pope Francis has re-situated *NE* within a broader framework of pastoral and ecclesial reform. *NE* thus becomes not an extra category, but the continuation of the ever-necessary task of culturally engaging proclamation. For Francis, evangelisation becomes new through the Christic prism of energetic and pastoral outreach. Francis re-frames *NE* as a relational rather than a catechetical endeavour. Given this, *NE* has tended to merge with the broader missionary vocation of the Church.

The re-framing of a new spirit of evangelisation by Pope Francis is manifest as a “performance” or “enactment” of God’s merciful embrace. In establishing an Extraordinary Year of Jubilee to focus on mercy, Francis connected *NE* and the Second Vatican Council as “a new phase of history”:

The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father’s love in the world.<sup>179</sup>

This new phase of evangelising activity needs to be understood within the broader impulses of Vatican II. The evangelising energies of the pontificate of Francis find concrete expression in pastoral acts of mercy. For him, mercy is a verb, made real through kerygmatic proclamation and Christic encounter.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, any new evangelisation must negate the

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<sup>178</sup> *LS*, 3.

<sup>179</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2015), 4. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_bolla\\_20150411\\_misericordiae-vultus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html) on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2015.

<sup>180</sup> The Episcopal motto of Francis, *Miserando atque eligendo* (“by having mercy and by choosing”), is taken from the *Homilies of Bede the Venerable* (21). Commenting of the enactment of mercy as a program and vision for his episcopal ministry, Francis said in an interview, “I think the Latin gerund *miserando* is impossible to translate in both Italian and Spanish [and English]. I like to translate it with another gerund that does not exist:

barriers and burdens which prohibit the “mercy-ing” word of the Gospel being heard and accepted. In this light, *NE* becomes not an extra-dimension of the Church’s activity, but takes centre-stage as a re-examination of pastoral concerns with consequential implications for new strategies of outreach.

### 3.7 CONCLUSION

The review of the literature relating to *NE* demonstrates how it is interpreted in a variety of complementary and competing ecclesial agendas. Initially inseparable from the theological and pastoral vision of John Paul II, *NE* has increasingly focussed on the social and cultural realities of secularity, pluralism and atheism. In the vision of Pope Francis, mission, evangelisation and ecclesiology are all interrelated dimensions at the service of the kerygma. In this light, *NE* has moved towards a multi-faceted, inter-disciplinary theological proposition.

Ultimately, *NE* must come to be understood as contextual evangelisation. It is not an adjunct to “proper” or “former” evangelisation but is, to use McGrath’s description, a new paradigm for the whole activity of evangelisation which will be far more conscious of the need to awaken the spiritual instincts of the modern person. It will involve both formal ecclesial responses and spontaneous movements. It will encompass the broad spectrum of Church theological reflection, spiritual renewal and pastoral practice. It will need also to be measured on its own terms and not in terms of “results” or “success” which is neither the view of Scripture nor the reality of history.<sup>181</sup>

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*misericordiando* (“mercy-ing”).” Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: The Exclusive Interview with Pope Francis”, *America* 209, no. 8 (September 30, 2013): 16.

<sup>181</sup> *EG*, 127.



*NE* is simply forms of evangelisation needed in our context today, an old imperative in a new age. Karl Rahner recognised that the social, intellectual, cultural and religious situation in which the modern person lives has changed significantly. This thesis will consider Rahner's theological proposal which sought to address this new context.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### ***A MYSTAGOGY OF LIVING FAITH:***

#### ***An Analysis of***

#### ***Karl Rahner's Mystagogical Approach***

## **Mystagogy of Living Faith: An Analysis of Karl Rahner's Mystagogical Approach**

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Mystagogy is rooted in the Greek word *myéō* which means “to be led” into “the [pagan mystery cult] secrets” or “to be initiated into the mysteries”.<sup>1</sup> In a Christian sense, Jesus is the pre-eminent mystagogue. His life and public ministry were both an enactment and a proclamation of the Reign of God. Eating and drinking with the unclean and unacceptable, teaching in parables and stories, healing which re-initiated the healed back into community life, and pronouncements of mercy and forgiveness were not simply actions designed to support messianic claims: rather, they were invitations to participate in the mystery of God's Reign for those who were sufficiently alert to the deeper realities of Jesus' life and proclamation. Collins and Foley describe this mystagogical dimension of Jesus' ministry as interpreted through eucharistic theology:

In the midst of what is remembered as his final meal, Jesus reinterpreted the event in the event: he offered his ultimate interpretation of meal practice, so intimately touching the very Mystery of God in Christ that it remains central both to eucharistic practice and to reflection upon that practice. It is this “mystagogy in the moment” that becomes the core tradition that Paul feels compelled to hand on (1 Cor 11:23-26), revealing that Jesus is both the divine Mystery and divine mystagogue.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 615. See also, Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 168. It is closely connected to the word *mystērion* (mystery), which in turn, appears to be derived from *muein*, meaning “to close one's eyes or lips”. See Mary Collins and Edward Foley, “Mystagogy: Discerning the Mystery of Faith”, in *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of The Roman Missal*, ed. Edward Foley (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 86. The origins of *mystērion* are unclear, with Günther Bornkamm stating that a study of the “etymology leads only to the fairly certain general conclusion that a *mystērion* is something on which silence must be kept”. Günther Bornkamm, “Mystērion”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 4:824.

<sup>2</sup> Collins and Foley, “Discerning the Mystery of Faith”, 86.

Enrico Mazza notes that mystagogia was “always used in a sacred context”, and, in its original usage, was connected to mystery cults of the ancient world.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the connection to “closing one’s eyes or mouth” – things about which silence must be kept (see fn. 1) – has a two-fold meaning. The first meaning refers to a code of conduct enjoining silence about the mysteries into which one is initiated. The second implies the receptive sensibility of a neophyte. A certain stillness of the senses is required if one is to be “initiated” into the mystery which is ultimately beyond words.<sup>4</sup>

While there are multiple references to the “Mystery of Christ” in Pauline literature, there is only one specific scriptural allusion to the concept of mystagogical initiation in the New Testament. In the Letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks of “learning the secret” to face all conditions of life (Phil 4:12) and uses the term *memyēmai* (from *myéō*).<sup>5</sup> The term begins to take on greater meaning in the fourth Century due to a number of factors: the rising tide of adult baptisms as a result of the Roman Empire’s embrace of Christianity, the Trinitarian and Christological debates of the era, the increasing importance of the episcopate, as well as the gradual development of the liturgical cycle and its associated celebrations.<sup>6</sup>

At this time, mystagogy held a variety of meanings. René Bornert’s commentary identifies two primary usages: the first is the “performance of a sacred action” particularly baptism and Eucharist; and second, “oral or written explanation” of the mysteries of Scripture

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<sup>3</sup> Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: The Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Pueblo, 1989), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Both the Septuagint and New Testament show some awareness of the initiatory practices of the ancient mystery cults. For example, the Gospel of Mark (4:10-12) in particular presents Jesus as a teacher of “mysteries”: “When Jesus was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret (or mystery) of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.’” See also Gilbert Ostdiek, *Mystagogy of the Eucharist: A Resource for Faith Formation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 619.

<sup>6</sup> Craig Alan Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan’s Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 2-3.

and the symbolic rites of liturgy.<sup>7</sup> It is most typically identified as a style of catechesis and religious formation.<sup>8</sup>

Mystagogia is usually understood in post-baptismal catechetical terms.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, a broader interpretation of mystagogy which incorporates the lived experience of believers. Collins and Foley acknowledge a more fundamental meaning which is “neither narrowly sacramental nor fundamental liturgical”, recognising that the “goal of mystagogy is an encounter with the Mystery [the God of Jesus Christ....] in service of the growing realization of God’s reign here and now in the world”.<sup>10</sup> In this light, Collins and Foley propose a useful definition:

Mystagogy is an imaginative form of theological reflection, prompted by the Holy Spirit, contextualized in a particular faith community, integral to and born of the liturgical event itself, more poetic than discursive, that respects the affective as well as cognitive gifts of the assembly, for the sake of encountering the mystery of God in Christ, which leads to personal and ecclesial transformation in service of the in-breaking of God’s reign of justice and peace into the world.<sup>11</sup>

In much the same sense, Karl Rahner was to use the term “mystagogy” as a reference point for theological renewal. To briefly summarise Rahner’s ambition for contemporary theology, forms of mystagogy undertake methods of theological reflection which engage the subjective level of human experience, accepting this starting point as the threshold to receiving the greater narratives of salvation history and recognising the presence of Divine

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<sup>7</sup> René Bornert, *Les Commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècle*, vol. 9 (Institut Français d’études Byzantines, 1966), 29. Quoted in Mazza, *Mystagogia*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Collins and Foley, “Discerning the Mystery of Faith”, 83. Collins and Foley follow the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet and hold that Scripture was “born of the liturgy”. Collins and Foley ask, “If the assemblies of Christians in Eucharist and baptism ‘seem to have functioned empirically as the decisive crucible where the Christian Bible was formed,’ should we not look to such ritual events – rather than the texts born of this action, as Mazza does – also as the crucible of mystagogy itself?” In their study of mystagogy, Collins and Foley apply three presuppositions: “(1) mystagogy is a form of theological reflection integral to and born of the liturgical event itself; (2) Scripture is only one (albeit important) lens for defining mystagogy; and (3) the proper origins of mystagogical interpretations are to be found in Jesus, especially his table ministry culminating in the final meal(s) with his disciples”, 83.

<sup>9</sup> “Mystagogy” is the name given to the Easter period of reflection for neophytes in the Rite of Christian Initiation. As noted in Ch. 1, see *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 234 and 237.

<sup>10</sup> Collins and Foley, “Discerning the Mystery of Faith”, 97.

<sup>11</sup> Collins and Foley, “Discerning the Mystery of Faith”, 100.

Mystery in one's personal story. Rahner argued that theological reflection must contain a mystagogical dimension in order to properly "illuminate the personal experience of grace".<sup>12</sup> This chapter will explore the arguments for a mystagogical theology in Rahner's theology, with a particular focus on his more mature works. Prior to this exploration, a brief history of mystagogical styles of formation will help situate the concept.

## 4.2 MYSTAGOGIA: A SHORT HISTORY

Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia are among the pre-eminent examples of those who employed forms of mystagogical formation.<sup>13</sup> It appears that Cyril of Jerusalem was the first to describe his method of instruction as "mystagogical": "These daily introductions into the Mysteries (*mystagogiai*), and new instructions, which are the announcements of new truths, are profitable to us".<sup>14</sup> Edward Yarnold explored the effect of the transference of the language from the pagan mystery cults to Christian instruction and considered to what extent this modified the liturgical rites themselves. His conclusion was that the adaption of the rites themselves was minimal. The significant evolution was in the manner of instruction and formation:

It was at Jerusalem that the veneration of the Christian sacred objects (the cross, Calvary, the tomb) began and apparently the practice of mystagogic catechesis began here too. Cyril applied to his sermons the name *mystagogia*, with all its pagan associations.<sup>15</sup>

Cyril understood that growth in faith is a progression. His style was to allow the mysteries of Christ to unfold in the lives of the catechumens and neophytes. Through these

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<sup>12</sup> O'Collins and Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, 168.

<sup>13</sup> Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis*, Sermon 2:1. Quoted in Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 76.

<sup>15</sup> Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 66.

mystagogical lectures, Cyril strove to draw the neophyte into an ever-deepening awareness of the saving faith which they had received.<sup>16</sup> Cyril frequently offered simple examples and analogies of faith, as a master might guide an apprentice. The catechumens were beginners and learners, and therefore Cyril pitched his simple analogies to their level of understanding: “It is only fair that if you are feeble where faith is concerned, I should give you feeble examples” (Sermon 18:3).

Yarnold quotes a fifth century ecclesial text which paraphrases Aristotle and provides a sense of the mystagogical aim at the heart of the methodology of Cyril of Jerusalem: “Those undergoing initiation are not expected to gain knowledge (*manthein*) but an experience (*pathein*) and a disposition.”<sup>17</sup> Initiation was intended to engender conversion at a deeper level beyond intellectual accent. Pope Benedict XVI described Cyril’s catechesis as “an integral catechesis [...] involving body, soul and spirit” which “remains emblematic for catechetical formation of Christians today”.<sup>18</sup> Cyril was one of a number who adopted a mystagogical style of formation for adult Christians. It was a style of pedagogical simplicity, which connected liturgical experience to Christian formation and conversion.

The growth of a mystagogical dimension of Christian formation was aided by the marriage of faith and culture that took place in Roman Empire at this time. This greater freedom of religion enabled an evolution in style, thought and practice. This same marriage that assisted the development of a myriad of mystagogical styles and approaches in the fourth and fifth centuries also contributed to its decline. As infant baptism increasingly became the norm, the necessity for adult formation gradually decreased. Nevertheless, Collins and Foley highlight that there remained important remnants of mystagogical approaches in the medieval

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<sup>16</sup> William Henn, *One Faith: Biblical and Patristic Contributions Toward Understanding Unity in Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 126.

<sup>17</sup> Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 63. Original text: Aristotle, fragment 45(15) (1483a19); *The Works of Aristotle*, tr. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict XVI, “Cyril of Jerusalem”, in *The Fathers of the Church* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2008), 71.

Church. Dramatic presentations of scriptural stories, liturgical feasts and stylised depictions of popular piety served as “their own kind of mystagogy”.<sup>19</sup> Beyond this, an important dimension of mystagogy which still remains is the art embedded the Church’s architectural traditions. The medieval cathedral served as a form of mystagogy “whose very design, iconography, stained-glass windows, and sacramental carvings and mosaics provided a visual form of theological reflection often rooted in the sacramental practices of the day”.<sup>20</sup>

In the contemporary age, John XXIII encouraged the participants of the Second Vatican Council to re-present the Catholic faith in a new fashion. He insisted that the “substance” of the faith is one thing; the manner “in which it is presented is another”.<sup>21</sup> If Yarnold’s proposition that the influence of mystery cults re-invented the catechetical model for initiation rather than initiatory practice itself is taken as an accurate assessment, then the mystagogical pedagogy of the fourth and fifth centuries offers a historical example of the conciliar intention of John XXIII. What changed during this period of the early mystagogical teachers was not the substance of the liturgical rituals but the manner in which they were presented and explained.

The concerns which shaped the development of the Second Vatican Council differed from those that shaped the styles of the fourth and fifth century teachers. The centuries-old marriage of religion and culture that had been a foundation of Western civilisation for centuries was showing signs of stress and strain by the twentieth century. A re-presentation of the faith was necessary, not the result of a new cultural marriage, as was the case in the fourth century, but as the result of a growing dissolution of this old wedded partnership. It was a split that had been centuries in the making, and which now required a re-assessment of the modes of relationship between the Church and the secular world.

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<sup>19</sup> Collins and Foley, "Discerning the Mystery of Faith", 93.

<sup>20</sup> Collins and Foley, "Discerning the Mystery of Faith", 95-6.

<sup>21</sup> *GME*, 7.2.



Older forms of catechetical instruction, coupled with the presumption that faith would simply be absorbed from one generation to the next, alongside certain theological, philosophical and ecclesial categories, were no longer formative in the modern age. The insight of John XXIII mirrored the same realisation of the ancient mystagogical teachers: what is taught is one thing; how it is received is another.

Pope Francis expounded upon this in *EG*. He spoke of the Church as a “missionary disciple” constantly needing “to grow in her interpretation of the revealed word and in her understanding of truth”.<sup>22</sup> The Church, Francis added, must utilise many styles and modes of thought, in order to explore with freedom the great challenges and issues which she must confront.<sup>23</sup> The language and style that the Church uses to invite and teach faith can be both liberating and problematic, as Francis noted:

Today’s vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness [...] There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian. In this way, we hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance. This is the greatest danger. Let us never forget that “the expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning”.<sup>24</sup>

A mystagogical approach can play a particular role in this renewal of the modes of expression in these culturally-changing times. The methodology of Karl Rahner provides a

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<sup>22</sup> *EG*, 40.

<sup>23</sup> *EG*, fn. 44: “Saint Thomas Aquinas noted that the multiplicity and variety ‘were the intention of the first agent’, who wished that ‘what each individual thing lacked in order to reflect the divine goodness would be made up for by other things’, since the Creator’s goodness ‘could not be fittingly reflected by just one creature’ (*S. Th.*, I, q. 47, a. 1). Consequently, we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships (cf. *S. Th.*, I, q. 47, a. 2, ad 1; q. 47, a. 3). By analogy, we need to listen to and complement one another in our partial reception of reality and the Gospel.”

<sup>24</sup> *EG*, 41. Internal quote from John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 19.

starting point to explore what a “mystagogical approach” might look like as a method for “expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness”.

#### 4.3 A “PROPOSITION OF GRACE”: GOD’S UNIVERSAL WILL FOR SALVATION

Thomas O’Meara described Rahner as a “philosopher theologian”.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, Rahner’s mystagogical insight owes more to an instinct for grace rather than a systemic philosophical or theological method. It is a presupposition, a foundational premise, and a fundamental starting point, or as Karen Kilby concludes, “a theological hypothesis rather than

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas F. O’Meara, *God in the World: A Guide to Karl Rahner’s Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 22. Much is made of the philosophical sources of Rahner’s theology. Werner Löser, who is critical of the limits of Rahner’s method, described him as “a constructive thinker” whose “philosophical influences came from the thought of German Idealism, from Fichte, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger”.<sup>25</sup> See Brian W. Hughes, “Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Interview with Werner Löser”, *America* 181(October 16, 1999): 18. Rahner’s studies in Freiburg were steeped in a tradition of phenomenology and neo-Kantianism, and it was there that he personally encountered Heidegger. (O’Meara, *God in the World*, 22). Rahner, himself, was unwilling to attribute too much influence to Heidegger. See Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews (1965-1982)*, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 257. “The Heidegger that I learned was the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, the Heidegger of the battlecry, perhaps even the Heidegger of metaphysics. That was the Heidegger with whom I learned to think a little bit [....] Insofar as it is philosophical, my theology does not really show the systematic and thematic influence of Heidegger. What he communicated was the desire to think, the ability to think [....] I would say that Martin Heidegger was the only teacher for whom I developed the respect that a disciple has for a great master. That had little to do with individual questions or influence on my philosophy or even my theology, although I am really grateful to him.” He went further to reject notions that his work was more philosophical than theological. Responding to a question in 1980 to describe “his philosophy”, he answered bluntly, “*Ich habe keine Philosophie*” (“I do not have a philosophy”). William V. Dych, *Karl Rahner* (London: Chapman, 1992), 18. As a connection to *Being and Time*, *Dasein* (openness to being-in-the-world) is a central concept for Heidegger. “Being-in is not a ‘property’ which *Dasein* sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and without which it could just **be** just as well as it could be with it. It is not the case that man ‘is’ and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being towards the ‘world’—a world with which he provides himself occasionally. *Dasein* is never ‘proximally’ an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a ‘relationship’ towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only because *Dasein*, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 12:84. Constitutive of Being is to ask questions regarding the nature of Being. This ontic nature of the human questioner is fundamental to Rahner’s theology. Heidegger’s view of mystery, that which is simultaneously revealed and hidden, while being a classic theological principle, is also fundamental to Rahner’s presentation of the human experience of God. In Heidegger’s words, that “which shows itself and at the same time withdraws is the essential trait of what we call the mystery. I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology [instruments], openness to mystery”. *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 55.

a philosophical claim”.<sup>26</sup> Speaking of what he had acquired from the philosophical method of Martin Heidegger, Rahner acknowledged that he had developed a certain modern and critical eye to doctrinal truths. Rahner’s desire was to reduce dogmatic propositions to a “synthetic idea” which could be assimilated and integrated into the life of the individual believer.<sup>27</sup>

Given such an understanding of his theological vocation, O’Meara credits Rahner with the distinction of teaching theologians “how to be Catholic and modern”, and shaping ordinary Christians to “see their faith and church in a deeper and broader way”.<sup>28</sup> In this light, Patrick Burke judges that, for the most part, “twentieth century Catholic theology can be read as the attempt to answer the questions raised by Modernism while remaining within the limits of orthodoxy defined by the magisterium”.<sup>29</sup> Rahner was at the forefront of this twentieth century endeavour, asserting that the older forms and theological techniques of Scholasticism and Neo-Scholasticism were no longer adequate to communicate in the age of modernity.

Apart from Heidegger, other influences at work in Rahner’s theology are well known: the transcendental method of Joseph Maréchal, the thought of Thomas Aquinas, and Ignatian spirituality.<sup>30</sup> This was a potent triad of philosophy, theology and spirituality out of which poured forth a broad range of theological works and spiritual reflections, imbued with a

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<sup>26</sup> Karen Kilby, "Philosophy, Theology and Foundationalism in the Thought of Karl Rahner", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 (2002): 129.

<sup>27</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 13. “This may be described as a method or approach by which one does not examine dogmatic truths merely as evidence derived from positive sources, but one seeks to construct a synthesis. One takes the various dogmatic propositions and reduces them to certain fundamental principles. In that way an internal, coherent body of dogmatic truth is established. The modern person is thus able to perceive the order and harmony in the mysterious truths of the Church and Christianity. The modern person no longer is satisfied with taking a collection of the truths and various opinions that are proven in Denzinger and thinking no more about it. Rather, he or she looks for some synthetic idea, even though it might be quite simple, to organize the immense material of Christian dogma.”

<sup>28</sup> O’Meara, *God in the World*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick J. Burke, "Conceptual Thought in Karl Rahner", *Gregorianum* 75, no. 1 (1994): 66.

<sup>30</sup> Otto Muck, "Not Only For Opportunistic Reasons", in *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas R. Batlogg and Melvin E. Michalski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 66. “Karl Rahner studied the transcendental analysis of Maréchal intensively. The term “Transcendental Method” or “analysis” first appeared in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but Maréchal took transcendental analysis to a new stage. Karl Rahner built on Maréchal and further developed his thought through the use of the existential terminology of Martin Heidegger. Experience is understood not only in an empirical sense. Thus, the transcendental philosophical starting point of Maréchal, upon which Rahner intensively reflected during the course of his studies, he wedded to an existential-phenomenological element. The approach to the question of being, Rahner worked out using Heidegger. So one must always be mindful of these three roots when one is studying Rahner’s methodology: Scholasticism, Maréchal and Heidegger.”

distinctive style of thought and expression, and which drew both strong devotees and stern critics. Roman Siebenrock notes that, for some, Rahner “is heralded as the foremost theologian” of the twentieth century, and by others, “he is decried as a heretic”.<sup>31</sup> According to Siebenrock, the evaluation of Rahner’s contribution is frequently limited in scope and frequently fails to take into account these “two essential aspects”: “his critical engagement with, yet dependence upon scholastic theology, and development and change inspired by his pastoral engagement”.<sup>32</sup> Despite critical assessments which focus on his philosophical foundations or theological method, “Rahner’s work cannot be reduced to one method and one source”, nor “has it a single purpose and quest”.<sup>33</sup>

O’Meara holds that Rahner’s theology was not a philosophical abstraction or a form of spirituality, but an attempt to articulate a theology of the human person in the modern world. This was a theology directed towards thinking and living in a Christian way in a contemporary culture that was increasingly shying away from transcendent foundations:

Much is made of Rahner’s line that increasingly believers will be mystics. It is not helpful, however, to confuse his central theme of grace and revelation surrounding each human subject in a silent but dynamic way with what is meant since the sixteenth century by mysticism, or to see his theology mainly as a modern spirituality [...] Rahner’s theology looks at every aspect of the human personality and ends not in emotion or introspection but in thinking and acting.<sup>34</sup>

An examination of Rahner’s mystagogical approach necessarily touches upon many dimensions of Rahner’s work. A mystagogical approach intersects with metaphysics, the relationship of nature and grace, consciousness, knowledge and religious experience. Grounded in Transcendental Thomism, Rahner’s earliest works explored the nature of knowledge shaped by an interpretation of Aquinas’ understanding of the human person.<sup>35</sup> For

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<sup>31</sup> Roman A. Siebenrock, "'Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you' (James IV,8): The Development of Karl Rahner's Theological Thinking in its First Period", *Louvain Studies* 29, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2004): 29.

<sup>32</sup> Siebenrock, "The Development of Karl Rahner's Theological Thinking".

<sup>33</sup> Siebenrock, "The Development of Karl Rahner's Theological Thinking".

<sup>34</sup> O’Meara, *God in the World*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Burke, "Conceptual Thought in Karl Rahner", 66-7.

Rahner, the human person is a “questioner” and theological methodology must incorporate this subjective dimension. The attempt to “enter into a constructive dialogue with modern thought” was one strand of the program of the Transcendental Thomistic school.<sup>36</sup>

Rahner’s first and incomplete doctoral thesis, which was later published as *Spirit in the World*, was his initial attempt to stress the human person’s intuitive capacity for “knowing” the Infinite beyond the finite. In classically Thomistic terms, intellect and sense knowledge are integrated in the judgment that constitutes genuine knowing.<sup>37</sup> In *Spirit in the World*, Rahner refers to “knowing” as a kind of “intuition” - whereby the universal and the concrete dimensions of knowledge are grounded in a particular fashion within the experience of the knower:

There lies at the basis of the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge, as in every metaphysics of knowledge, the view that the act which is the primary foundation of all knowing is to be understood as intuition (*Anschauung*), as an immediate grasping of what is known in its own real and present self.<sup>38</sup>

Knowledge, therefore, can also be identified as an experience of transcendence and, indeed, conveys an implicit sense of God as an encounter with Mystery. Thus, “we seem to know God” as “the necessary horizon” of human experience and “which is possible only in this [human] way”:

In order to be able to hear whether God speaks, we must know that He is; lest His word come to one who already knows, He must be hidden from us; in order to speak to man, His word must encounter us where we already and always are, in an earthly place, at an earthly hour.<sup>39</sup>

In such words, Rahner articulates the foundation of his theological convictions. His Christian anthropology grounded in “the ultimate desire of the spirit for absolute being” is shaped by Thomistic theology. This is further specified in Rahner’s subsequent theological

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<sup>36</sup> Burke, “Conceptual Thought in Karl Rahner”, 66.

<sup>37</sup> Burke, “Conceptual Thought in Karl Rahner”, 67-8.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (Sydney: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 25.

<sup>39</sup> Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 407-8. The connection noted previously between Heidegger’s presentation of mystery as that which simultaneously approaches and remains hidden is apparent in Rahner’s description.

anthropology, so that the human person is that point at which the self-revelation of God is received, and the Divine Word becomes audible and knowable.

In his introduction to *Hearers of the Word*, Johannes Metz described a fundamental focus of Rahner's understanding of nature and grace: human beings "must listen in on history in order to encounter there the 'word' that founds and enlightens existence", for it is to this "word" that the consciousness of the human person "has always been questioningly attuned".<sup>40</sup>

In this early work, Rahner explores the relationship between *being* and *knowing*. Revelation is understood here in propositional terms, as a form of "information", and "the imparting of facts hidden in God".<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, a personalist dimension emerges in that the human person "must possess an openness for the self-utterance of the one who possesses being absolutely through the luminous Word".<sup>42</sup> For Rahner, the "primordial essence" of the human person is "spirit" which "has an ear open to any word whatsoever that may proceed from the mouth of the Eternal".<sup>43</sup> Rahner employs the philosophical term "existential", borrowed from Heidegger, to analyse the "illuminated" nature of the human person.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas Sheehan's contribution regarding this "transcendental turn" is significant. He argues that far from being an exploration of the subject alone, Rahner's transcendental proposal implies, as a given, that the subject must be in relation to some Other. The human person becomes aware of his or her finiteness in relation to the Infinite as "subject *in-*

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<sup>40</sup> Johannes B. Metz, "Preface", in Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Ronald Walls (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), viii. See also Boyd Taylor Coolman, "Gestimmtheit: Attunement as a Description of the Nature-Grace Relationship in Rahner's Theology", *Theological Studies* 70, no. 4 (2009): 782.

<sup>41</sup> Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 51.

<sup>42</sup> Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 68.

<sup>44</sup> Kilby, *The SPCK Introduction to Karl Rahner* (London: SPCK, 2007), 55. Kenneth Eberhard defines an "existential" as a "constant structure of one's being". Kenneth D Eberhard, "Karl Rahner and the Supernatural Existential", *Thought* 46, no. 4 (2010): 540. This concept will be developed further later in this chapter.

*relation*” whereby the subject makes “the *a priori* correlation between the meaningful and the constitution of its meaning”.<sup>45</sup>

This transcendental “basic constitution” of the human person implies that “openness to the absolute being of God is the affirmation of his (her) own existence”.<sup>46</sup> For Rahner, the human person is “attuned” to Divine disclosure, which does not reveal an “object” but reveals ultimate Mystery, and which in turn reveals the human person as both “being”, and “subject” directed towards this ultimate Mystery. Elsewhere, Rahner was to write that this “unformed attunement (*Gestimmtheit*)” establishes “the unembraceable ground” of the human person’s “whole knowledge” and is “the permanent condition of the possibility of all other knowledge, its law and gauge, and its ultimate form”.<sup>47</sup> This “attunement” grounds all human “being” and “knowing”. Rahner’s categorisation of the ontological receptivity of the human person is concisely summarised by Boyd Taylor Coolman:

The human person’s ontological posture — as that of one who is called to listen in history, listen in her ordinary, everyday concourse with ordinary, everyday things for a word of revelation from God — is the natural orientation of human being toward God.<sup>48</sup>

This “listening” is not a purely subjective activity or orientation. In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner explains the formal manner of the human reception of “knowledge” of God in classical, scholastic terms. He outlines three modes of “knowing” God. The first is the light of natural reason which can lead to an understanding of God, at least in principle.<sup>49</sup> The second mode is in God’s self-revelation through what is meant by the full Christian sense of “the Word”. The third mode is salvation history within the collective story of the human

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Sheehan, “Rahner’s Transcendental Project”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32. “This correlation is called ‘transcendental’ insofar as the knowing subject necessarily ‘transcends itself,’ i.e., has already escaped from an imaginary Cartesian interiority and is always in a state of relatedness to possible objectivity as the *a priori* basis for knowledge.”

<sup>46</sup> Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Rahner, *Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger, Theological Investigations: Vol. V - Later Writings (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 209.

<sup>48</sup> Coolman, “Gestimmtheit”, 794.

<sup>49</sup> See also: Vatican I, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith* (24<sup>th</sup> April, 1870), 2:1

race or the individual. He notes that there is an encounter with the Transcendent from and in the “individual and collective personal experience of existence”.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the human person “stands already constantly and fundamentally before a God of revelation – a God, moreover, who acts in history”.<sup>51</sup> This receptive encounter is never in a pure form, but must be received into a human world of language, signs and symbols; the self-revelation of God, “whatever its origin, must in the end be translated into human speech”.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4.4 MADE FOR GRACE: RAHNER’S SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL

Rahner’s later theology shifted his agenda from an emphasis on the content and explanation of faith at an intellectual level, to a transcendental-experiential model of searching for God “more slowly, more tentatively, and starting from human mystery as the gateway to the divine mystery”.<sup>53</sup> In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner further develops his Christian anthropology. The human person is directed towards God as in a fundamental ontological orientation:

We are oriented towards God. This original experience is always present [...] This unthematic and ever-present experience, this knowledge of God which we always have even when we are thinking of and concerned with anything but God, is the permanent ground from out of which that thematic knowledge of God emerges which we have in explicitly religious activity and in philosophical reflection.<sup>54</sup>

Rahner goes further to state that we “know our subjective freedom, our transcendence and the infinite openness of the spirit even where and when we do not make them thematic at

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<sup>50</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 55.

<sup>51</sup> Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 89.

<sup>52</sup> Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 33.

<sup>54</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 53.



all”, including when we do so partially, or even when “we refuse to engage” in a process of acknowledgement and reflection.<sup>55</sup>

Coolman notes a transition apparent here that is characteristic of Rahner’s more mature writings. The ontological posture of the human person is of fundamental significance. It is related to a particular theology of grace. For Rahner, grace which “brings about this determination of human being is uncreated grace” and is “nothing less than the self-communication of God”.<sup>56</sup> The transcendental disposition of “attunement” to ultimate Mystery is the result of the uncreated grace which continually invites the human person to the fullness of life through a real but hidden word. God’s self-communication, therefore, “is really God in his own being, and in this way it is a communication for the sake of knowing and possessing God in immediate vision and love”.<sup>57</sup> Divine self-communication occurring here and now is not a pale substitution for the full and final vision of God which awaits us but is an authentic human experience of God’s self-giving grace in the present. Encounters of grace (authentic human experience), and the process of divinisation to which these leads (full and final vision of God), are “two phases of one and the same event” – God’s single self-communication.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Rahner’s position leaves open foundational questions of nature and grace.

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<sup>55</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*. We “know our subjective freedom, our transcendence and the infinite openness of the spirit even where and when we do not make them thematic at all. We also know them when such a conceptual, objectifying thematization and verbal expression of this original knowledge perhaps does not succeed at all, or succeeds very imperfectly and distortedly. Indeed we even know them when we refuse to engage at all in such a process of thematization.”

<sup>56</sup> Coolman, “Gestimmtheit”, 794.

<sup>57</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 117-8. Rahner’s point here, which is a development on his earlier thought, is that human experience of transcendent encounter is God’s self-communication and can be trusted as authentic experience of God (immediate). This encounter is always mediated through the human realm of interpretation. Given this process of “mediated immediacy”, there is clear continuity between the God encountered in human experience (Rahner’s transcendental dimension), the conceptual mediations of such experience (Rahner’s categorical dimension), both of which are authentic – yet incomplete – encounters with God as God (Absolute Mystery). This is explored more fully later in this chapter.

<sup>58</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 118.

Rahner emphasises that this orientation is an anticipative dimension of grace.<sup>59</sup>

Rahner argues that this primal openness to Mystery is an *a priori*, non-reflexive human experience. This is of particular importance for any mystagogical approach to evangelisation. He does not speak of an “awareness” of God, but uses the German term, *Vorgriff*, which is not readily translatable into English. Karen Kilby proposes that the two preferred translations are “pre-apprehension” and “anticipation”.<sup>60</sup> For Rahner, *Vorgriff* is the “spontaneous pre-apprehension of *esse* (Being) absolutely”.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the human person has the capacity to reach beyond the conceptual limitations of finite being and objects, and so anticipate “Being-absolute” or “Absolute Mystery”. In Rahner’s later work, Kilby notes that:

The *Vorgriff* [...] becomes in a sense the place where human beings and God meet, and therefore central to Rahner’s theological anthropology. It plays a critical role in Rahner’s understanding of grace and of revelation, in his attempt to work out the significance of the incarnation and the intelligibility of the hypostatic union, and in his recommendations as to how the Church should understand non-believers (i.e. in his theory of the anonymous Christian).<sup>62</sup>

For Rahner, this Godward orientation of the human person is not a dimension of human nature *per se*, as grace requires a free offer of salvation to be received within the experience of human existence. If it were part of “human nature”, it would not be gratuitous

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<sup>59</sup> In one of the earliest examinations of the supernatural existential, Gerald McCool wrote: “In the construction of [Rahner’s] theological explanation of man’s elevation to the supernatural order, Rahner has drawn on the resources of Maréchal and Heideggerian philosophy. As a true Maréchal, convinced of the reality of intentional being, he is certain that God’s decree elevating man to a supernatural order would be a chimera and not a real decree, if it did not have as its effect the production of a corresponding ontological reality in the human spirit. No purely extrinsic theory of man’s elevation, which would leave man’s nature metaphysically unaltered by God’s positive decree ordering him to a supernatural end, will explain the supernatural satisfactorily. Because of God’s decree calling man to a supernatural end, therefore, even before the reception of the first elevating grace, a supernatural reality has been produced in the human soul. Due to that new reality, man’s whole spiritual dynamism is now ordered with all its energy to the beatific vision. What name is to be given to this supernatural entity? It is not elevating grace, since it is possessed by every soul, even those of the damned in hell, for it is the metaphysical ground of their searing pain of loss. As an essential structure determining the meaning-giving end of man’s most authentic personal activity, it deserves the name Heidegger reserves for the fundamental structures of human consciousness: an existential. Due to God’s positive decree, every human soul, before the reception of sanctifying grace, is elevated to the supernatural order by the reception of a supernatural existential, an entity for which it has no exigency, but for which, as spirit, it is an obediential potency.” Gerald A. McCool, “The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner’s Theology”, *Theological Studies* 22, no. 4 (1961): 547.

<sup>60</sup> Kilby, *Introduction to Karl Rahner*, 3. Another translation is “ontological alert” by Eberhard, “Karl Rahner and the Supernatural Existential”, 538.

<sup>61</sup> Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Kilby, “Philosophy, Theology and Foundationalism”, 129.

but a given aspect of the human condition. Yet, in Rahner's view, this orientation is present in every person by virtue of God's universal salvific will. Because the human person is attuned to transcendence through an *a priori* gift of God, it leaves open the possibility of receiving the gift of God's self-communication in history, both communally and personally. God intends from the first that "Christ and grace" are the "ultimate meaning" of the person.<sup>63</sup> Pure human nature is "a 'remainder concept', what-would-have-been had not God intended, in a prior way", the grace of God's self-communication as "a conscious element of human experience".<sup>64</sup> Grace "is God himself, the communication in which he gives himself to humans as the divinizing factor which he is himself".<sup>65</sup> For Rahner, God's self-communicating activity is universal and continuous.<sup>66</sup>

This "supernatural existential" is, therefore, a capacity "opened and borne by grace".<sup>67</sup> The "supernatural existential" does not imply "a new, added ability", but "an inner illumination" of the self-transcending "spiritual subjectivity or transcendence itself", and thus "the ability to hear the word of revelation can be considered in the light of the basic constitution of the human spirit".<sup>68</sup> As David Coffey explains, "grace in this sense produces the existential as its first and inalienable effect, and later, on the basis of the human being's free assent of faith, justification as its second effect".<sup>69</sup> This existential infuses our consciousness, "even if only in an implicit and unthematized way".<sup>70</sup> Even so, it is not brought into being by an awareness of one's finite existence but exists prior to the exercise of

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<sup>63</sup> Anne Carr, "Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner", *The Journal of Religion* 53, no. 3 (1973): 363.

<sup>64</sup> Carr, "Theology and Experience".

<sup>65</sup> Rahner, "Nature and Grace", in *Theological Investigations: Vol. IV - More Recent Writings* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 177.

<sup>66</sup> Rahner, "Nature and Grace", 180.

<sup>67</sup> David Coffey, "The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential", *Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2004) 104. This is Coffey's amended translation of "Nature and Grace", 178.

<sup>68</sup> Kilby, *Introduction to Karl Rahner*, 10, fn. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Coffey, "The Whole Rahner", 105.

<sup>70</sup> Carr, "Theology and Experience", 363.

human freedom. It exists “always”, from the first moment of human existence.<sup>71</sup> As Coffey puts it, this “follows from the fact that God never had any other intention for human beings than their destination to divine friendship”:

It is not as though pure nature existed first in its own right and was then determined. Rather, creation and determination take place together, though creation belongs to the level of nature, and determination in some way to the level of grace. Nor is the existential simply added to nature; it transforms nature in its coming into being. And the transformation will remain forever, unaltered by anything the person may or may not do subsequently.<sup>72</sup>

Described as a “tendency towards God” which so “completely permeates” human “being and existence”, this supernatural existential allows the human subject to anticipate or listen for a word which one, already and unknowingly, “positively expects”.<sup>73</sup> Christ is the clearest expression of this word and “constitutes the goal of creation”. Prior to any expressed acceptance of faith on the part of the individual believer, Christ is the anonymous presence who does not come “to us from without as entirely strange”, but as the “explication of what we already are by grace and what we experience as least incoherently in the limitlessness of our transcendence”.<sup>74</sup>

Concretely, Rahner’s supernatural existential is experienced as a question, a choice which needs to be made, denied or ignored, and a claim that is made upon each and every human person. The human person “is essentially a questioner”, endowed with an “objective curiosity” through the grace of the Holy Spirit, rooted at the centre of one’s personal being:

He is given the capacity to ask for infinity and to lay himself open to the infinity of God. If we do not hold back our questions, needs and desires from this natural right and this horizon of meaning, then we experience ourselves in the concrete

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<sup>71</sup> Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. I - God, Christ, Mary, and Grace* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 312.

<sup>72</sup> Coffey, “The Whole Rahner”, 101.

<sup>73</sup> Rahner, “Anonymous Christians”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. VI - Concerning Vatican Council II* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 391-2.

<sup>74</sup> Rahner, “Anonymous Christians”, 394.

situation of salvation as a question which can only find an answer in the self-communication of God in the Holy Spirit and in Christian revelation.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, Christianity is not a series of propositions and “is far from being a clarification of the world and existence; rather it contains the prohibition against treating any experience or insight, however illuminating it may be, as conclusive and intelligible in itself”.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, “Christians have [fewer] answers (at their disposal) than other mortals”:

A Christian cannot enter God as an obvious item in the balance sheet of his life; he can only accept him as an incomprehensible mystery in silence and adoration, as the beginning and end of his hope and therefore as his unique, ultimate and all-embracing salvation.<sup>77</sup>

This capacity to be conscious of the Infinite within the finite prepares for conversion (sanctifying grace) in its full theological sense. In Rahner’s Christian anthropology, the offer of God’s grace is not given to an exclusive few, and as such, “the event of God’s self-communication” is offered to all people and expresses “an existential of every person”.<sup>78</sup> Rahner states that “really and radically *every* person must be understood as the event of a supernatural self-communication of God”, although the freedom to accept or reject this self-communication remains operative.<sup>79</sup>

Rahner did not see this position as particularly “Rahnerian” and disparaged such suggestions. His starting point was fundamentally Catholic with the incarnational perspective that “the human person is understood from the start as radically related to God in nature and grace and cannot be thought without this relationship”.<sup>80</sup> This “anthropocentric” and “theocentric” theology is not contradictory; rather such poles represent “a unity” in “which

<sup>75</sup> Rahner, “The Foundation of Belief Today”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. XVI - Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), 9.

<sup>76</sup> Rahner, “Foundation of Belief Today”, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Rahner, “Foundation of Belief Today”, 14-5.

<sup>78</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 127. “The love of God does not become less a miracle by the fact that it is promised to all [people] at least as an offer.”

<sup>79</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 127-8.

<sup>80</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 326.

neither God nor the human person can be left out”.<sup>81</sup> Rahner’s Christian anthropology is shaped by a theology of Incarnation as a continuous event:

If it is, moreover, true, that God became flesh and remains so for eternity, then there can be no theology in which anthropology need not be done, since in the Incarnation God himself did anthropology for himself and does anthropology for all eternity. This is the sort of thing that I don’t see why such a starting point, which is quite obvious for Catholic theology, is now supposed to be a special peculiarity of my theology.<sup>82</sup>

At its most basic level, Rahner’s Christian anthropology is a methodological attempt to express in concrete, human terms God’s desire for the salvation of all. It was a proposition which was to lead to one of Rahner’s more famous and controversial contentions – the “anonymous Christian”. Even in its most inaccurate and vague interpretations, “anonymous Christian” became synonymous with “Rahnerian” theology.

#### 4.5 THE HUMAN ORIENTATION TOWARDS TRANSCENDENCE AND THE ANONYMOUS CHRISTIAN

The concept of the “anonymous Christian” and the “anonymous Christian world” finds an earlier expression in *Hearers of the Word*. There, Rahner argued that the universal human capacity for transcendence must be intelligibly expressed in some living form: “Man is the same the world over, and that where man’s expectation of a true revelation from God is not satisfied or not thought to be satisfied, very easily comparable substitute images begin to arise.”<sup>83</sup> Some of the strongest criticisms of Rahner’s work concentrate on this theme of the “anonymous Christian” as the prime example of what is lacking in his broader methodology.

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<sup>81</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*.

<sup>82</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*.

<sup>83</sup> Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 178. Rahner’s footnote (fn. 10) expands this point: “After all, in order to judge the religious-historical parallels, one must keep in mind that humanity – because of God’s universal will for salvation – factually stands under the affirmation of supernatural grace as a whole, and is therefore (at least initially) incorporated into the horizon of one history of revelation, since grace (as the supernatural self-revelation of God) and revelation are not related by chance and by mere exterior disposition, but are related in

Rahner's starting point is a conviction that God is inescapably present at the heart of human existence.<sup>84</sup> Simply stated, human beings have an inbuilt capacity for God. This is what Rahner calls the "transcendental consciousness".<sup>85</sup> The second level is the "categorical" dimension which expresses human responses in a conceptual way to this prior, deeper orientation. The first level is the basis for the human experience of God. The second finds its source in the first, but the "categorical is greatly influenced by surrounding culture and [...] involves a person's thought-out or voiced interpretations of life".<sup>86</sup> It is the "necessary historical mediation of our transcendental and supernatural experience".<sup>87</sup> There is a range of "categorical" responses to this graced instinct for transcendence, not limited to "specifically and thematically religious material".<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the manifestation of the transcendental dimension through the categorical dimension reaches its peak in Judeo-Christian revelation.<sup>89</sup>

Even so, one might look toward other world religions and recognise "the God of the Old and New Testament revelation at work there, however primitive they might be".<sup>90</sup> This recognition, adds Rahner, in no way prejudices "Christianity's absolute claims".<sup>91</sup> Rahner's central question is, if God's salvific will is offered to all, and if faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, how might that salvific will of God include those of other faiths or no expressed

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essence. But from this it is clear that, even in the non-Christian sphere, the liminal experience – which is truly preserved actually only in the light of grace – of the "expectation" of an historically arriving divine revelation can articulate itself as a knowledge disposed by God, so that this liminal experience can objectivize itself as a genuine and totally encompassable religion, and, thus involved, can represent that historical event of revelation which has found its own unique, unsurpassable, and lasting presence in the *signum elevatum* of the Church."

<sup>84</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 32.

<sup>85</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 149. "This transcendental moment in revelation is a modification of our transcendental consciousness produced permanently by God in grace. But such a modification is really an original and permanent element in our consciousness as the basic and original luminosity of our existence. And as an element in our transcendental which is contributed by God's self-communication, it is already revelation in the proper sense."

<sup>86</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 151.

<sup>88</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 151-2. "In this sense the world is our mediation to God in his self-communication in grace, and in this sense there is for Christianity no separate and sacral realm where alone God is to be found."

<sup>89</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 155. "[W]here such an explicitly religious and categorical history of revelation as the history of transcendental revelation through God's self-communication knows itself to be willed positively and directed by God, and is assured by this history, there we have the history of revelation in the sense which is usually associated with this word."

<sup>90</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 156-7.

<sup>91</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 157.

faith? His conclusions are the result of a pastorally-focussed theology of the individual's response (or not) to the promptings of God. His secondary, but nonetheless important, aim was to account for atheism as a phenomenon: If God is always present, how then can unbelief be a response to that abiding presence?<sup>92</sup>

Though there are different ways in which Rahner's proposal of the "anonymous Christian" might be expressed, it admits of various "degrees" in relation to Church membership because we can only reconcile "the necessity of Christian faith" with "the universal salvific will" of God "by saying that somehow" all people "must be capable of being members of the Church".<sup>93</sup> This capability must acknowledge "real and historically concrete" possibilities.<sup>94</sup> From this, Rahner concludes that, "there must be degrees of membership of the Church" rippling out from "the explicitness of baptism into a non-official and anonymous Christianity which can and should be called [from a Christian perspective] Christianity in a meaningful sense".<sup>95</sup>

This "rippling" of Church membership is, for Rahner, analogous to God's universal will for salvation. This nameless and concrete striving of the human person will by its very nature seek "explicit expression" and, therefore, depends on the on-going work of proclamation of the explicit Word.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, what is involved is a radical self-acceptance on the part of the human person. In this process of acceptance, which itself is a work of grace, the human person "is accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and guarantee of his own anonymous movement towards God by grace".<sup>97</sup> This acceptance of "the grace of

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<sup>92</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> Rahner, "Anonymous Christians", 391.

<sup>94</sup> Rahner, "Anonymous Christians".

<sup>95</sup> Rahner, "Anonymous Christians".

<sup>96</sup> Rahner, "Anonymous Christians", 395 and 397.

<sup>97</sup> Rahner, "Anonymous Christians", 394.



Christ” is “in its turn the grace of his Church which is only the continuation of the mystery of Christ, his permanent visible presence in our history”.<sup>98</sup>

The Church’s relationship with other religious traditions and non-believers, and related issues of methods and manner of missionary activity are principal concerns for contemporary Christianity. On this point, Rahner argues that his “theory in no way cripples the missionary impulse of the Church” but is an attempt to put before the missionary Church “the person to whom it addresses itself in his true hopeful condition so that it can approach him with confidence”.<sup>99</sup> The “hopeful condition” of the human person, especially one who is fully immersed in secular culture, is a contentious starting point. Is the modern, secular person to be found in a hopeful disposition towards the possible encounter with transcendence? And if so, does this necessarily lead to a relationship with the Church? A further question arises: Does the call for a new evangelisation, whatever its form, imply in some way that the Church has lost confidence in approaching the human person of today?

Rahner’s view of the transcendence of the everyday can be a helpful starting point for regaining some evangelising confidence in a secular world. He holds that transcendence is an experience of the ordinary and the secular and is not confined to explicitly religious, spiritual or cultic activity. The experience of transcendence is the “experience which is given to every person prior to [...] reflexive *religious* activity and decisions, and indeed perhaps in a form and in a conceptuality which seemingly are not religious at all”.<sup>100</sup> This is a central point in understanding the form of mystagogical theology which Rahner proposed:

If God’s self-communication is an ultimate and radicalizing modification of that very transcendentality of ours by which we are subjects, and if we are subjects of unlimited transcendentality in the most ordinary affairs of our everyday existence, in our secular dealings with any and every individual reality, then this means in principle that the original experience of God even in his self-

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<sup>98</sup> Rahner, “Anonymous Christians”.

<sup>99</sup> Rahner, “Anonymous Christians”, 398.

<sup>100</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 132.

communication can be so universal, so unthematic and so “unreligious” that it takes place, unnamed but really, wherever we are living out our existence.<sup>101</sup>

Individual, social, cultural, historical and future dimensions of existence are affected by grace. It is a world that is “en-graced” and therefore a world in which it is possible to encounter Divine Mystery. In *Everyday Faith* we read, “we live in a world which always and everywhere is directed by the secret grace of God [and] this occurs always and everywhere, whenever a person does not expressly shut himself off by real culpable unbelief”.<sup>102</sup> There is in the world an “inner-most supernatural, grace-given dynamism” which lies at the core reality of creation and which human beings encounter in the midst of their creatureliness. In short, for Rahner, not only are there “anonymous Christians” but also there is an “anonymous Christian world” which contains “an inner mysterious depth”.<sup>103</sup> The world is, “by the grace of God”, open “to God and his infinitely incomprehensible love” even “when it is not aware of it”.<sup>104</sup> Whenever and wherever the “whole breadth and depth of human existence” and “the totality of human life” are lived and experienced, “the grace of Christ is already at work”.<sup>105</sup>

The great legacy of Rahner is a methodology based upon the constant presence and abundant generosity of God’s grace. Evangelisation takes on a particular style when it begins from this starting point. Daniel Donovan summarises the “abiding concern” of Rahner’s theology as the desire “to help people living in the modern world to recognize that faith in both the mystery of God and the message of the gospel remains for them a genuine possibility”.<sup>106</sup> In Rahner’s words, our daily cycle of activity “is full of holy significance, a preparation for greatness”; what “is holy happens” in the midst of routine activity.<sup>107</sup> In the

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<sup>101</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*.

<sup>102</sup> Rahner, *Everyday Faith*, trans. W. J. O’Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 110.

<sup>103</sup> Rahner, *Christian in the Market Place*, trans. Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1966), 97.

<sup>104</sup> Rahner, *Christian in the Market Place*.

<sup>105</sup> Rahner, *Christian in the Market Place*.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel Donovan, “Revelation and Faith”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85.

<sup>107</sup> Rahner, “Love Sees the World as a Parable”, in *Biblical Homilies* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 39.

substance of life itself, the “person of faith” is “able to recognize the parable of each individual life”.<sup>108</sup>

The “parable of each individual life”, representing a greater mystery, is a key to understanding Rahner’s calls for a new mystagogical style in theology. He understood this as an imperative in the modern context of today’s hearers of the Word; a style that would need to be more experiential, concrete and expressive.

#### 4.6 RECEPTIVE SENSIBILITY: MYSTAGOGY FOR TODAY

Rahner stated that his primary objective in writing *Foundations of Christian Faith* was to “tell the reader something very simple” which was to express the view that “human persons in every age, always and everywhere, whether they realise it and reflect upon it or not, are in relationship with the unutterable mystery of human life that we call God”.<sup>109</sup>

Rahner is not alone in this endeavour, and as will be demonstrated, this has been an active theological pursuit in the Australian scene. It was, however, becoming increasingly clear to Rahner that the cultural scaffolding of Christianity, especially in the West, was no longer able to sustain the kerygmatic content and the essential social dimensions necessary of a living faith. Proclamation of the Christian story would require something new in the future, different from the resources the Church had relied upon in the past. The receptive sensibility of people of today would not generally be engaged by categories and language which belong to different historical and cultural patterns of thought.

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<sup>108</sup> Rahner, “Love Sees the World as a Parable”.

<sup>109</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 147. This comment was made in response to the question, “Could you briefly formulate the purpose and theme of your book, *Foundations of Christian Faith*?” November 21, 1976.

A future theology would need to be both “missionary and mystagogic”.<sup>110</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza explains that theology can no longer “appeal to neutral universal or foundational truth to ground Christianity”.<sup>111</sup> In Gallagher’s view, Rahner considered that “what is at stake today is not the content of the creed but the very ability to believe”.<sup>112</sup> Rahner himself stated that by mystagogical, he meant “bringing the *fides quae* (the content of faith) into the closest possible unity with the *fides qua* (the conscious act of faith itself)”.<sup>113</sup> This unity would highlight the transformative meaning of faith for the individual and for society and human culture.<sup>114</sup> What is necessary is to bore down “into the depths of human existence and make a real effort to grasp the meaning of the objective dogmas of the Church”:

Then it will become apparent how the human, existential question and the concrete answer of revelation come together and how the essential kernel and experience of revelation are brought to light [...] Of course the official teaching of the Church exercises normative power in directing the process of grounding Christian faith, but today this must necessarily consist in personal initiation and in arousing an inner experience of faith.<sup>115</sup>

Paul Crowley sums up this goal as the task of unifying “the *fides quae* with the *fides qua* in a deeper understanding of believing (the mystagogic task), thereby enabling Christian theology to function within and address a people of the Church and of the world who are steeped in a secular milieu (the missionary task)”.<sup>116</sup> In Rahner’s terms, the proclamation of

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<sup>110</sup> Rahner, “Possible Courses for the Theology of the Future”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. XIII - Theology, Anthropology, Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 40.

<sup>111</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Method in Theology”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 80.

<sup>112</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 31.

<sup>113</sup> William V. Dych, “Karl Rahner: An Interview”, *America* 123, no. 13 (October 31, 1970): 357-8.

<sup>114</sup> Rahner, “Theology of the Future”, 40-1.

<sup>115</sup> Rahner, “Foundation of Belief Today”, 9-10.

<sup>116</sup> Paul Crowley, “Mystagogy and Mission: The Challenge of Nonbelief and the Task of Theology”, *Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2015): 12. See also James J. Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy According to Karl Rahner* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 12-19.

Christian faith “must always be seeking for new ways to awaken to life this interior disposition and capacity” of transcendent awareness.<sup>117</sup>

A number of times Rahner stressed that the Church of the future will be “made up of those who believe as a matter of personal conviction and individual choice”.<sup>118</sup> In a well-known statement, he emphasised how interior grace flowers into a spirituality of faith in a manner that transcends intellectual acceptance and assent:

The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all. If by mysticism we mean [...] a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence, this statement is very true and its truth and importance will become still clearer in the spirituality of the future [...] The ultimate conviction and decision of faith comes...from the experience of God, of his Spirit, of his freedom, bursting out of the very heart of human existence and able to be really experienced there.<sup>119</sup>

Rahner envisages a future in which the individual choice for faith would have less support from external cultural and religious frameworks. In this cultural situation, “the lonely responsibility of the individual” will require faith to be a “much more radical” choice “than it was in former times”.<sup>120</sup> Rahner foresees a time when commitment to faith in the modern world will be courageous as it will involve a personal choice not reliant upon validation by public opinion and which “can exist only if it lives out of a wholly personal experience of God and his Spirit”.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Rahner, “Foundation of Belief Today”, 10. “Christianity cannot be put over in indoctrination in the way school children are taught that Australia exists, that is, by being told: you yourselves have not been there but others have travelled there and geographers have proved its existence. So you must accept that there is such a country. If one wants to communicate Christian faith in this way from outside by appealing to the formal authority of the Church or to some generally accepted social institution, then one would not be preaching the message of God in the manner demanded by the present age,” 10-1.

<sup>118</sup> Rahner, “Theology of the Future”, 149.

<sup>119</sup> Rahner, “The Spirituality of the Church of the Future”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. XX - Concern For The Church*, ed. Paul Imhof (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 149.

<sup>120</sup> Rahner, “The Spirituality of the Church of the Future”.

<sup>121</sup> Rahner, “The Spirituality of the Church of the Future”.

Elsewhere, Rahner wrote that future Christians will either be believers who have “‘experienced’ something”, or they “will cease to be anything at all”.<sup>122</sup> Allied to this personally appropriated faith is the recollection of “original experience” of transcendence from which we develop the “concepts and words which we use to talk of the Eternal”. These “concepts and words” are “merely tiny signs and idols we erect and have to erect so that they constantly remind us of the original, unthematic, silently offered and proffered, and graciously silent experience of [...] the mystery”.<sup>123</sup> The task of a mystagogical evangelisation, then, is to connect “the original experience” with the “concepts and words” and to name that original experience and so to move from the anonymous to the explicit expression; or to use Rahner’s terms, to move from the unthematic to the conceptual, or from the transcendent to the categorical. Rahner was convinced that the precise task for Christianity today was to “point ever anew to this basic experience of God” (Incarnational kerygma), to persuade men and women to discover this “basic experience” within themselves (mystagogical evangelisation and proclamation), “to accept it” and to concretely declare an allegiance “in its verbal and historical objectification” (invitation to conversion).<sup>124</sup>

Rahner’s mystagogical approach presupposes human experience as the primary place of encounter with God.<sup>125</sup> He points to “concrete life” rather than to abstract and formal themes in preaching about God in relation to human experience.<sup>126</sup> Gallagher astutely observes that, while “anonymous Christian” became part of the theological vocabulary, Rahner’s “mystagogical” approach received far less attention.<sup>127</sup> This is not to say that both are not intimately connected, but it does suggest that a greater willingness to embrace

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<sup>122</sup> Rahner, “Christian Living Formerly and Today”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. VII - Further Theology of the Spiritual Life I* (New York: Seabury, 1971), 15.

<sup>123</sup> Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church*, trans. John G. Cumming (London: Burns & Oates, 1979), 13.

<sup>124</sup> Rahner, “The Experience of God Today”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. XI Confrontations I* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 165.

<sup>125</sup> Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church*, 38.

<sup>126</sup> Rahner, “Theological Considerations on Secularization and Atheism”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. XI - Confrontations I* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 167.

<sup>127</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 38.

descriptors of God's universal saving will, rather than the more difficult task of a renewal of theological method, prevailed in the reception of Rahner's work.

His mystagogical approach contrasted with "ways of talking about God that are 'unworthy of belief'" because they were remote from lived experience and locked into a narrowly religious attitude.<sup>128</sup> What is needed is not indoctrination at a conceptual level but an "inauguration" or "initiation" into an experience of God at the most basic level of human existence.<sup>129</sup> Walter Kasper endorses this theological orientation in his concern that "theology is not supposed merely to communicate theoretical, speculative insights" but "aims at the actual, specific practice of faith, hope, and love".<sup>130</sup> It is the longing of many believers, Kasper contends, "for this spiritual and mystical dimension, which is so inexcusably neglected in the conduct of our average academic theology".<sup>131</sup>

On this point, Taylor offers an important contribution. Taylor is critical of Christianity's process of "'excarnation,' the steady disembodiment of spiritual life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, so as to be concentrated more and more 'in the head'".<sup>132</sup> Taylor suggests that "breakthroughs" and "reforms" throughout Church history have led to a narrowing rather than a broadening of religious expression, and "a more homogenous world of conformity".<sup>133</sup> Older forms of religious expression are never truly suppressed and there is no unproblematic break with the past. No matter how abundant and sophisticated our theological notions, Taylor argues, human beings will always yearn for more personal, bodily and accessible expressions of faith. The task for the Church is to re-discover ways that incarnate faith into the very fabric of human existence.

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<sup>128</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 39.

<sup>129</sup> Rahner, "Theological Considerations on Secularization and Atheism", 183.

<sup>130</sup> Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 12.

<sup>131</sup> Kasper, *Theology and Church*.

<sup>132</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 771. Here Taylor is referring more specifically to developments of Judaism and Christianity that "crushed or sidelined important facets of spiritual life, which had flourished in earlier 'paganisms', for all their faults". It could be equally argued that both forms of monotheism have been adept at assimilating various customs and traditions of "paganism" throughout the centuries. Yet, his critique of the "excarnation" of religious expression remains a pertinent and valuable insight.

<sup>133</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 772.

Taylor's critique echoes Rahner's mystagogical approach with its desire to move beyond dogmatic formulas and into the realm of "concrete" human experience. However, Rahner admitted to not having developed a "comprehensive mystagogy" but merely recognised the need for it, along with a preliminary understanding of what was entailed.<sup>134</sup>

While Rahner did not systematise this theme, James Bacik outlines the various elements of "mystagogy" identifiable in Rahner's work:

- a) recognition of the dimensions and depth of the problem;
- b) powerful insights into human nature and the human situation;
- c) the importance and consistently applied distinctions between the transcendental and categorical dimension of experience;
- d) numerous methodological suggestions which can be applied to the problem;
- e) helpful explanations of the category "self-experience";
- f) realistic, and at times poetic, descriptions of human experience; and, especially, a consistent and comprehensive theological system.<sup>135</sup>

A mysticism of the everyday is a prominent feature in this mystagogical approach, influenced no doubt by Ignatian spirituality and the aspiration to find God in all things.<sup>136</sup> However, for Rahner such concerns were not a matter of personal spirituality but fundamental determinants of theological method and discourse. He writes:

For me in my theology the givenness of a genuine, original experience of God and his Spirit is of fundamental importance. This precedes logically (and not necessarily temporally) theological reflection and verbalization and is never adequately overtaken by this reflection. What Christian faith teaches is never communicated merely by a conceptual indoctrination from without, but is and can basically be experienced through the supernatural grace of God as a reality in us. That does not mean that the linguistic representation and interpretation of the religious experience is not something that has to occur within the Church under the supervision of her magisterium. But I believe, it is true, that an awakening, a mystagogy into this original, grace-filled religious experience is today of fundamental importance [....] It is no longer necessary to think that such a mystagogy takes place only in absolute isolation and interiority.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> "Brief von P. Karl Rahner", in Klaus Fischer, *Der Mensch*, 1974, 407-8. Quoted in Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, 61.

<sup>135</sup> Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, 61. Bacik also suggests that other terms could be substituted for "mystagogy" such as "consciousness-raising" or "increasing religious self-awareness", 62. The formatting of the quotation is my own.

<sup>136</sup> Rahner, *Encounters with Silence*, trans. James M. Damske (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 50. "If it is true that I can lose You in everything, it must also be true that I can find You in everything [....] If every day is "everyday," then every day is *Your* day, and every hour is the hour of *Your* Grace."

<sup>137</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 328.



He once asked, “What has become of the times when the great theologians also wrote hymns?”<sup>138</sup> The great theologian must also have a poet’s pen. While not hymns in the classic sense, some of Rahner’s theological meditations exemplify his own mystagogical capacities. *Encounters with Silence* situates the human questioner before the silence of Absolute Mystery. Here is an indication one Rahner’s overarching theological themes: the “dark light” of faith “lures us out of the bright security of our little huts into Your night”.<sup>139</sup> But what of those who fail to move out into this “dark light”? Of the ones to whom evangelisation is directed, Rahner ponders the place of Mystery in their lives: “Are You anything more for them than the One who sees to it that the world stays on its hinges, so that they won’t have to call on You? Tell me, are You the God of *their* life?”<sup>140</sup>

This is the question that Rahner grapples with in his “anonymous Christian” proposal, but he always maintained that the Church remained the place where life’s questions find “their explicit and [...] institutionalized answer”.<sup>141</sup> The aim of mystagogical evangelisation is to lead people more deeply into the life of God and, by invitation, more deeply into the life of the Church. As stated earlier, the “mystic” is one who experiences transcendence among the everyday rhythms of living. For Rahner, “mysticism” is not a parallel experience to expressed formulas of faith or a form of “true spirituality” which formal religious practice cannot provide. The Church remains the primary, formative Christian “mystical” experience. It is the vessel which carries the believer to the fulfilment that our most fundamental hope

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<sup>138</sup> Rahner, “Priest and Poet”, in *Theological Investigations: Vol. III - The Theology Of The Spiritual Life* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 316.

<sup>139</sup> Rahner, *Encounters with Silence*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Rahner, *Encounters with Silence*. Larger quotation: “Are You the First Beginning and Last End for them, the One without whom their minds and hearts can find no rest? Don’t they manage to get along perfectly well without You? Don’t they feel quite at home in this world which they know so well, where they can be sure of just what they reckon with? Are You anything more for them than the One who sees to it that the world stays on its hinges, so that they won’t have to call on You? Tell me, are You the God of *their* life?”

<sup>141</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 146.

desires: “For Christianity’s unique message endures precisely in its answer [...]: that there is a final hope.”<sup>142</sup>

Pope Francis wrote of the need for a mystagogical renewal of the kerygmatic dimension of evangelisation. What is implied here is distinct from Rahner’s approach, but which, nevertheless, strives to connect the evangelising task with human experience. In Francis’ words, a mystagogical catechesis assumes “very different forms” based on the requirements of individual communities, because it demands “a suitable environment and an attractive presentation, the use of eloquent symbols, insertion into a broader growth process and the integration of every dimension of the person within a communal journey of hearing and response”.<sup>143</sup> Underpinning Pope Francis’ call is Rahner’s contention that what is required of theology today is to seek a closer unity between the *fides quae* and the *fides qua*. This is the aim of a mystagogical approach.

#### 4.7 DISCOVERING AND DEVELOPING AN AUSTRALIAN MYSTAGOGY

Efforts at a mystagogical renewal of theology have been central to many projects since the Second Vatican Council. The Australian context, in particular, provides a rich source of volumes to explore. As this thesis moves towards a more concentrated analysis of the Australian context, a short introduction to the methodology of the dual projects edited by Peter Malone provides a bridge between Rahner’s proposal and a later presentation of a

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<sup>142</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 146-7. “I would like a final answer to the deepest mystery that I myself am. I would like to have something to do with God. I would like to have an ultimate hope for the validity and true reality of my existence. I wouldn’t like to be consumed by the banality of the everyday. I would like to see myself in solidarity with the people of the past, who aren’t simply the precondition of some kind of utopian future of success and consumerism. Where can we find an answer to these and hundreds of other similar questions outside of Christianity? For Christianity’s unique message endures precisely in its answer to each of the questions we raised: that there is a final hope.”

<sup>143</sup> EG, 166.

model for a mystagogical category of evangelisation. The content of these works will form the basis of later chapters.

Numerous articles, collected essays and explorative surveys have been published which have sought to shake Australia's spiritual tree and name the fruits of the religious experience of the Great Southern Land.<sup>144</sup> Two of these volumes edited by Peter Malone endeavoured to capture the spirit, context and content of Australian theologising and enable a closer unity between the *fides quae* and the *fides qua*. *Discovering an Australian Theology* was published in the year of the nation's bicentenary (1988), and *Developing an Australian Theology*, a sequel of sorts, was released as the new millennium approached.<sup>145</sup> The aim of the first volume was to tap into "a local theology" and identify emerging methods and considerations in theology.<sup>146</sup> The second volume drew upon the widening circles of theologising which had developed in the preceding decade.<sup>147</sup>

Written by many of the main drivers of theological thinking during those decades, these two collections provided a broad survey of the foundations, currents and, to some

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<sup>144</sup> There have been many such surveys. Some have been academic in nature aimed at a theologically literate readership, while others have addressed a more general readership. A small, and by no means comprehensive, sample of these titles includes: *Toward Theology in an Australian Context*, (Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1979); Dorothy Harris, Douglas Hynd, and David Millikan, *The Shape of Belief: Christianity in Australia Today* (Homebush: Lancer Books, 1982); Anthony Kelly, *A New Imagining: Towards an Australian Spirituality* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1990); John Thornhill, *Making Australia: Exploring our National Conversation* (Newtown: Millennium Books, 1992); Denis Edwards, *Called to be Church in Australia: An Approach to the Renewal of Local Churches* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1987); Muriel Porter, *Land of the Spirit? The Australian Religious Experience* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990); John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity - A Story of Hope*, 2nd ed. (Sutherland: Albatross, 1994); Eugene Stockton, *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation* (Alexandria: Millennium Books, 1995); David Tacey, *Reenchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (Pymble: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000); Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*, 2nd ed. (Hindmarsh: ATF Press, 2007); Veronica Brady, *The God-Shaped Hole: Responding to the Good News in Australia* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2008); *Catholic Schools: Hope in Uncertain Times*, (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 2008); Tom Frame, *Losing My Religion: Unbelief in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009); Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools; Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, (Mulgrave: Garratt Publishing, 2012).

<sup>145</sup> *Discovering an Australian Theology*, (Sydney: St. Paul Publications, 1988); *Developing an Australian Theology*, (Strathfield: St. Pauls Publication, 1999).

<sup>146</sup> Malone, *Discovering an Australian Theology*, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Malone, *Developing an Australian Theology*, 11.

degree, a sense of the multiplicity of voices in the Australian sphere.<sup>148</sup> Both volumes are early attempts to gather some foundations which might then become the building blocks for an unnamed but generally implied new impulse of evangelisation. The essays take human experience and the cultural landscape as the point of departure, and in this sense, have a clear mystagogical slant.<sup>149</sup> Malone noted that the contemporary is an opportunity for a creative “new evangelism” which required “new categories of thought, new images and symbols” and “contemporary language”.<sup>150</sup>

Malone utilised a methodology borrowed from Monika Hellwig, which was used extensively in various workshops and texts developed for an Australian audience. This simple process struck a chord with an Australian spiritual instinct. Because of this, Malone adopted this method in these published surveys of the native theological enterprise.

Hellwig’s proposal, a form of mystagogical method, was outlined in her essay, “Theology as a Fine Art”.<sup>151</sup> Hellwig’s method can be summarised as follows:

- *Contemplation*: Identifying stories, images, rituals and other symbols from which formulations and explanations arise.
- *Empathy*: Building bridges into the stories and symbols and responding to their inner meaning
- *Reason*: Moving to systematic and more abstract understanding of expression of meaning.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Malone observed that the first book “served its temporary purpose, offering suggestions and examples of the discovering. At the time one of the features that caused concern was the predominance of men involved in theology rather than women.” Peter Malone, “Introduction”, in *Developing an Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 1999), 10. The first volume included three female contributors, while the second contained articles by eight female authors.

<sup>149</sup> Malone stated that a starting point for communicating the Gospel today was “to listen to the questions that people ask, to try to appreciate the searching that they are involved in (often byways and dead ends), to empathise with problems so that answers can come from the head and the heart.” “Introduction”, 18.

<sup>150</sup> Malone, “Introduction”, 17.

<sup>151</sup> Malone, “Introduction”, 13. See Monika Hellwig, “Theology As a Fine Art”, in *Interpreting Tradition: The Art of Theological Reflection*, ed. Jane Kopas, *The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 1983* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984).

<sup>152</sup> Malone, “Discovering”, in *Discovering an Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Homebush: St. Paul's Publications, 1988), 22.

In Hellwig's own interpretation, the "fine art of theology" is "the simultaneous cultivation of contemplation, empathy, and reason".<sup>153</sup> The first step of contemplation involves engaging reality in dialogue, as "a deep existential grasp of the truth that all our theory is a critique of our praxis and that evasion of experience means distortion or alienation in our theory".<sup>154</sup> Empathy opens the possibility of reading "the images, stories, and rituals of the tradition" and of entering more deeply "into the human experiences and longings out of which they come".<sup>155</sup> Empathy serves as a counter-balance to "critical thinking, abstraction, and empirical verification".<sup>156</sup> In Hellwig's view, this is essential to the task of theology as narratives, art and rituals "hold clues to the deeper reasons for the systematic formulations and debates", and therefore provide the opportunities to overcome "the alienation of our theology from our life experience".<sup>157</sup> Empathy is the search for the "correlation between reality revealed in contemporary experience (on the one hand), and the gospel of salvation with its doctrinal elaborations through history on the other".<sup>158</sup>

Theological reasoning is the outcome of "contemplation" and "empathy". The form of reasoning which Hellwig emphasised was the "discerning and eliminating all unnecessary technical vocabulary" while searching for the means to express "the real human issues" which reveal the presence of the Divine.<sup>159</sup> A cautionary note needs to be added on this point, as there are reasons why theology has developed a "precise" vocabulary, not least of which is the awareness of the tentative ground upon which one stands when speaking of Divine Mystery. The Judeo-Christian tradition has consistently recognised both the richness and limits of story and language when naming the experience of the Transcendent. Given this, Hellwig's methodology is a somewhat more developed strategy than Rahner's bare

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<sup>153</sup> Hellwig, "Theology As a Fine Art".

<sup>154</sup> Hellwig, "Theology As a Fine Art".

<sup>155</sup> Hellwig, "Theology As a Fine Art", 7.

<sup>156</sup> Hellwig, "Theology As a Fine Art".

<sup>157</sup> Hellwig, "Theology As a Fine Art", 8.

<sup>158</sup> Hellwig, "Theology As a Fine Art".

<sup>159</sup> Hellwig, "Theology As a Fine Art", 9.

mystagogical instincts. Malone found Hellwig's method to be a productive tool in cataloguing an Australian theological agenda and its spiritual expressions. Malone's contextual usage of Hellwig's proposal provided a framework for an initial mystagogical conversation in Australian theological circles. It is a methodological attempt to shape theological language through the lens of human experience and culture. As a reflective process, it situates Rahner's mystagogical and pastoral theory within a particular theological project. It thereby provides scope for reflection and analysis of a critical theological method which aimed to be both mystagogical and missionary. These themes provide the foundations of the second half of this thesis.

#### 4.8 CONCLUSION

Rahner's speculative writings culminate in one simple proposal: God's universal salvific will necessarily presupposes the seed of grace transforming human nature in anticipation of the fullness of life. Any new evangelisation must find ways of speaking to this "attunement" of the human person. It must contain an aesthetic dimension which is able to touch the depths of human life through imagination, creativity, poetry and beauty. The great drama of the story of redemption is lived in the reality of each human person. What is necessary, then, to illuminate what might otherwise lie dormant, unseen and unfelt, in the corners of the human heart and mind? Rahner's mystagogical proposal, though not a systematic treatise, points toward the possibility of evangelisation in a secular culture.

The fourth century mystagogues explored this question with the neophytes: "What happened to me?" Rahner, a twentieth century mystagogue, began his theological task with the question: "What is this sense of the Infinite I feel when I only experience and know this

finite world?" It suggests the deep meaning of the first words of the Word in the Gospel of John: "What are you looking for?" (Jn 1:38).

Rahner saw his theological contribution as modest, and at his funeral in 1984 he was quoted by his eulogist as saying: "If I have been able to help anyone in my life, just a little, to find the courage to speak to God, to think of God, to believe in God, to hope and to love; then I think that it has been worth it to have lived."<sup>160</sup> That is the task and gift of a mystagogue.

Rahner understood the human person as primarily a "questioner" which presumes that there must be some absolute answer. For some, the answer might be pure nothingness. For others, the question reveals the Absolute. A mystagogical approach seeks to inspire a humble but persistent search for an answer based in the revelation of Mystery. I now turn to Rahner's critics, the better to clarify what a genuinely mystagogical approach might mean, in order to present a mystagogical method with greater clarity and precision.

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<sup>160</sup> Rahner quoted in his funeral homily preached by Alfons Klein. Alfons Klein, "A True Jesuit", in *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas R. Batlogg and Melvin E. Michalski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 216.

## **CHAPTER 5**

***MSYTAGOGIA BEYOND RAHNER:***

***Responses and Developments***



## **Mystagogy Beyond Rahner: Responses and Developments**

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Karl Rahner stands with a number of theologians of the twentieth century who represent an era of transition. This transition was marked by a variety of methodological approaches which yielded a rich harvest of theological reflection as prodigious as at any stage of the Church's tradition.<sup>1</sup> Sensitive to the immense social changes of the time, this theology was noted for its robust debate, doctrinal tensions, and diverse ecclesiological visions.

Central to this thesis is the conviction that evangelisation needs to attend to grace already at work in the lives of those to whom the preaching of the Gospel is addressed. Rahner's writings provide a framework to tease out certain characteristics of a mystagogical approach to proclaiming the living Gospel. Not all theologians saw value in the theological turn to the "subject-in-relationship". At the same time, the Second Vatican Council embraced this theological shift, best demonstrated by its designation as a "pastoral" council. Pope Benedict XVI recognised this anthropological concern as a core focus of the Council's deliberations:

In the great dispute about man which marks the modern epoch, the Council had to focus in particular on the theme of anthropology. It had to question the relationship between the Church and her faith on the one hand, and man and the contemporary world on the other. The question becomes even clearer if, instead of the generic term "contemporary world," we opt for another that is more precise: the Council had to determine in a new way the relationship between the Church and the modern era.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carlo Maria Martini, "Teaching the Faith in a Postmodern World", *America* 19, no. 16 (May 12, 2008): 17.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia* (22 December, 2005). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html) on 13th October, 2014.

For some, Rahner's desire to shape a theology for "the modern era" represented a fundamental unhinging of theological methodology. It was his method, perhaps more so than his conclusions, which drew fire.

Gallagher interprets these critiques of Rahner's method against a larger backdrop. In Lonerganian terms, many of those who challenged Rahner's method held a "classicist" model of culture and theology, which stressed elements that are "permanent and universal", while cautious of starting points which appeared overly empiricist or subjective.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the background debate was the relationship between faith/theology and culture, and concern for the direction of theology itself. At stake were such questions as: What are the legitimate tools of contemporary theological enquiry in the modern era? What is the proper relationship between universal truth and subjectivity? How does the Church turn to "the world" without mirroring "the world"? A mystagogical method of evangelisation reacts to these same questions and concerns.

Francis Schüssler Fiorenza identifies three criticisms of Rahner's theological method: a problematic "philosophical anthropological basis"; "a false universalism"; and finally, an "insufficient political basis".<sup>4</sup> This chapter will pay attention to such criticisms and analyse them through the framework of four categories:

- philosophical anthropology;
- pneumatology and religious experience;
- theological methodology;
- praxis and political engagement.

These four categories can be aligned to dimensions of *NE*, which were identified in the previous chapter as a new anthropological context from which emerges the call for new

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<sup>3</sup> Gallagher, *Faith Maps*, 36. For Lonergan's definition of "classicist" and "empiricist" models, see thesis chapter 1 (hereafter, ch.), footnote (hereafter, fn.) 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "Method in Theology", 66.

pneumatological “ardour” or impulse, a new theological “method” and new “expressions” of public witness and engagement. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to crystallise a theological basis for a mystagogical approach to *NE*.

## 5.2 CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY: RAHNER’S “RADICAL ANTHROPOCENTRISM”

Joseph Ratzinger, although holding many views in harmony with Rahner, declared that, as they worked together at the Council, he came to realise that they lived on “two different theological planets”.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to paint Ratzinger as a theological opponent of Rahner. In reality, Ratzinger engaged with Rahner’s work and acknowledged his inventiveness and courage, while questioning some of Rahner’s fundamental propositions. Ratzinger praised Rahner’s contribution to Catholic theology, particularly on the tension between universal claims of salvation history and subjective experience. Ratzinger named Rahner’s contribution as “the most effective and surely the most penetrating” of recent Catholic theological endeavours, while also noting that Rahner’s theological project “has something dazzling, something stupendous, about it”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 128. “In questions such as liturgical reform, the new place of exegesis in the Church and in theology, and in many other areas, he stood for the same things as I did, but for entirely different reasons. Despite his early reading of the Fathers, his theology was totally conditioned by the tradition of Suarezian scholasticism and its new reception in the light of German idealism and of Heidegger. His was a speculative and philosophical theology in which Scripture and the Fathers in the end did not play an important role and in which the historical dimension was really of little significance.”

<sup>6</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 162 and 166. Eamonn Conway, “Rahner’s ‘Tough Love’ for the Church: Structural Change as Task and Opportunity”, in *Karl Rahner: Theologian for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Pádraic Conway and Fáinche Ryan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 143-4: “In his *Introduction to Christianity*, first published in 1968, Ratzinger acknowledges that his whole chapter on “The Ecclesial Form of Faith” is ‘much indebted’ to an essay by Rahner. Subsequently, in 1978, Ratzinger defended Rahner’s transcendental method which, he said, ‘does not pretend to deduce Christianity purely from itself.’ It is, he recognized, ‘a presupposition of understanding that becomes possible because the faith has already opened up the field of thought’.”

Significant for this thesis is Ratzinger's challenge that Rahner's synthesis "attempted too much", or, as Bacik explains, Rahner's "radical anthropocentrism"<sup>7</sup>:

He has, so to speak, sought out a philosophical and theological world formula on the basis of which the whole of reality can be deduced cohesively from necessary causes [...] This revelation seems to him to reveal the horizon from which man – taught by God's own word – can begin to reflect on the divine mysteries and come to understand with God's own understanding, can gain an understanding of the cohesion of reality as a whole. This basic intention is unimpeachable. Theology is just such an attempt to find an understanding of reality itself. But revelation has given us no world formula. Such a concept is plainly counter to the mystery of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

At issue here for Ratzinger is what he interprets as Rahner's assimilation of German idealist philosophy which incorporates a perspective of human freedom as the capacity for self-realisation and self-fulfilment. Ratzinger notes that this is "a concept that, in reality, is appropriate to the absolute Spirit – to God", but not to the human person.<sup>9</sup> Ratzinger rejects any claim that Christianity merely represented the highest claims of a universal human experience: "Is it true that Christianity adds nothing to the universal but merely makes it known? Is the Christian really just man as he is?"<sup>10</sup> Christianity, without a sense of uniqueness and an in-breaking of the "new" risks, according to Ratzinger, becoming "innocuous" and "superfluous".<sup>11</sup> The Christian message speaks of "the new, the other, the saving trans-formation (*Ver-änderung*)".<sup>12</sup> Ratzinger points to a weak Christic spiritual formulation in Rahner's work, as will Balthasar, and suggests that Rahner could "refute all

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<sup>7</sup> Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, 49.

<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 169.

<sup>9</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 169-70. "Basically, however, Rahner has, to a great extent, adopted the concept of freedom that is proper to idealistic philosophy, a concept that, in reality, is appropriate to the absolute Spirit – to God – but not to man. He says, for instance, that freedom is "the ultimate self-responsibility of the person [...] as a self-action." Freedom is defined as the ability 'to be oneself'."

<sup>10</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 166.

<sup>11</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*.

<sup>12</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*.

this” by stating that his “point of departure” is the “inconceivably new [...] *Event* that is the Savior”.<sup>13</sup>

In using the term “world formula”, Ratzinger interprets Rahner’s model as tending towards a “closed system” which can ultimately turn to seek its own historical fulfilment. Interestingly, Ratzinger extends the “popularization” of Rahner’s theology, which he recognises as a misinterpretation of Rahner in many cases, to include a “materialistic reading of the Bible” and “Marx-inspired theologies” in the following generation.<sup>14</sup> In turn, theological interpretations such as “liberation theology” emerge, in part, from an attempt to define Christianity from a universalist view of the human person:

Rahner appropriated universal reason for Christianity and tried to prove that universal reason leads ultimately to the teachings of Christianity and that the teaching of Christianity are the universally human, the rational par excellence. If the teachings of Christianity are the universally human, the generally held views of man’s reason, then it follows that these generally held views are what is Christian. In that case, one can – in fact, one must – interpret what is Christian in terms of the universal findings of man’s reason.<sup>15</sup>

In this view, the content of faith becomes defined by human reason and rational consensus, rather than a mutually-enriching exchange of faith and reason. Ratzinger acknowledges that this is not Rahner’s intention but it does identify “weak spots and critical points” in Rahner’s synthesis.<sup>16</sup>

In the broader context of this thesis, two points arise from this. Firstly, it is worth noting that *NE* was developed, in part, as a response to liberation theology and “materialistic” readings of scripture. Rahner’s focus on experience as revealing an “always already” presence of Absolute Mystery is interpreted by Ratzinger, at least in part, to have encouraged

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<sup>13</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*. “[Rahner] could say that what is universal has now become that which saves only because, in this Savior, a universality of being has come to pass that could not emanate from being itself.”

<sup>14</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 168.

<sup>15</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*.

<sup>16</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*.

the development of the political-praxis models of South America. Ironically, as shall be noted, Rahner was criticised for his *lack* of political theology.

Secondly, while a mystagogical approach to evangelisation seeks to reveal the “always already” presence of God in the life of the individual and the world, the question arises: How can it also point to the “in-breaking of the new” as a word of revelation in the life of the hearer? Mystagogy is a pattern of evangelisation that begins with the person’s concrete life circumstances, but also presumes that some form of response or conversion is a dimension of the mystagogical realisation. Ratzinger’s argument is that more is required than an affirmation of the objective reality of personal history and being. One’s subjective existence is crucial. The aim of mystagogy is to allow for a newness to emerge from within human experience. Pauline imagery of the “old self” and “new self” offers a scriptural lens through which to give expression to conversion and self-transcendence.<sup>17</sup>

Crucial to evangelisation is the question of the nature of conversion. Ratzinger argues that Rahner’s presentation is too narrow and reduces conversion as no more than a conversion to an awareness of one’s own existence. Ratzinger stresses that conversion is an encounter which comes to the human person in a “new and unexpected” manner from beyond the limits of their personhood. The human person comes to salvation not solely in a self-reflective manner but in “ec-stasy (*Ek-stase*)”:

[I]n the being-taken-out-of-himself that goes beyond reflection – not in continuing to be himself, but in going out from himself. It means that the liberation of man consists in his being freed from himself and, in relinquishing himself, truly finding himself. It means that by accepting the other, the particular, the apparently non-necessary and free, he finds what is whole and real. Such a philosophy of freedom and love is, at the same time, a philosophy of conversion, of going out from oneself, of transformation; it is, therefore, also a philosophy of community and history, of a history that is truly free. Man finds his center of gravity, not inside, but outside himself. The Place to which he is anchored is not, as it were, within himself but without.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Ephesians 4:22-24.

<sup>18</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 169 and 171. See also James Corkery, “Rahner and Ratzinger: A Complex Relationship”, in *Karl Rahner: Theologian for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Pádraic Conway and Fáinche Ryan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 94-5.

As noted earlier, Ratzinger is concerned that Rahner's approach lacks a distinctly Christian outlook and reduces itself to a specific form of humanism. The Christian, for Ratzinger, is one who has begun travelling the road of conversion to something other than him or herself. The "supernatural existential" of Rahner's method is classified by Ratzinger as a form of self-possession, lacking a distinctive Christian perspective.<sup>19</sup> Anthropology and theology become "fused together" (*verschmelzen*) in a manner that confuses nature and grace.<sup>20</sup> Rahner's concept of Jesus Christ as the "Absolute Bringer of salvation" and his overall "spiritual formulation" are inadequate, as they intermingle the universal and particular, and ultimately lead to a spirituality of self-affirmation of 'humanness' with Christian identity.<sup>21</sup>

Ratzinger concludes that Rahner's approach lacks a disruptive character. In this light, the ever-present "supernatural existential" is seen to flatten Christian experience, limiting the horizon of religious possibility, and failing to fully take into account the breadth of salvation history. Still, we must ask whether the Divine disruption needs to be received and recognised for what it is. If grace bursts forth into an individual life, must it not be received by a prevenient grace that is already present?

The supernatural existential of Rahner's approach is not meant to account for the whole of the Christian life. It is less about what the Christian does, or how a Christian lives, and more about what God desires for all. It seeks to express God's salvific will. It is, therefore, the existential of "salvific desire" but not salvation's accomplished reality. It does not limit the possibility of an extrinsic in-breaking of Divine encounter. In Rahner's perspective, "self-possession" takes the form of "self-transcendence" because an existential supernatural pre-awareness is a dimension of all human experience. The human person is constantly and continuously invited "out of one's self" to an ever-greater awareness. This is

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<sup>19</sup> Corkery, "Rahner and Ratzinger", 95.

<sup>20</sup> Corkery, "Rahner and Ratzinger", 93.

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 166 and 168.

no simple progression or ascent of human spiritual transformation. The Transcendent can so prise open human experience, that the believer becomes alive to greater realities. There is no anchoring of one's self within one's self, but an existential tending towards one's true "anchor" – Absolute Mystery. As Michael Purcell notes, in regard to Rahner's theology, "the subject is constituted as a moment and movement of grace".<sup>22</sup>

Rahner's interpretation of the Thomistic concept of *excessus* is not without its critics. However, his usage of *excessus* as a capacity of human reason to go out "into the inaccessible" provides a strong counterpoint to an overly-subjectivist interpretation.<sup>23</sup> This *excessus* is not the result of a personal capacity, but the Divinely-given supernatural radar of the human person who has the capacity "of being seized by what is always insurmountable".<sup>24</sup> Rahner's anthropology is always one of experiential dialogue, of "moment and movement". He is fundamentally more "intersubjective" than he is "subjective", for the subject is never considered without reference to Absolute Mystery.

A genuine challenge to a mystagogical approach remains. The temptation is to fall into a generic spirituality or spiritualised humanism. Certainly, Rahner's divisions of "transcendental" and "categorical" dimensions provide some interplay of considerations. However, questions remain:

- Does Rahner reduce all religious "experience" to a core human experience?
- How might the evangeliser present the unique story of Christianity?
- How does the "insurmountable" become "graspable" in an analogical sense?

While a mystagogical methodology can fall prey to defeat and confusion regarding such questions, it must be remembered that Rahner's greater concern was with the course of

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Purcell, "Rahner amid Modernity and Post-Modernity", in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 208.

<sup>23</sup> Rahner, "The Human Quest for Meaning in the Face of the Absolute Mystery of God", in *Theological Investigations: Vol. XVIII - God and Revelation* (New York: Crossroads, 1983), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Rahner, "The Human Quest for Meaning".



theology itself and its ability to proclaim the Gospel in cultural climates that were now significantly different from the past. His intention was to discover a pathway through which the Christian might be faithful to the tradition, while at the same time, engage the wider world.<sup>25</sup> His theological method of engaging with modern thought drew the charge of diluting the central tenets of Christianity in pursuit of a universalist and secular interpretation.

For Ratzinger, Rahner's theological explorations failed to take into account scriptural and patristic readings of Christology and grace. Rahner understood his goal as something more contemporary, namely, to re-present and re-formulate traditional theological categories within a more immanent framework. As Declan Marmion explains, Rahner's assumption was always that "theological reflection must be built on a living experience of faith": "For all his emphasis on the ineffable God, Rahner did not stop at pure negation but used this as a springboard into the search for unity with the transcendent."<sup>26</sup>

Ratzinger did not advocate a withdrawal from the public square, but preferred this engagement to be framed by Christian apologetics. As Benedict XVI, he constantly advanced the relationship between faith and reason, and entreated Europe not to abandon its Christian heritage.<sup>27</sup> Spirituality can never be a mere private striving or personal journey; it is the surrender to the larger story of Jesus Christ revealed in scripture and the story of the Church. Ratzinger was hesitant to give too much weight to subjective experience because of the fear that the universal could be reduced to the relative. Rahner, he feared, had drifted too far in that direction and had incorporated the humanist approach of German Idealism. It could be argued, however, that both Rahner and Ratzinger were idealists gazing in two different

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<sup>25</sup> Declan Marmion, "Rahner and His Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue", *Australian eJournal of Theology* 4 (February 2005): 10. Retrieved from: [http://www.aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/.../AEJT\\_4.10\\_Marmion.pdf](http://www.aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/.../AEJT_4.10_Marmion.pdf) on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Marmion, "Rahner and His Critics", 18.

<sup>27</sup> Cf: Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections* (Regensburg: 12 September 2006); *Speech to Representatives of British Society* (Westminster: 17 September 2010); *The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law* (Reichstag Building, Berlin: 22 September, 2011).

directions with the common intention of seeking to reveal the truth of the human person in the light of the glory of God.

### 5.3 THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Hans Rotter recalls that Hans Urs von Balthasar sent Rahner a copy of his book, *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*, in 1966 inscribed: “With a plea for a true theology of the cross”.<sup>28</sup> The intended reference is to Martin Luther’s *theologia crucis*, theology of the Cross, over and against *theologia gloriae*, the glorification of human reason. Balthasar deemed this to be Rahner’s methodological failing.<sup>29</sup> The “mystery of glory” is defined by Balthasar in terms of “the Cross” understood as “the self-glorification of the love of God in the world”.<sup>30</sup> Balthasar was influenced by the Reformed tradition, in particular the writings of Luther, John Calvin and Karl Barth.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the introduction of the term “evangelisation” into Catholic vocabulary owes much to Reformed theological influences on this eminently Catholic theologian.

In *Cordula*, Balthasar argues for a theology and spirituality capable of drawing out a full Christian response (interpreted as “martyrdom”) in a moment of crisis (*Ernstfall*).

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Rotter, “Genius, but also Human”, in *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas R. Batlogg and Melvin E. Michalski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 233. *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* was published by Balthasar in German in 1966. All quotes will be taken from the English translation: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1969). *Cordula* is the Christian story of a young nun who fearfully hid from martyrdom but in the clear light of day, “offered herself up to the fury of the Huns and thus received the crown of martyrdom”, (133).

<sup>29</sup> Commenting on his divergent methodology from Rahner, Balthasar observed, that “our starting points were actually always different. There is a book by Simmel, titled, “Kant and Goethe.” Rahner has chosen Kant, or if you will, Fichte – the transcendental approach. And I have chosen Goethe – as a Germanist. The form (Gestalt), the indissolubly, unique, organic, self-unfolding form – I think of Goethe’s “Metamorphosis of Plants” –, this form with which Kant even in his aesthetics could never really manage.” “Geist und Feuer: Ein Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar”, *Herder Korrespondenz* 30, no. 2 (1976), 76. Quoted in James K. Voiss, “Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the Question of Theological Aesthetics: Preliminary Considerations”, *Louvain Studies* 29, no. 1-2 (2004): 148.

<sup>30</sup> Balthasar, *Christian Witness*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Neil Ormerod, “The Debate Over Light in Darkness and the Catholicity of Hans Urs von Balthasar”, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 20, no. 3 (2013): 209. Retrieved from: [http://aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/603475/AEJT12.29\\_The\\_Heat\\_on\\_Light\\_in\\_Darkness\\_Ormerod\\_-\\_Final.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/603475/AEJT12.29_The_Heat_on_Light_in_Darkness_Ormerod_-_Final.pdf) on 3rd November, 2014.

Eamonn Conway notes a “double-sided” critique of Rahner: firstly, Balthasar attempts to show that “Rahner’s system is methodologically erroneous” and secondly to demonstrate the “negative consequences” for theological reasoning which stem from such a method.<sup>32</sup>

Balthasar was concerned that post-Conciliar theology was too accommodating to the modern mentality. *Cordula* is in many ways a work of loneliness and even isolation with its stress on individual choice in the face of opposition and persecution. Karen Kilby sees the publication of *Cordula* as an important moment in the establishment of Balthasar’s standing. He clearly emerged “as a writer who could forcefully articulate concerns about the direction in which the contemporary Church was moving”.<sup>33</sup> Balthasar saw Rahner’s work in the context of contemporary theological tendencies toward a “growing anthropocentrism and secularization of Christian self-understanding”.<sup>34</sup>

In stinging terms, Balthasar spoke of modern theology as placing the content of faith “in parentheses”, watering it down “to a bland and shallow humanism” and developing “barren transpositions of the mysteries of God into modern nursery rhymes”.<sup>35</sup> In that theological company, God was not the “yardstick” but “the alleged partner in dialogue”.<sup>36</sup> Central to Balthasar’s concern was soteriology in post-Conciliar theology.

Rahner’s theology of the Cross exhibits an incarnational emphasis, with a concentration on Christ’s death as “a death into the resurrection”.<sup>37</sup> Rahner rejected the narrowness of Anselm’s theology of satisfaction, and Balthasar’s “penal substitutionary

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<sup>32</sup> Eamonn Conway, *The Anonymous Christian - A Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Criticisms of Karl Rahner's Theory of the Anonymous Christian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993), 66. Conway adds that from “the middle sixties onwards Balthasar’s critique focuses more” on these “negative consequences”.

<sup>33</sup> Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Hughes, “Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Interview with Werner Löser”, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Balthasar, *Christian Witness*, 126-7.

<sup>36</sup> Balthasar, *Christian Witness*, 127.

<sup>37</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 266 and 296-7.

model of the atonement” which flows from it.<sup>38</sup> Balthasar argues the soteriological lacuna in Rahner’s position ultimately dilutes the whole of the Christian story:

There is lacking here a theology of the Cross that Rahner has not yet given us. It is true, of course, that the emphasis on the doctrine of an anonymous Christianity, so urgently required in the present situation, involves a proportionate devaluation of the theology of the Cross and, correspondingly, of the theology of Christian living in terms of the *Ernstfall*. For [...] man does not owe his redemption actually to Christ, but to the eternal saving will of God, which is made manifest to him in the life of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

As has already been noted, underlying these critiques are the tensions between what Lonergan described as classicist and empirical cultural categories. Missiology had been shaped by these tensions since the early decades of the twentieth century, and became more accentuated after the Council. The age of dialogue and inter-cultural encounter has called into question the necessity and method of explicit Christian proclamation. Certainly, Rahner’s notion of the “anonymous Christian” has been a strong formative influence, particularly in an era that must negotiate pluralism and diversity. Rahner’s primary point was not that mission was unnecessary, but rather that mission is founded on and energised by the universal saving will of God, already present in all people.

Balthasar’s overarching concern was for what he saw as the impoverishment of the theological enterprise. His soteriological emphasis limits the Christian life to the moment of Calvary, as this is carried forward into Christian witness in martyrdom. While Balthasar claimed that the uniqueness of the Christian story was contained in the moment of Calvary, he also went further than the Christian tradition in relation to the Holy Saturday stillness of

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<sup>38</sup> Ormerod, "Catholicity of Hans Urs von Balthasar", 208-10. See also, Anne Murphy, "Contemporary Theologies of the Cross, I", *The Way* 28, no. 2 (1988): 153. "Rahner has been strongly criticized by Balthasar, firstly because Rahner's anthropology seems to control his theology, rather than the opposite; secondly because he seems to see Christ as the *fulfilment* of human potential and not as one who reveals the radical sinfulness of the human situation; thirdly Rahner lacks a theology of the cross because the cross would not appear to be central or even necessary to his theological system. A recent writer has suggested that the heart of the difference between the two men 'seems to be that Rahner thinks of human frustration in terms of incompleteness, Balthasar in terms of tragedy'."

<sup>39</sup> Balthasar, *Christian Witness*, 109.

Christ's descent into Hell, thereby relegating the Resurrection to an almost secondary event.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, Rahner's focus is incarnational. In a broader Christic vision, the gospel is not limited to one historical moment. If Balthasar questioned Rahner's theology of the Cross, then Balthasar's theology of the Paschal Mystery is distorted by his emphasis on Christ's suffering at the expense of a fuller representation of all human death – "death" itself as the frame of human reference – overcome in Resurrection.<sup>41</sup>

Balthasar was criticised for "writing for a totally theoretical person."<sup>42</sup> There is an intellectual aloofness to Balthasar's argument which seeks to concentrate Christian life in one theoretical moment. A mystagogical theology seeks the opposite: to take moments of concrete human experience and broaden them to a pattern of life. A mystagogical approach seeks to distil from the plurality of human experience a transcendent awareness which leads to an encounter with a particular face and name. It is this person, Jesus Christ, who is, "always already" offering salvation to all.

#### 5.4 THE LANGUAGE OF THEOLOGY

In George Lindbeck's post-liberal view, doctrine provides the framework and grammar of religious experience. Lindbeck outlines three distinct approaches to doctrine: the "cognitive-propositional approach" in which doctrine is interpreted as "informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities"; against which an "experiential-expressive approach" developed, interpreting doctrine as "noninformative and nondiscursive

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<sup>40</sup> Ormerod, "Catholicity of Hans Urs von Balthasar", 208. "For Balthasar the descent into Hell is the descent into the Hell of the damned, so that Christ suffers the punishment due for every sin ever committed, in what is really a very strong version of the penal substitutionary model of the atonement".

<sup>41</sup> The Prayer of Commendation from *Order of Christian Funerals*, Approved for Use in Australia by the Australian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship ed. (Sydney: E.J. Dwyer, 1989): The "love of Christ, which conquers all things, destroys even death itself". For scriptural examples see also: Roman 6:1-9; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57.

<sup>42</sup> Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 94. Balthasar quotes a letter from Adrienne von Speyr, a spiritual companion, who encouraged him to write for the "normal" reader. Quoted in Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 3-4.

symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations”; and finally, a “hybrid” approach which Rahner and Lonergan, among others, exemplify.<sup>43</sup>

Singling out Rahner and Lonergan, Lindbeck concludes that this “hybrid” approach is “complicated” and “unpersuasive”.<sup>44</sup> Lindbeck develops a “cultural-linguistic” approach and thus focuses upon the “grammar” of religious language as formative of religious culture.<sup>45</sup> Lindbeck argues that, “like a culture or language”, religious doctrine “is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivity of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities”.<sup>46</sup> In this context, the Word becomes the primary and intensive grammatical rule of faith.

Lindbeck’s criticism is close to Ratzinger’s rejection of a “turn to the subject”. Immanuel Kant’s “reduction of God to a transcendental condition of morality” left “religion intolerably impoverished”.<sup>47</sup> This “breach”, in Lindbeck’s terms, was filled by Schleiermacher and others, with the “experiential-expressivism” mode which saw the source of all religion in the “feeling of absolute dependence”.<sup>48</sup> Lindbeck claims that this model as the dominant mode of modern religious thought is a result of the contemporary preference for “individual quests for personal meaning”.<sup>49</sup> The “experiential-expressive” model locates “whatever is finally important to religion in the prereflective experiential depths of the

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<sup>43</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 16-17.

<sup>44</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 17. “Even at their best, as in Rahner and Lonergan, they resort to complicated intellectual gymnastics and to that extent are unpersuasive. They are also weak in criteria for determining when a given doctrinal development is consistent with the sources of faith, and they are therefore unable to avoid a rather greater reliance on the magisterium.”

<sup>45</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 33.

<sup>47</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 20. See also, Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 2005. The relationship between the Church and the modern age was interrupted “when Kant described ‘religion within pure reason’”. “Religion” came to mean “one idea” among many.

<sup>48</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 22.

self”.<sup>50</sup> The external features of religion are “expressive and evocative objectifications of internal experience”.<sup>51</sup>

The effect this has on theology and theologians leads them “to commend public and communal traditions as optional aids in individual self-realization rather than as bearers of normative realities to be interiorized”.<sup>52</sup> Underlying both Ratzinger’s and Lindbeck’s concerns are issues of culture. For Ratzinger, contemporary culture distorts human freedom, which he observes as a tendency in Rahner’s work. For Lindbeck, it is the “dominant” theological culture that he critiques. He sees Rahner as representative of a theological culture which is too accommodating to modern sensibilities.

Theology cannot be isolated from modern concerns and realities, or it would be rendered irrelevant. The strength of Rahner’s method is precisely in his engagement with his intellectual and cultural environment. As Marmion writes:

Rahner did not want the particularity of Christian identity to be purchased at the price of the public character of theology. Most of his publications from the sixties onwards were of an “ad hoc” nature – responding to particular issues of the times. He did not recommend Christians to isolate themselves from their cultural environment.<sup>53</sup>

Lindbeck, on the other hand, is more concerned with the philosophy of theological discourse itself. Rahner resisted theological endeavours which relied on abstractions or were characterised by internal theological debates. The theological pluralism observed by Rahner is understood by Lindbeck as a deficiency and an obstacle to proper theological discourse. Yet, in a world of fragmentation, it is difficult to see how a theological method cannot recognise some degree of dialogical pluralism in its procedures. If the content of religious faith is a “language system” as Lindbeck proposes, it is difficult to nominate a “normative

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<sup>50</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

<sup>51</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

<sup>52</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 22-3.

<sup>53</sup> Marmion, “Rahner and His Critics”, 8.

language” in regard to religious belief – notwithstanding the measure of Scripture and the content of the Creed.

Rahner identified that the Second Vatican Council represented a disruptive ecclesiological moment, thus exposing a reality, welcome or otherwise, of a growing theological pluralism which contemporary theology, and evangelisation, cannot fail to take into account.<sup>54</sup> The full flourishing of a Christian life for Rahner was not defined by a sense of opposition to non-believers or an exclusivity in contradiction to the world, but “a bringing to historical and social visibility of the inner reality of their being”.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, Rahner’s theology is pastoral and practical, by drawing a Christian anthropology with historical, experiential, social and evangelising implications. Pluralism enhances the value of Christian witness. Rahner’s guiding theological principles of the open-ended invitation of grace and the universal saving will of God are neatly summarised by O’Meara: The “self-sharing of God enters happily into the course of the planet Earth” through which the “difficulties of an individual life and the struggles of a society are places where the future Mystery is already present”.<sup>56</sup> A mystagogical theology is keenly attuned to “the self-sharing of God” who “enters happily” into the “individual life” and the rhythms of society.

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<sup>54</sup> See Rahner, “Theology of the Future”, 32-60. “The theology of the future will be a *pluralist* theology, even though obviously it will have to maintain the unity of the Church’s creed. This statement should not for one moment be taken to convey that the pluralism we are speaking of is capable of representing something of the Church’s riches, or is in itself to be regarded as something especially welcome. Our intention is simply to recognize this pluralism as a fact. We accept that the Church is, or is destined to be, a world Church, and that too not merely in the sense of having a geographical universality [...] Now if all this is true then the theology of the Church is confronted with the most varied points of departure, ranges of perspective, conceptual models, and the most diverse criteria for distinguishing between that which can be taken for granted and that which cannot. These are the genuine assumptions, from which theological thought must proceed, and they cannot in the concrete be reduced to any one ‘system’.” (38-9).

<sup>55</sup> Rahner, *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings*, ed. Karl Lehmann, Albert Raffelt, and Harvey D. Egan, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 593.

<sup>56</sup> O’Meara, *God in the World*, 132.



## 5.5 TRANSFORMING PRAXIS

J. B. Metz was a friend, student and critic of Rahner, whose political theology challenged the idealism of the Rahnerian kind of Transcendental theology. Rahner conceded that Metz's critique was the only criticism which he took "very seriously".<sup>57</sup> In Metz's view, the failure to situate theology within concrete human history risks the privatisation of faith.<sup>58</sup> Transcendental theology emphasises too readily "the categories of the intimate, the private, the apolitical sphere".<sup>59</sup> Idealism and, by extension, Transcendental theology understands human history in progressive terms: "a history without interruption, without catastrophe, without danger".<sup>60</sup> On this point, Metz explains further:

The concept of the transcendental model acknowledges subjectivity, but not the subject. It reflects historicity, but not concrete history. Where this deficiency becomes glaringly apparent was revealed in our own German history. I asked Karl [Rahner]: "Why did you never say anything about Auschwitz? Why did that never appear?" [...] He said: "That is something that you must do." I accused him of having an eschatology that dealt too much with the idealistic and too little with apocalyptic [...] The fact that there is no answer to the human history of suffering – that is apocalyptic – the cry of God that arises out of suffering.<sup>61</sup>

It is a valid critique. Although Rahner frequently stresses that concrete human circumstances must be taken into account, he rarely focusses the lens to actual, concrete human history. Consequently, Rahner's interest in the individual subject risks limiting the "political, social, institutional, and eschatological elements" in his theology.<sup>62</sup> Questions recur and point to gaps in Rahner's thought:

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<sup>57</sup> Rahner, "Introduction", in *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy According to Karl Rahner* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), ix.

<sup>58</sup> Marmion, "Rahner and His Critics", 3.

<sup>59</sup> Metz, *Theology of the World*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> Metz, "Intellectual Passion and Spiritual Courage", in *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas R. Batlogg and Melvin E. Michalski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 136.

<sup>61</sup> Metz, "Intellectual Passion and Spiritual Courage", 137.

<sup>62</sup> Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, 51.

- What role does human suffering play in relation to the human capacity for the experience of transcendence?
- Does evil and suffering have the capacity to validate or invalidate, to reinforce or suffocate, the supernatural existential?
- Does the concrete human history of the twentieth century reveal or obscure a human “attunement” to transcendence?

Despite these gaps in Rahner’s theology, his methodology remains an intensely incarnational enterprise. Christology, theology and anthropology are so intimately connected in his mind that it is impossible to speak of God without reference to human beings and vice versa:

If human beings in their concrete and historical essence cannot be described unless we say that they are those to whom God, as uncreated grace, communicates existence, then we cannot speak of them without speaking also of God. We are not able to understand what God is except by referring to the infinite transcendence of human beings themselves [....] Thus, you cannot have a full theology unless you consider its anthropological aspects. If you wish to speak accurately of God, then you must speak of human beings.<sup>63</sup>

While it may be possible to speak of God in an abstract way, human beings can only truly grapple with Divine Mystery in a performative and relational sense. And while it might be possible to speak of the human person in a purely anatomical or physiological sense, what is *human* only comes into *being* in relationship with the Other and others.

Rahner acknowledges that the challenge to a mystagogical approach is to establish a “performative” dimension to spirituality which encourages believers not merely to be hearers of the word, but doers as well.<sup>64</sup> Rahner conceded that “every concrete mystagogy must obviously from the very beginning consider the societal situation and the Christian praxis to which it addresses itself”.<sup>65</sup> In this light, a concrete mystagogical approach, which is “of

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<sup>63</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 18-19.

<sup>64</sup> Marmion, “Rahner and His Critics”, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Rahner, “Introduction”, x.

fundamental significance for pastoral work in a secularized world”, must be “at the same time ‘mystical and political’”.<sup>66</sup> The task of a mystagogical approach is to situate religious experience within the human and social context of each believer. The spiritual, transcendent experience emerges from the embodied, cultural existence of the human person, and in turn, sheds light on that same context. In Rahner’s words, it “is only through the will for necessary social changes that people can really aim their hope toward the absolute future that is God”.<sup>67</sup>

The personal mysticism which Rahner saw as the future of the Christian life is not a substitute or counter to communal witness. Spirituality, when left to its own devices, can become detached from the Christian treasure of wisdom and witness. A mystagogical approach is not to be conceived as a promotion of internalised, “spiritualised” Christian living, but the pathway to appropriate the riches of the tradition in response to the needs of the contemporary moment. The moment of Christian witness is at once a personal, communal and socio-political moment which originates in an experience of Absolute Mystery and is drawn deeper into it. A mystagogical approach, then, will seek to connect religious experience with implications for personal and communal life.

## 5.6 FOUR PRINCIPLES OF A MYSTAGOGICAL METHOD

The preceding exchanges between Rahner and selected critics sought to give firmer shape to mystagogical theology. While such critiques did not respond directly to proposals for mystagogy, they serve to more clearly defining Rahner’s fundamental theological arguments. His theology aims to hold in tension a unity between the *fides qua* and the *fides quae* in a mystagogical manner. How, then, is this attuned to the vision of a new evangelisation, with its new spirit (ardour), new methods and new expressions?

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<sup>66</sup> Rahner, "Introduction".

<sup>67</sup> Imhof and Biallowons, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 62.

The following quote from *RM* combines the language of *GS* with Rahner's notion of the "anonymous Christian". In the context of promoting the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, John Paul II wrote that the "social and cultural conditions" in which people live today can hinder the proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>68</sup> In situations such as these, "salvation in Christ" is offered through the grace of "a mysterious relationship to the Church", which "does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation".<sup>69</sup> As an expression of the fundamental presumption of God's universal desire of salvation, John Paul II goes on to quote *GS* 22:

[T]his applies not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is therefore a universal one, we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.<sup>70</sup>

Though these words address the traditional missionary aim of "first proclamation", they also shed light on the evangelisation of those who are baptised but not regularly connected with a worshipping community. Through baptism, these too have "mysterious relationship" to Christ and the Church. How might evangelisation enlighten "them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation"?<sup>71</sup> Christian witness requires respectful encounter with all cultural contexts, including secular contexts. It must take seriously the other's search for truth, and the questions which stir their hearts.

Mystagogy, in Rahner's terms, presumes that God is already at work in the life of individuals and cultures. Rahner's themes indicate both the foundation and limitations of such mystagogical methodology. His proposal is not systematically clear, and is more a thread running through his theology. His aim was to place the act of believing in dialogue

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<sup>68</sup> *RM*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *RM*, 10.

<sup>70</sup> *RM*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> *RM*, 10.

with the content of faith, which would require of theologians “a constant and vital inward sympathy” for the concrete circumstances of human experience.<sup>72</sup> In an explicit comment, he noted that former styles of theologising were under pressures in a secularised world:

In the unceasing life-and-death struggle within secularised society it is inevitable that theology should be fully preoccupied with having to raise and answer ever afresh the ultimate questions of a personal decision for God, for Jesus Christ, and [...] for the Church [...] ‘Mystagogy’ means that the *fides quae* of today can be expressed only in a very explicitly recognized unity with the *fides qua* [...] For in all departments of dogmatic theology we have to ask, ‘What does this mean for me (and society)?’ ‘How does this really affect me?’ ‘How precisely can I myself really believe this?’<sup>73</sup>

Theology is conducted by entering into an internal and external dialogue.

Evangelisation must be alert to this complex dialogical character which David Ranson describes in four movements. The spiritual quest firstly recognises “that something is beckoning us”.<sup>74</sup> This *awareness* (spiritual sphere) encourages the human person to explore the “deeper aspects of this beckoning”. *Reflection* (personal sphere) seeks to *interpret* (social sphere) “the meaning of this beckoning” and so *acts* (religious sphere) “in response to this beckoning”. Ranson’s model relies on categories of both personal and ecclesial conversion.

<sup>72</sup> Rahner, “Theology of the Future”, 41.

<sup>73</sup> Rahner, “Theology of the Future”, 40-1.

<sup>74</sup> David Ranson, *Across the Great Divide: Bridging Spirituality and Religion Today* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2002), 19. All quotes in this paragraph are taken from this page. Ranson offers a simplified presentation of Lonergan’s four core activities of “attending, inquiring, interpreting and acting”, 18-9. See also Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 14-5. Lonergan’s “realms of meaning” are also useful in understanding Ranson’s four-fold pattern. Lonergan outlines a movement in degrees of meaning starting from “common sense” (general understandings), to “theory” (specialist knowledge), to “interiority” (“heightened consciousness”), and finally to “transcendence” (“fulfilment”). See *Method in Theology*, 81-4. In *Insight*, Lonergan defines “reflection” as “an actuation of rational self-consciousness”: “I am empirically conscious inasmuch as I am experiencing, intellectually conscious inasmuch as I am seeking to grasp the virtually unconditioned or judging on the basis of such a grasp. But I become rationally self-conscious inasmuch as I am concerned with reasons for my own acts”, 164. As a further analysis of the cycle of interpretation, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical triad identifies three inseparable but distinguishable processes: understanding, interpretation and application. For Gadamer, understanding, interpretation and application comprise “one unified process” through which understanding “proves to be an event”. These three cannot be separated as “understanding is always interpretation, and [...] interpretation is the explicit form of understanding”. As a necessary hermeneutical principle for evangelisation, Gadamer notes that the interpreter’s task cannot simply be repetition of what has previously been said, but “to express what is said in the way that seems most appropriate [...], considering the real situation of the dialogue”, given that the interpreter “knows both languages used in the discussion”. Reflection, understanding, interpretation and application are always a living, vibrant process. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 1975), 306-8.

The perspective of “beckoning” suggests what is involved in a mystagogical and cultural hermeneutical approach to *NE*. What is intended is the process of evangelisation as a mystagogical pattern of an unfolding awareness, interpretation, understanding and integration of religious experience. On this point, Paul Crowley advances Rahner’s hope for a greater theological unity of the *fides qua* and the *fides quae*. Crowley outlines a mystagogical approach as affirming a breadth of spiritual, doctrinal, and institutional practices. These practices would constitute “a coherent religious world that would not reduce God to a manageable idol” in the form of a set of catechetical propositions.<sup>75</sup> Any mystagogical method of evangelisation would presume the fundamental connection between the content of faith and the experience of faith. However, faith as “a human response to a personal self-gift” beckons us “to modes of believing that include, but are not exhausted by, beliefs”.<sup>76</sup> A fundamental mystagogical principle arises from the experience of faith. It “beckons” us into a response which is distinguished by personal, social, ecclesial and ethical-missionary dimensions.

In short, a mystagogical approach to *NE* contains the following elements in the service of the new ardour, methods and expressions that the situation demands:

1. It aims to bring to **conscious awareness** the “always already” transcendent beckoning implicit in human experience;
2. By accompanying **reflection** through imaginative, culturally-attentive modes of dialogue and communication;
3. And encouraging **interpretation** of this self-communication of Divine Mystery through engagement with scripture and tradition;
4. Leading to a **responsiveness** manifest in on-going conversion and commitment to community life.

A mystagogical approach is fundamentally a pre-religious, creative conversation shaped by culture. The goal is to create a space in which the ever-active experience of the Mystery of God will be consciously registered. As Rahner clearly understood, theological and

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<sup>75</sup> Crowley, "Mystagogy and Mission", 24.

<sup>76</sup> Crowley, "Mystagogy and Mission", 27.

evangelical methodologies need renewal. Basic to this requirement is the hermeneutical engagement with the forces that frame the person's view of the world, and its personal and social implications. Accordingly, a mystagogic evangelisation participates in the world of meaning and culture in which an individual can detect the voice of invitation, or subversion or protest. It is more "parabolic" in nature than catechetical, as in Gallagher's terms, "traps for depth".<sup>77</sup> Parables break open language, narrative expectations and perceptions of the real, and invite the religious imagination into new dimensions.

Mystagogy also implies the necessity for a gradual pedagogical framework. Pope Francis affirmed the strategy proposed previously in *Ecclesia in Asia* which promoted a mystagogical "evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables and symbols" designed to introduce "people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery".<sup>78</sup>

In short, a cultural hermeneutical attentiveness is foundational to a mystagogical approach. The aim is to bring to consciousness an awareness of Divine Presence as an anthropological reality through stages of reflection, interpretation and responsiveness. Reflection, interpretation and responsiveness mirror the three original ambitions of *NE* of new ardour, new method, and new expressions. They thus engage the whole life of the individual or community, and are steps for a mystagogical evangelisation.

Rahner did not set out a comprehensive mystagogical proposal. In order to work towards establishing some mystagogical principles, this pattern of awareness, reflection,

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<sup>77</sup> Implied here is Klyne Snodgrass' definition of parables as "indirect communication" which "finds a way in a back window and confronts what one thinks is reality". He continues that parables "provide new sets of relations that enable us (or force us) to see in a fresh manner. Parables function as a lens that allows us to see to the truth and to correct distorted vision. They allow us to see what we would not otherwise see, and they presume we should look at and see a specific reality [...]. They are stories with intent, analogies through which one is enabled to see the truth. Except for five of Jesus' parables [...] they are stories with two levels of meaning, the story level through which one sees and the truth level, the reality being portrayed". Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 8. As quoted in Ch. 2: "Like the parables of Jesus, what is needed are traps for depth, moments of human poetry that give voice to the language of desire. And this would be a response on the level of pre-religious spiritual imagination." Gallagher, *Dive Deeper*, 122.

<sup>78</sup> John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Exhortation: Ecclesia in Asia* (6<sup>th</sup> November, 1999), 20. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_06111999\\_ecclesia-in-asia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html) on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2014. See also *EG*, 171.

interpretation and responsiveness can provide a theological framework from which to proceed. Twenty-five years after *Nostra Aetate*, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue published a joint statement on the relationship between dialogue and proclamation. *Dialogue and Proclamation* (hereafter, *DP*) defined the principle elements of mission as: “presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and catechesis”.<sup>79</sup> The document asserted that proclamation and dialogue, each in their own way, are “component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church”.<sup>80</sup> Drawing on previous statements, *DP* spoke of four forms of evangelising dialogue:

1. The dialogue of life (dialogue of common human experience);
2. The dialogue of action (collaboration for development and liberation);
3. The dialogue of theological exchange (dialogue of traditions and spiritual values);
4. The dialogue of religious experience (dialogue of the experience of prayer and contemplation in the search for God or the Absolute).<sup>81</sup>

While this document applies these principles to the first proclamation, it also can establish principles for *NE*. Pope Francis has spoken of the importance of a “new synthesis” in the promotion of the Gospel. This would include inculturated preaching, the on-going dialogical relationship between faith and reason, and the renewal of an “authentic humanity”

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<sup>79</sup> Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Instruction on the Proclamation of the Gospel and Interreligious Dialogue: "Dialogue and Proclamation - Reflections and Orientations"* (19th May, 1991), 2.

<sup>80</sup> *DP*, 2.

<sup>81</sup> *DP*, 42. *ES* 70-77 describes the “dialogue of salvation” (*salutis colloquium*) in terms of Divine initiative. The “whole history of salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvellously begins with God and which [God] prolongs with [all people] in so many different ways”, 70. These four forms of evangelising dialogue are an intentional participation in the great “conversation” or “dialogue of salvation”.



in the face of growing technologies.<sup>82</sup> A mystagogical proclamation likewise entails a “new synthesis” between lived faith and expressed faith. By appropriating the four forms of dialogue named in *DP* and re-shaping them for a mystagogical approach, a “mystagogical synthesis” can be outlined in the following manner:

1. A mystagogy of life (Awareness)
2. A mystagogy of religious experience (Reflection)
3. A mystagogy of theological conversation (Interpretation)
4. A mystagogy of praxis (Responsiveness).

These four dimensions provide a framework to explore a mystagogical approach in particular contexts. Prior to doing so in the next section, this section will conclude with a brief description of each of these dimensions.

#### 5.6.1 A Mystagogy of Life: Awareness

Mystagogy “seeks to disclose the clues or intimations of divine grace already found in experience and to relate them to the meanings contained in the Christian tradition”.<sup>83</sup> The difficult for mystagogy, or any theology in the modern era, is the fragmentation of explicit faith and subjective experience – or between Gospel and culture. Bacik names this break as “the eclipse of mystery”. A mystagogical evangelisation must do more than “match a doctrine with some perceived deeper experience because the experience itself has not entered explicit

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<sup>82</sup> *EG*, 129, 143 and 242. “The ultimate aim should be that the Gospel, as preached in categories proper to each culture, will create a new synthesis with that particular culture”, 129; “The challenge of an inculturated preaching consists in proclaiming a synthesis, not ideas or detached values. Where your synthesis is, there lies your heart”, 143. “[The] Church proposes another path, which calls for a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself, which elevates us to the mystery transcending nature and human intelligence. Faith is not fearful of reason,” 242; See also: “An authentic humanity, calling for a new synthesis, seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door. Will the promise last, in spite of everything, with all that is authentic rising up in stubborn resistance?” *LS*, 112

<sup>83</sup> Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, 15.

consciousness”.<sup>84</sup> Mystagogy is more than rhetoric. Deeper conceptual movements continue to flow through modern culture, and older categories of metaphysics and theological methodology fail to identify these currents. Fundamental theological concepts such as redemption, sin, grace, resurrection, and eternal life (and many other topics) must not only find a new vocabulary of proclamation but also contend with a new horizon of interpretation of human experience. A new conceptual framework is necessary, and this is at the centre of Rahner’s mystagogical agenda. For Rahner, this mystagogical framework begins with the human questioner:

Is human existence absurd or does it have an ultimate meaning? If it is absurd, why do human beings have an unquenchable hunger for meaning? Is it not a consequence of God’s existence? For if God doesn’t exist, then the hunger for meaning is absurd.<sup>85</sup>

Nicholas Lash has noted that Thomas Aquinas’ “five ways” or “five proofs” of the existence of God are not scientific proofs in the modern sense, but rather explorations of the verb “to be” (*esse*), in which Aquinas’ aim is to examine the appropriateness of “existence-talk” regarding “God”.<sup>86</sup> Lash concludes that in some contexts, Aquinas leans towards the usage of “God” as a verb rather than a noun.<sup>87</sup> While the agent cannot simply be collapsed into agency, Nash quotes Fergus Kerr’s conclusion that “Thomas’ God [...] is more like an event than entity”.<sup>88</sup> Inheriting this from Aquinas and Maréchal, Rahner considered “God” as the “foundational event” in the life of each and every person.

Central to Rahner’s assessment was his sense that the modern person had been conditioned by the slowly accumulating flow of modernity which had dissolved former

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<sup>84</sup> Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*.

<sup>85</sup> Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of his Life, 1982-84*, ed. Paul Imhof, Hubert Biallowons, and Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 163.

<sup>86</sup> Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 14-5.

<sup>87</sup> Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, 36.

<sup>88</sup> Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 187. Quoted in Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, 36.

categories of religious interpretation and meaning. In order to speak to contemporary culture, “God” needed to be expressed in relational terms, and as a result, theology needed to reframe its agenda, vocabulary and methodology. In essence, this “re-framing” is exemplified in the pastoral project of the Second Vatican Council. The turns that were apparent in the theologising of the Council incorporated both historical consciousness and cultural awareness. The human person to whom the teaching of the Council was addressed was situated within history and shaped by culture.

The “turn to the subject” of the Enlightenment philosophers also resulted in a theological turn to the subject of the Church as a historical reality and to the subject of “the world” as the horizon of the Church’s activity. A mystagogy of life, in evangelising terms, draws upon the historical and cultural settings of Christian anthropology. The Church is concerned with the whole complexity of human life: the social and political concerns of the global family; investment in the common good; a full and rich contribution to the cultural life of human societies; educational endeavours, scientific investigation, health and well-being; promoting the just economics and human rights; and promoting a care and reverence of the earth. As the opening line of *GS* declared:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.<sup>89</sup>

John Paul II noted that human beings cannot escape their cultural world. For this reason, the realm of the human is also the realm of the Incarnate Word: “All people are part of a culture, depend upon it and shape it. Human beings are both child and parent of the culture in which they are immersed”.<sup>90</sup> At the heart of every culture, there is “impulse

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<sup>89</sup> *GS*, 1.

<sup>90</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (14<sup>th</sup> September, 1998), 71 (hereafter, *FR*). Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html) on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2014.

towards a fulfilment” which discloses “that culture itself has an intrinsic capacity to receive divine Revelation”.<sup>91</sup> The most simple and the most splendid acts of living are an avenue to the Divine.

### 5.6.2 A Mystagogy of Religious Experience: Reflection

Rahner proposed that the basic posture of the human person is as a hearer of the word. “From a Rahnerian perspective [...] the human person is *homo mysticus* (‘a mystical person’).”<sup>92</sup> A mystagogy of life presumes that a dialogue with the living Word is possible because “the seeds of the word” (*logoi spermatikoi*) are apparent, or at least present in a hidden way, in the life of individuals, communities and cultures. Evangelisation seeks to open the possibility of “hearing” the dynamic word of God in everyday life. The task of mystagogy is to point to the dimension of life that may be called “religious experience”:

It must be made intelligible to people that they have an implicit but true knowledge of God – perhaps not reflected upon and not verbalized; or better expressed, they have a genuine experience of God ultimately rooted in their spiritual existence, in their transcendentality, in their personality, or whatever you want to call it.<sup>93</sup>

The “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon of the contemporary age leads many people to diverse spiritual engagements, often limited to the personal, private, eclectic and non-traditional. The distinction between a mystagogy of life and a mystagogy of religious experience is the extent to which individual life-experience can be placed into a larger, common human story. This statement presumes that the formulation of a “grand narrative” is still possible in a post-modern world.

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<sup>91</sup> *FR*, 71.

<sup>92</sup> Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 57.

<sup>93</sup> Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 115.

Post-modernism has rejected the possibilities of “grand narratives” with the view that “all big stories and all great hopes were oppressive”.<sup>94</sup> At a moment when the world is becoming increasingly connected through globalised agendas and technological progress, there is a corresponding disconnection to any larger story. Certainly to a secular mind, as the new atheism movement insists, one mysterious, over-arching story is considered ‘anti-rational’ and ‘anti-human’. Nicolas Boyle observes that it is “rather extraordinary” that the acceptance of the notion “that there is ‘no single world’ for us to have knowledge of, that there is only a boundless and bottomless plurality of mutually untranslatable idioms”, has come about at same time that “the unity and boundlessness of our planetary existence has become more concrete, more visible, than at any previous time in the history of the human race”.<sup>95</sup> The possibility of reaching towards some truths is necessary if the human psyche is not to slip into a mindless abyss. As scientist Stephen Weinberg remarks:

The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless. The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy.<sup>96</sup>

In a world of fragmented narrative and plurality of interpretation, terms such as “God” are spoken into a mist of blurred meanings and contexts. In Paul Ricoeur’s analysis, the term “God” constitutes “the total context (of) the entire gravitational space” of religious texts, practices and propositions.<sup>97</sup> The term “God” is both the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*: “The referent ‘God’ is at once the coordinator of these diverse discourses and the vanishing point, the index of incompleteness, of these partial discourses”.<sup>98</sup> To attempt to come to some

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<sup>94</sup> Kelly, “A Tradition of Hopeful Intelligence: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition”, *Compass* 42, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 22.

<sup>95</sup> Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 151.

<sup>96</sup> Stephen Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 149. Quoted in Kelly, “Hopeful Intelligence”, 22.

<sup>97</sup> Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 94.

<sup>98</sup> Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*.

understanding of the word “God” is to follow “the arrow of meaning of this word”.<sup>99</sup> By “following the arrow of meaning”, Ricoeur intends a two-fold task: gathering “together all the significations produced by the partial discourses and opening up a horizon that escapes the closure of discourse”.<sup>100</sup>

A mystagogy of religious experience gathers the religious discourse of the tradition and life of the Church in a narrative that is culturally-aware and strives to open a horizon towards the Transcendent Mystery which ultimately moves beyond all such discourse. Evangelisation presumes that the language of transcendence can still be spoken and received in contemporary culture. A secular society seeks to keep this conversation personal and ultimately culturally-neutral and ineffective. Evangelisation seeks to draw the personal experience into a larger historical, communal and cultural world. Indeed, transcendence is not only encountered in the personal depths but also in one’s cultural expressions, signs and symbols.

Pope Francis’ “dogmatic certainty” of God’s “always already” presence in every human life provides an evangelising principle for a mystagogy of religious experience:

I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person’s life. God is in everyone’s life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else — God is in this person’s life. You can, you must try to seek God in every human life. Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God.<sup>101</sup>

There remains an evangelising potential in every human experience. Human experience provides the soil in which the seeds of the word are planted. Evangelisation provides the water and nourishment for those seeds to grow.

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<sup>99</sup> Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*.

<sup>100</sup> Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*.

<sup>101</sup> Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God”, 32.

### 5.6.3 A Mystagogy of Theological Conversation: Interpretation

As has been noted, faith can only be invited, not imposed. Theological reflection for and in the modern age requires an accessible, invitational tone. This persuasive art of invitation is no easy art, as St Augustine noted:

Accordingly a great orator has truly said that, “an eloquent man must speak so as to teach, to delight, and to persuade.” Then he adds: “To teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph.”<sup>102</sup>

The state of cultural flux and its effect on theological reflection is recognised in *EG*: “New cultures are constantly being born in...vast new expanses where Christians are no longer the customary interpreters or generators of meaning”.<sup>103</sup> What is emerging is “new languages, symbols, messages and paradigms which propose new approaches to life, approaches often in contrast with the Gospel of Jesus”.<sup>104</sup> The theological dialogue which takes in this multiplicity of contexts requires considered listening, historical consciousness, playful vocabulary, a holistic vision of the human person, and a creative ability to reframe “the old” within “the new”. Evangelisation must be a trigger for the imagination, “capable of shedding light” on “new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us, and inspiring essential values”.<sup>105</sup> The Church “must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed”, and bring “the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities”.<sup>106</sup>

As noted previously, Rahner’s mystagogical methodology sought to draw together “into the closest possible unity”, the *fides quae* (the content of faith) with the *fides qua* (the conscious act of faith itself). This requires a methodology which is incarnational, inculturated

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<sup>102</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine, In Four Books* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) Book IV, Ch. 12, 27, 174. Retrieved from: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.pdf> on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> *EG*, 73.

<sup>104</sup> *EG*, 73.

<sup>105</sup> *EG*, 74.

<sup>106</sup> *EG*, 74.

and expressed in personalist, relational terms. By incarnational, what is presumed is a theology that presupposes the initiative of God, speaking a word which takes flesh in the concrete realities of this world. By inculturated, what is presumed is a theology which takes seriously the signs, symbols, customs and modes of expression of the cultures from which and to which it speaks, and is able to re-propose “the Church’s rich bi-millennial tradition” in fruitful new ways.<sup>107</sup> By personalist and relational, what is presumed is a theology which engages the hunger of the human person for relationship, community, transcendence and spirituality, and will serve to illuminate the “inner logic” of the human person and human experience.<sup>108</sup> The work of evangelisation must constantly be enlightened by the “beacon” of “the primacy of grace”.<sup>109</sup>

It is the task of theology to draw out an “abiding newness” to ancient truths, particularly in “today’s rapid and vast cultural changes”.<sup>110</sup> Theology is always a task at the service of the Church, which always remains “a missionary disciple”, and is always maturing in its understanding and judgement.<sup>111</sup> Overall, this will be a theology of conversation; a dialogue with God in the midst of every human setting.<sup>112</sup> Theological reflection is the bridge between unreflected human experience and faith’s public, communal expression and praxis.

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<sup>107</sup> EG, 233.

<sup>108</sup> Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 20.

<sup>109</sup> EG, 112.

<sup>110</sup> EG, 41.

<sup>111</sup> EG, 40 and DV, 12.

<sup>112</sup> EG, 133. “A theology [...] which is in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences is most important for our discernment on how best to bring the Gospel message to different cultural contexts and groups....I call on theologians to carry out this service as part of the Church’s saving mission. In doing so, however, they must always remember that the Church and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology.”



#### 5.6.4 A Mystagogy of Praxis (Responsiveness)

A mystagogy of praxis promotes a “living gospel”. Paul VI proposed effective witness as the mystagogical characteristic of any evangelising Christian community.<sup>113</sup> The modern age places a high value on authenticity, perhaps an antidote to an age of cynicism, distrust of the “grand narrative” and its traditional institutions, and enhanced by a longing for “the real”. In words that are perhaps even more true for the twenty-first century, John Paul II captured the age of authenticity in *RM*: “People today put more trust in witnesses than teachers, in experience than teaching, in life and action than in theories. The witness of Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission”.<sup>114</sup> Ratzinger echoed these words when he acknowledged the mystagogical power of Christian commitment:

I have often affirmed my conviction that the true apology of Christian faith, the most convincing demonstration of its truth against every denial, are the saints, and the beauty that the faith has generated.<sup>115</sup>

Christian praxis seeks not only to be of service to the world, but also to arouse a sense of curiosity in those who are served by and witness this Christian commitment. It is a mystagogy of stirring the human imagination, and the blood. It raises questions regarding true human fulfilment and fruitfulness. Mystagogical witness can function as an amplification and validation of the “transcendent mystery of humanization” that is already “gratuitously operative” in the life of those who are open to the search for what is authentically human.<sup>116</sup>

Mystagogy must ultimately be directed towards Christian witness. This comes in many forms: monastic contemplative prayer; artistic endeavour, ordinary daily vocation, a life of practical service, or a commitment to causes of justice and reconciliation. A

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<sup>113</sup> *EvN*, 21-2 and 41.

<sup>114</sup> *RM*, 42.

<sup>115</sup> Ratzinger, “The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty”, in *Message to the Communion and Liberation Meeting at Rimini* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 24th August 2002). Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20020824\\_ratzinger-cl-rimini\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020824_ratzinger-cl-rimini_en.html) on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Baum, *Man Becoming*, 20.

mystagogical evangelisation will falter if it fails to translate personal experience into communal witness. In the words of Pope Francis, personal experience of faith must be grounded in, measured against and sustained by the life of the Church community:

There exists an indissoluble bond between the *mystical* and the *missionary* dimension of the Christian vocation, both rooted in Baptism [...] The communitarian dimension is not just a “frame”, an “outline”, but an integral part of Christian life, of witness and of evangelization.<sup>117</sup>

There is no shortage of common human endeavours which can serve as a basis of mystagogical action. Environmental sustainability, morality and ethics, education, the equity of economic systems, globalisation, the common good and issues of social justice are the realm of what has been called “the ecology of the human person” and the ecology of human communities.<sup>118</sup>

The primary theme which runs through these four dimensions of a mystagogical approach is the presentation of the human person as one who is in relationship with transcendence and who is called to relationship with fellow human beings. It seeks to illuminate and strengthen Christian anthropology and its communal necessity and obligation. Praxis points not to the action itself, but to that which (or Who) motivates the action.

A mystagogy of action bears witness to the gospel principle of authentic human fulfilment: “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort [...]: life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others.

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<sup>117</sup> Francis, *General Audience* (15<sup>th</sup> January, 2014). Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140115\\_udienza-generale\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140115_udienza-generale_it.html) on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2014. “There exists an indissoluble bond between the *mystical* and the *missionary* dimension of the Christian vocation, both rooted in Baptism [...] The communitarian dimension is not just a “frame”, an “outline”, but an integral part of Christian life, of witness and of evangelization.”

<sup>118</sup> Francis, *General Audience* (5<sup>th</sup> June, 2013). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130605\\_udienza-generale\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale_en.html) on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2013. “We are living in a time of crisis; we see it in the environment, but above all we see it in men and women. The human person is in danger [...] hence the urgent need for human ecology! And the peril is grave, because the cause of the problem is not superficial but deeply rooted. It is not merely a question of economics but of ethics and anthropology.” This was a message he was to repeat in *LS*, 5: “Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and ‘take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system’.”

This is certainly what mission means”.<sup>119</sup> Mystagogical witness promotes engagement, service and resistance across the wide spectrum of culture.

## 5.7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter has been to examine some of the critiques of Rahner’s methodology, and by extension, what might be seen as shortfalls in a mystagogical approach. Concerns raised over a theological “turn to the subject”, the proclamation of the uniqueness of the Christ event, the style of theological discourse and the need to move from affective experience to effective action are legitimate questions which highlight some of the possible limitations of a mystagogical methodology. Rahner has provided a theological proposal, from which a synthesis can be developed to establish criteria for a mystagogical evangelisation in particular cultural contexts. This synthesis, involving Christian anthropology (awareness), spirituality (reflection), theological engagement (interpretation) and witness (responsiveness) will now be examined within a particular cultural setting. Prior to this theo-cultural excursus, a theological foundation will be offered for doing so.

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<sup>119</sup> Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document* (29th June, 2007), 360. Retrieved from: <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf> on 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2014.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### ***CONTEXT AND THE AUSTRALIAN SETTING:***

***Conversations with Culture, Spirituality,***

***Theology and Praxis***

**Context and The Australian Setting:**  
**Conversations with Culture, Spirituality, Theological Reflection and Praxis**

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Australia, as in any cultural setting, there is an interplay of factors which shape the imagination, form the social character, and shift cultures. Every culture is evolving and constantly in a state of flux. However, there are some consistent narratives which express the spirit of a people and can be analysed as sources of cultural meaning. This chapter aims to explore some of these narratives in the Australian context. This chapter will proceed through an examination of cultural and theological discourse through the four dimensions of a mystagogical approach identified at the conclusion of the previous chapter:

1. Awareness: A Mystagogy of Life and Culture
2. Reflection: A Mystagogy of Spirituality and Religious Experience
3. Interpretation: A Mystagogy of Theological Conversation
4. Responsiveness: A Mystagogy of Witness, Action and Praxis.

It is impossible to draw accurately every cultural contour and social stratum. The aim of this chapter is to describe some complementary, competing and conflicting elements of the Australian cultural space and its religious sensibilities. This analysis will be drawn from an array of theological literature, surveys and projects which have emerged in recent decades. As a prologue to this discussion, a consideration of ‘context’ is presented in order to establish a theological basis from which to proceed.

## 6.2 THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR AN INCULTURATED EXAMINATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN SETTING

In recent decades, contextual and practical theologies have emerged as important disciplines within theology. These theological methodologies intend to build bridges between the lived expression of faith and theological reflection. A distinctive tone was set with the Second Vatican Council, and as a result, “theology was charged with becoming more open and directed to social and cultural realities”.<sup>1</sup> The objective of practical theology is to name, engage and challenge the world in which faith is lived. Ruard Ganzevoort defines practical theology as the study of “the field of lived religion” by listening to “the endless conversations in which we construct meaning”.<sup>2</sup> Contextual and practical theology engages the historical, linguistic, and social *foci* of cultures as necessary dimensions of theological reflection. Practical theology presumes an “interplay of theology” with other disciplines in order “to make theological sense” of the experience of the sacred within the contemporary human horizon.<sup>3</sup>

Helping to further an understanding of this interplay, Stephen Bevans describes the theological enterprise today as:

1. Requiring a commitment to translating and inculturating the Gospel into new contexts;
2. Finding fresh ways of listening to our contexts in order to proclaim the Gospel in ways that are comprehensible;
3. Theology also needs to be open to the surprise of the Gospel as we engage in the work of ministry and justice;
4. And to enter “into mutually enriching conversations or confronting our contexts with the power of the Gospel”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cahalan, "Locating Practical Theology", 4.

<sup>2</sup> R. Ruard Ganzevoort, "Forks in the Road when Tracing the Sacred: Practical Theology as Hermeneutics of Lived Religion", (Presidential Address International Academy of Practical Theology, Chicago 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2009), 4. Retrieved from: [www.ia-pt.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/.../presidentialaddress2009.pdf](http://www.ia-pt.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/.../presidentialaddress2009.pdf) on 29th September, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Cahalan, "Locating Practical Theology", 20. See thesis ch. 1, fn. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Bevans, *Theology in Global Perspective*, 187. See thesis ch. 1, fn. 18.

Evangelisation requires particular forms of contextualisation to translate the message of the Gospel. Historically, the Church's missionary efforts have been built on various forms of engagement with cultures. David Bosch's historical analysis of missionary models noted six historical paradigm shifts of Christian missionary activity.<sup>5</sup> As Bosch observes, in each of these epochs, Christians "wrestled with the question of what the Christian faith and, by implication, the Christian mission meant for them".<sup>6</sup> The cultural dynamics of the transmission of faith are crucial to understanding the missionary context of the Church in any age. There is no "pure gospel unaffected by any cultural and other human accretions" to be transmitted, as no culture "receives the gospel passively; each one as a matter of course reinterprets it".<sup>7</sup> In words which echo the call for *NE*, Bosch states that in the context of "a fundamentally new situation and precisely so as to remain faithful to the true nature of mission, mission must be understood and undertaken in an imaginatively new manner today".<sup>8</sup>

Bosch identifies inculturation as "an integral feature of Christianity from the very beginning", and asserts that "Christian faith never exists except as "translated" into a culture".<sup>9</sup> Inculturation continues as a dimension of mission and evangelisation as "a tentative and continuing process."<sup>10</sup> However, Bosch argues for "interculturality" through which cultures "influence, challenge, enrich, and invigorate each other".<sup>11</sup> Gemma Cruz notes that "contextuality is a precondition for interculturality".<sup>12</sup> True interculturality "celebrates

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<sup>5</sup> As listed by Bosch, these six epochs are: 1. The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity; 2. The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period; 3. The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; 4. The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm; 5. The modern Enlightenment paradigm; 6. The emerging ecumenical paradigm. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 181-2 and 188.

<sup>6</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 182.

<sup>7</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

<sup>8</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 366.

<sup>9</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 448 and 447.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 455.

<sup>11</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 457.

<sup>12</sup> Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Interculturality as Pedagogy: Challenges of Teaching and Learning Religion and Theology Beyond Borders", *Compass* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 36.

otherness with a steadfast refusal to conflate diverse experiences into a false synthesis”.<sup>13</sup>

Interculturation acknowledges diversity without the assumption of assimilation. Nevertheless, in an ecclesial sense, interculturation must also acknowledge *communio*. As Bosch explains, interculturation must also assume “that local incarnations of the faith should not be *too* local” by maintaining the *communio* of the whole Church: “It is true that the Church exists primarily in particular Churches (LG 23), but it is also true that it is *in virtue of the Church’s catholicity* (cf LG 13) that the particular Churches exist”.<sup>14</sup>

Engaging with the ever-accelerating shifts of cultures is a key task of *NE*. In this regard, the pastoral program of Pope Francis provides a sharper focus for *NE*. The agenda of *NE* moves from purely catechetical or pedagogical principles towards practical engagement with faith as it is lived today. Pope Francis has led the Church into examining the most complex issues of the modern era, such as family life, sexuality, economic justice, missionary outreach, and ecological concerns. All these issues have localised flavours but they are also held together by a deeper level of human convergence and the interconnected vision of the Gospel. In Francis’ vision, the Christian response to world of cultures is shaped by a “revolution of tenderness” and an evangelising mercy.<sup>15</sup> The distinctions of interculturality are dissolved in a hermeneutic of Christian love.

As Bosch might point out, the “new” attached to “evangelisation” is an indication of another paradigm shift in the relationship between faith and culture. The term *NE* reinforces that context shapes the nature of evangelisation and mission. For over a generation, this has been a dominant theme for Australian theologians. The following sections of this chapter explore and analyse this theological agenda through the previously outlined four dimensions of mystagogical evangelisation.

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<sup>13</sup> Cruz, “Interculturality as Pedagogy”.

<sup>14</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 457.

<sup>15</sup> EG, 88. “The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.”



### 6.3 AWARENESS: A MYSTAGOGY OF CULTURAL LIFE

Culture is a complex reality which forms narratives of common experience and collective expression. “Culture is the vital space within which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel”.<sup>16</sup> Les Murray’s observation that the whole cannot be described but only evoked through common expressions and familiar references is pertinent to this point. Societies share “a rough but poignant sense of the reality we live in, a sort of signature tune only partly in words, made of common experiences and family references”.<sup>17</sup>

Mystagogy is an evangelisation by evocation. It requires an ear for signature tunes which comprise the constant refrains of culture. It also requires an ear for the “rests” and “pauses” in the rhythm; the off-beats of dissonance. Culture is not a steady rhythm but a festival of many styles and forms of accompaniment. There is not one main stage of performance, but a plenitude of cultural expressions and identities which contribute to a greater whole. This is the dynamic cultural relationship from which the Church both emerges and engages. There is a shifting cultural horizon to be negotiated, as identified in *GS*:

Today’s spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution [...] The human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one.<sup>18</sup>

This “dynamic” and “evolutionary” understanding of cultural transformation is analogous to Taylor’s ‘cultural’ theory of the progression of modernity.<sup>19</sup> There is no “neutral

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<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Les A. Murray, *The Quality of Sprawl: Thoughts about Australia* (Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1999), 170.

<sup>18</sup> *GS*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity”, *The Hastings Center Report* 25, no. 2 (March-April, 1995): 24-33. Taylor offers two theories: a “cultural reading” and an “acultural reading”. In a “cultural” reading of modernity, cultures are transformed by means of movement from one “set of meanings” to another; while, in an “acultural” reading, a “traditional” society declines and is replaced by a “modern” society through the growth of reason or knowledge (24). This progress is considered as an historical, “rational or social operation” which is “cultural-neutral” (25). In the ‘cultural’ reading, modernity is understood as a process of the cultural transformation of “background” meanings and understandings (28). The “accultural” reading of modernity assumes that the project of modernity has a specific outcome; which is the “dissipation” of a primitive world which is progressively replaced by a modern world of reason and technology. On the other hand, the “cultural” reading

self-understanding”.<sup>20</sup> There is only a “dense constellation of background understanding” which shifts in connection to fundamental understandings of one’s “relation to others and the good”.<sup>21</sup> This “dense constellation of background understanding”, the signature tunes to which Murray alludes, transforms notions of embodied and social space, relationships and common good in ways which were inconceivable by previous Australian generations. This chapter attempts to trace a course through the “dense constellation” of background understandings in Australian culture, and engage with the dynamic and evolutionary cultural concepts of personhood, society, the search for meaning and the service of the good common. The aim is to identify social spaces for mystagogical engagement which will be outlined in the following chapter.

Noel Rowe offers a note of caution regarding a theological search for “themes”, or the “dense constellations of background understanding” in culture, and more sharply, in literature. Rowe warns that there is a tendency to harmonise such literary themes with theological agendas, and argues that such desire for thematic convergence can lead to “the crucifixion of meaning”.<sup>22</sup> Rowe nominates three challenges to a theological survey of cultural themes:

- Firstly, the importance of “a dialogue with postmodern texts which, in various ways, enact the ‘death of God’;
- Secondly, “a realisation that the religious imagination (as distinct from the theological imagination) can need its demons as well as its angels”;
- Thirdly, “an awareness that literature is not simply a storehouse of themes (theological or otherwise)”.<sup>23</sup>

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takes into account that the embodied and imaginative human experience of the social and collective space does not “evolve” in a singular progressive movement, but is transferred from one “constellation” of meaning to another, 29-30.

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity”, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity”, 32-3.

<sup>22</sup> Noel Rowe, “Are There Really Angels in Carlton? Australian Literature and Theology”, *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 6, no. 2 (1993): 164.

<sup>23</sup> Rowe, “Australian Literature and Theology”, 142.

Rowe's overarching point is that cultural narratives can and do espouse "the potential for spiritual greatness" but often in ways which leave "conventional Christian theology" uncomfortable.<sup>24</sup> Uncomfortable as conventional Christian theology may be with subversive spiritual narratives, these create no barrier to a mystagogical engagement with cultural conversations. Indeed, subversion of theological and spiritual conformity is the narrative territory of the gospels and the signature of Divine activity and speech which disturbs perceived reality. Rowe appeals for the broadening of the "selection of stories" which strengthen theological options for dialogue with Australian culture and negotiate "difference" in transformative ways.<sup>25</sup> Taking Rowe's cautions into account, the observations in the following two chapters will be alert to spaces of dislocation, dissonance and disruption in Australian cultural imagination. These spaces of fraught or silent conversation also speak of the potential for spiritual and theological maturation.

There is a considerable amount of literature which strives to describe the cultural situation of the present moment. Demographical trends are increasingly shaping sociological and religious assumptions, and much of this literature tends to include analysis based on demographic scales: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation I.<sup>26</sup> This would appear to suggest that there is not only a "gap" between Gospel and culture, but also "generational gaps within the gap" which create an increasingly complex social reality.

Often described as a secular or "post-Christian" society, the Australian cultural horizon is much more ambivalent. As noted earlier, it is more accurate to describe Australian culture as pluralist rather than boldly secular. Girard's contention that cultures are inherently

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<sup>24</sup> Rowe, "Australian Literature and Theology", 144.

<sup>25</sup> Rowe, "Australian Literature and Theology", 157.

<sup>26</sup> See Rymarz, "A Fork in the Road"; "Lost Generation: The Cultures of Gen X Catholics", *The Australasian Catholic Record* 81, no. 2 (2004): 259-71; Rymarz and John Graham, "Drifting from the Mainstream: the Religious Identity of Australian Core Catholic Youth", *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11, no. 3 (2006): 371-83; "Australian Core Catholic Youth, Catholic Schools and Religious Education", *British Journal of Religious Education* 28, no. 1 (2006): 79-89; Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton, and Ruth Webber, "The Spirituality of Young Australians", *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 12, no. 2 (2007): 149-63; Rymarz, "The Evangelisation of Younger Catholics in Secular Cultures", *Compass* 49, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 20-28.

forged by violence crafted by mimetic desires offer a particular historical perspective on Australian cultural forces. The unresolved wounds of the dispossession of the First Peoples have left an amnesiac void in the Australian collective memory. While dispossession is broadly acknowledged, the details remain expunged from the conversation. In Kate Grenville's novel, *The Secret River*, the aftershock of the murder of an Indigenous tribe by early settlers stains the soil with blood and silence:

The sun hardened around them. The clearing had a broken look, the bodies lying like so much fallen timber, the dirt trampled and marked with dark stains. And a great shocked silence hanging over everything.<sup>27</sup>

In Grenville's prose, this silence is both relational and spatial. For those responsible, "a space of silence" had "taken up residence with them", and "made a little shadow, the thing not spoken of".<sup>28</sup> For the land on which the massacre, and the subsequent bonfire of burning bodies took place, something irrevocable "had happened to the dirt in that spot so that not so much a blade of grass had grown there ever since".<sup>29</sup> There was a story needing to be told in this lifeless, silent vacuum: "Nothing was written on the ground. Nor was it written on any page. But the blankness itself might tell the story to anyone who had eyes to see".<sup>30</sup> A mystagogical evangelisation seeks to read and engage with these hidden "texts" and "webs of significance" of culture.

Australia is an ancient land with a Western culture imported with the first European settlers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Donald Horne's famous epitaph that Australia was a "lucky country" has become a vernacular statement of privilege rather than its original intention of sobering indictment.<sup>31</sup> As if to prove Horne's original point, the term "the lucky country" is

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<sup>27</sup> Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2005), 309.

<sup>28</sup> Grenville, *The Secret River*, 324.

<sup>29</sup> Grenville, *The Secret River*, 325.

<sup>30</sup> Grenville, *The Secret River*.

<sup>31</sup> In 1964, Donald Horne wrote, "Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people's ideas, and, although its ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise. A nation more

frequently used as a valedictory to prosperity and the gifts of fate. Decades on from Horne's original commentary, the Australian cultural landscape has changed significantly through immigration, social evolution, economic prosperity and globalisation.

More pronounced than in previous generations, pluralism and secularisation have become the dominant socialising forces. At the same time, religion – and not only Christianity – continues to play a considerable role in the political and social milieu of contemporary culture. Australia is “lucky” in the sense that it manages to hold together societal extremes in a relatively harmonious cultural atmosphere, less through determined effort and more through instinctive expectations of the necessary minimum requirements of social cohesion. There are strong values that mark Australian society, and these have a distinctly Christian flavour, even if the pluralist soul of the nation would find this difficult to acknowledge.

Immigration continues the process of evolution of Australia's cultural milieu. Figures in 2015 demonstrate that the number of Australian's born overseas “has hit its highest peak in 120 years” with 28% of the general population being born elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> Multicultural strategies have been the backbone of Australia's political and social models of cultural synthesis for many decades. This has not always been the case, as for the first half of the twentieth century (and prior), Australia's political leaders endorsed a “White Australia Policy”.<sup>33</sup>

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concerned with styles of life than with achievement has managed to achieve what may be the most evenly prosperous society in the world. It has done this in a social climate largely inimical to originality and the desire for excellence (except in sport) and in which there is less and less acclamation of hard work. According to the rules Australia has not deserved its good fortune.” Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country* (Melbourne: Terra Nova, 1964), 220.

<sup>32</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Media Release: Overseas born Aussies hits a 120 year peak”, (29<sup>th</sup> January, 2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/latestProducts/3412.0Media%20Release12013-14> on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Prior to Federation, colonial laws limited migration. One of the first pieces of the legislation to pass in the new National Parliament was the Immigration Restriction Act, 1901, which restricted the migration of non-Europeans into the Commonwealth. After the Second World War, a more open immigration policy was gradually introduced by successive federal governments.

Even so, the privileged place of a “white, male, Anglo-Saxon” mono-cultural history, told through “the general Australian pantheon of failed heroes from the convicts, to the goldiggers, explorers, the drovers and the shearers, reaching its fully fledged maturity in the First World War with the Anzacs” is far from a complete picture.<sup>34</sup> As Lars Jensen explains, this mythology excludes the variety of those who have contributed to a richer picture of Australian identity:

First of all it excludes women and Aborigines from both being representative and from exerting any influence on the form given to ‘Australian identity’. Secondly, such a cast of national heroes disregards the fact that most people, also in Australian colonial times, were actually urbanised, and thirdly, it leaves out the fact that if one were to accept these hero-types they did not include [...] Aboriginal war heroes, Chinese bushrangers, and goldiggers from all over the world.<sup>35</sup>

In contemporary Australia, to be Australian is also to embrace one’s cultural heritage. This evolving pluralism also has socio-political consequences. Former “tribal” loyalties and affiliations have been displaced by newer expressions of belonging. Laksiri Jayasuriya describes this as a movement from a “cultural” citizenship to a “political” citizenship. Jayasuriya notes that the “Achilles heel of Australian multiculturalism has been the nagging fear of the possibility of social conflict, fragmentation and disharmony” which has the potential to be exploited by its opponents.<sup>36</sup>

New modes of multiculturalism promote “democratic pluralism” which strives “to safeguard and protect the rights of ‘minorities’ to participate as full and equal members of society”.<sup>37</sup> This new multiculturalism recognises “minorities” rather than “ethnic groups”.<sup>38</sup> This form of political pluralism is premised “on the existence of a ‘shared political culture’” which “allows for a ‘differentiated citizenship’ (or a multicultural citizenship) which is

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<sup>34</sup> Lars Jensen, *Unsettling Australia: Readings in Australian Cultural History* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2005), 136.

<sup>35</sup> Jensen, *Unsettling Australia*, 136-7.

<sup>36</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, “Australian Multiculturalism Reframed”, *Australian Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (May-June 2008): 27.

<sup>37</sup> Jayasuriya, “Australian Multiculturalism Reframed”, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Jayasuriya, “Australian Multiculturalism Reframed”.

socially integrative and acknowledges the reality of a society differentiated by gender, class, and ethnicity”.<sup>39</sup> This new mode of “differentiated citizenship” is apparent in the social discourse of almost every aspect of social and political life from questions of equal marriage, procreation and family, education, health, government funding for religious organisations, economic policy, and ecological concern. It can also be measured by membership of political parties and social institutions.<sup>40</sup> This shift demonstrates an attempt to negotiate the postmodern “fissures” in cultures.

These developments also transform the face of local churches and parochial communities. In Coleridge’s words, being Catholic in Australia today “no longer means belonging to an Anglo-Celtic tribe”.<sup>41</sup> Ethnic communities bring a new vitality to the Church, provide personnel for lay and ordained leadership, and stretch the Catholic imagination in more dynamic and holistic directions. The ethnic presence in Catholic schools, parishes and seminaries re-invigorates these institutions.

The on-going success of Australia’s great multicultural project is not a given. As racial and religious tensions become more apparent, and populist rhetoric of assimilation finds wider channels of communication and reception, it is no longer assured that cultural acceptance will continue as a general standard. Nor can it be presumed that ethnic communities will continue to inject the local churches with renewed vigour in future generations, with a similar slide into diminished participation through secularism probable though not inevitable.

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<sup>39</sup> Jayasuriya, "Australian Multiculturalism Reframed".

<sup>40</sup> By way of example: “Politics used to be truly a mass movement. There was a time when every thinking adult must have considered picking a team. Nowadays, those of us carrying a membership card are few and far between and getting rarer every year. Membership in both the ALP and Liberal parties peaked mid-last century at about 350,000 members. At today’s population, that would be something like a million members each. In reality, both the major parties have memberships estimated at about 50,000. (The parties no longer publish membership numbers, presumably out of embarrassment).” Colin Jacobs, "Politics: Pick a Team and Play", *The Sydney Morning Herald* 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/politics-pick-a-team-and-play-20100816-126f3.html#ixzz3oJkZ79yV> on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Coleridge, "A Different Fire", 136.

The Church's participation in Australia's social life as both an example and source of cultural diversity offers a particular form of witness. The Catholic Church is a great contributor to Australian social life as a provider of educational formation, a voice of conscience for economic equity, employment and social justice, a concerned partner in the work of social welfare and the pursuit of the common good, and for care of the natural and human environment. By engaging with the social fabric of the nation, the Church continues to propose the Gospel to a culture in transition.

One of the differentiating features of the Australian cultural landscape is its egalitarian and open spirit. While there are some degrees of hierarchy in the social make-up, Australians maintain a generally horizontal view of status and rank.<sup>42</sup> Historian John Hirst names this social egalitarian spirit as a "democracy of manners".<sup>43</sup> With a poet's observant eye, Murray summarises this as "the proletarian evolution" which "is more a matter of manners and style than one of politics".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> It has often been commented that Australian culture suffers from the "Tall Poppy Syndrome"; i.e. those who are viewed as successful and rise above general standards are often criticised or 'de-merited' because of this success. As an example of degrees of social hierarchy, elite sportsmen hold a particular privileged place in Australian culture. While female elite athletes are recognised, they do not achieve the same economic reward or social standing. The political class is generally looked upon with cynicism. Intellectuals, academics, scientists and researchers rarely achieve the status of 'cultural icons', as do elite male athletes. Economic divides are becoming more pronounced, as a report in 2015 found: "In a country that prides itself on its egalitarian traditions, the reality of income and wealth inequality in Australia comes as a shock to many [...] The Report has found that there is a big gap in incomes and wealth between different groups in society. A person in the top 20% income group receives around five times as much income as a person in the bottom 20%. A person in the top 20% wealth group has a staggering 70 times as much wealth as a person in the bottom 20%. The Report also finds that these gaps are widening. Over the last 20 years the share of income going to those at the top has risen, while the share flowing to those in the middle and at the bottom has declined. The same is true for wealth, with the bottom and middle having lost ground to those at the top. The wealth of the top 20% wealth group increased by 28% over the period from 2004 to 2012, while by comparison the wealth of the bottom increased by just 3%." Ro Evans et al., "Inequality in Australia: A Nation Divided", in *Poverty and Inequality in Australia* (Sydney: Australian Council of Social Service, 2015), 8.

<sup>43</sup> John Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2005), 301-2.

"Australians treat each other as equals. This is the egalitarianism they have perfected. Australian democracy is first of all a democracy of manners [...] Australians blot out differences when people meet face to face. They talk to each other as if they are equals and they will put down anyone claiming social superiority. It is the feel of Australian society that is so markedly egalitarian, not its social structure [...] The democracy of manners is a precious achievement. One of the reasons people fought for democracy was that they wanted respect for ordinary people, that they should not be humiliated and scorned. Australians achieved that outside politics and their egalitarianism is more deep-seated and genuine because it is not a political doctrine."

<sup>44</sup> Murray, *The Quality of Sprawl*, 41.



For some, this egalitarian spirit is viewed as a negative or a lacuna which influences religious practice. This spirit of openness was noted as contributing to “a crisis of faith” in the Curial “Statement of Conclusions” following the *ad limina* meeting with the Australian bishops in 1998.<sup>45</sup> In a positive light, however, this spirit can be viewed as an important connecting point with the spirit of the Gospel.<sup>46</sup> The Roman assessment of a geographical crisis of faith was again highlighted in 2005 when Benedict XVI commented that the “so-called ‘great’ Churches seem to be dying” and this was “true particularly in Australia”.<sup>47</sup> The degree to which the Church in Australia could be said to be ‘dying’ would be no more accelerated or “particular” to Australia than in other Western nations. It may be that Australian tastes for institutional churches are historically less developed than European nations.

While there is a “social egalitarianism”, there is also an “experiential egalitarianism” in which humour functions as a filter to level out the highs and lows of life. Australians’ irreverent and laconic sense of humour is the easy ability “to laugh at venerated things, and at awesome and deadly things.”<sup>48</sup> Murray concludes that at the base of this irreverence is “a spiritual laughter, a mirth that puts tragedy, futility and vanity alike in their place”.<sup>49</sup> This might indicate one of the barriers to exploring a sense of the sacred in the Australian psyche. The proclamation of the Christian message necessarily incorporates suffering, death and resurrection, dimensions of life which Australian ironic wit dismisses with pragmatic

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<sup>45</sup> “The tolerance characteristic of Australian society naturally affects the Church also. While it has many positive elements, tolerance of and openness to all opinions and perspectives on the truth can lead to indifference, to the acceptance of any opinion or activity as long as it does not impact adversely on other people. It can also lead to a reluctance in claiming that any particular affirmation, belief or conviction is true.” *Final Conclusions of the Interdicasterial Meeting of the Roman Curia with a Representation of Bishops from the Episcopal Conference of Australia*, (14<sup>th</sup> December, 1998), 4. Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20000630\\_dichiarazione-vescovi-australiani%20\\_It.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20000630_dichiarazione-vescovi-australiani%20_It.html) on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” See also Colossians 3:11.

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, “Address to the Diocesan Clergy of Aosta”, (25<sup>th</sup> July, 2005). Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/july/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20050725\\_diocesi-aosta.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050725_diocesi-aosta.html) on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Murray, *The Quality of Sprawl*, 26-7.

<sup>49</sup> Murray, *The Quality of Sprawl*, 27.

indifference. The most central elements of Christian proclamation are flattened into minor inconveniences and common embarrassments through a habit of casual dryness.

It is often said that Australian is the land of the “fair go”.<sup>50</sup> A “fair go” is recognised as a valued marker of Australian culture, yet it is mostly left undefined. It is more honoured by its ubiquitous usage, than in actuality. The political solutions to the relatively small flow of asylum seekers and refugees expose a dark heart that is far from the espoused principle of a “fair go”.<sup>51</sup> Jesuit priest, Frank Brennan, acknowledges this failure in terms of the nation’s juridical responsibilities and moral obligations: The “secure national borders for a country as geographically and jurisprudentially isolated as Australia confronts an enormous moral challenge, and [Australian is] falling short, badly and selfishly.”<sup>52</sup> The gnawing, fearful residue of social transplantation is often exploited by self-serving political discourse which exposes the unsettled negotiation of people and place.

“Mateship”, the roots of which Murray describes as the “great ‘folk’ discovery” of the writers and poets of the late nineteenth century, levels out and softens any sense of hierarchy and class structure.<sup>53</sup> “Mateship” forms the basis of a “secular creed” for some, epitomised in Nick Dyrenfurth’s book which analyses ‘mateship’ through various religious evocations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> One survey in 2007 found that “91% of Australians believe that ‘a fair go for all’ is an important Australian value”. However, this term remained undefined. Australian Council of Social Service, “A Fair Go for All Australians (International Comparisons, 2007): Ten Essentials”, (Sydney: Australian Council of Social Service, 2007), 1.

<sup>51</sup> In 1992, Mandatory Detention was introduced for those who arrive in Australia without a valid visa. In 2001, the Australian Government introduced offshore processing of asylum claims. This continues as Australian government policy, raising concerns for the health and well-being of those seeking asylum. *The New York Times* wrote an editorial critical of the policies of the former Prime Minister Tony Abbott in September, 2015: “Prime Minister Tony Abbott has overseen a ruthlessly effective effort to stop boats packed with migrants, many of them refugees, from reaching Australia’s shores. His policies have been inhumane, of dubious legality and strikingly at odds with the country’s tradition of welcoming people fleeing persecution and war. Since 2013, Australia has deployed its navy to turn back boats with migrants, including asylum seekers, before they could get close to its shores. “Editorial: Australia’s Brutal Treatment of Migrants”, *The New York Times* 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2015. Retrieved from: [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/03/opinion/australias-brutal-treatment-of-migrants.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/03/opinion/australias-brutal-treatment-of-migrants.html?_r=0) on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Frank Brennan, “What I Believe: The Inviolable Inherent Dignity of Aylan Kurdi”, (*Festival of Dangerous Ideas*, Sydney Opera House: *Eureka Street*, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=45430#.VhMzSVLsm00> on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Murray, *The Quality of Sprawl*, 182.

<sup>54</sup> Nick Dyrenfurth, *Mateship: A Very Australian History* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2015). See contents page: The four parts to the book are given religious terms: Part I: Genesis; Part II: Scripture; Part III: Crusades; Part IV:

The term, however, endorses forms of exclusion: the feminine, the alien, the outsider, the critic. “Mateship”, a term intended to describe the greater bonds of social concord and equanimity, more easily enshrines narrow views of political history, social cohesion, moral norms, and embedded behaviours. “Mateship”, as a form of male socialisation, is insufficient as a basis for moral, ethical or social transformation or subversion.

Australian “religious” expressions are apparent outside of religious institutions. One of the most prominent “signature tunes” of Australian social discourse is the myth of the Anzac. Girard’s view that religious rituals moderate the innate violence within cultures is clearly demonstrable in this socio-historical narrative. Anzac Day provides a critical eye into the role of violence which establishes a sacralised and religious cultural language directed towards social identity.<sup>55</sup> The thematics, rituals, linguistic structures of Anzac Day can teeter dangerously towards idolatry. Year after year, the Anzacs are rhetorically sent over the trenches again as a form of “human sacrifice to the reigning cultural idols” serving to maintain, rather than to question, “the root of violence”.<sup>56</sup>

Religion, as defined by Emile Durkheim, “is in a word the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence”.<sup>57</sup> The Anzac myth serves to condense a secular expression of latent religious values. The mythology and ritualised commemoration of Anzac Day functions as a substitute for religion in the Australian consciousness and thereby becomes the “system of

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Reformation. Former Prime Minister, John Howard, wished to include the term in a proposed preamble to the Constitution: “Australians are free to be proud of their country and heritage, free to realise themselves as individuals, and free to pursue their hopes and ideals. We value excellence as well as fairness, independence as dearly as mateship.” He stated that “mateship” had a “hallowed place in the Australian lexicon”. Negative reaction to this attempt highlighted that it did not speak of “inclusion” to everyone. “Mateship” enshrined an Anglo-Saxon, male perspective of Australia. See Dyrenfurth, *Mateship*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Anzac Day is commemorated annually on April 25. It recalls the landing at Gallipoli in Turkey by Australian and New Zealand troops during WWI, and the ultimate withdrawal from the Peninsular some nine months later, after suffering severe casualties during the campaign. It is frequently spoken of as the “birth” of the Australian nation. It is also critiqued as a militarisation of Australian history.

<sup>56</sup> Kelly, “From Cultural Images to Historical Reality: Questions Arising”, in *Developing an Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Strathfield: St. Pauls Publications, 1999), 68.

<sup>57</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John. A Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1951), 312.

symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself” and marks “the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence”.

The revival of the “spirit of the Anzac” in recent decades is in stark contrast to the decline in connection to institutionalised religion. Anzac Day is spoken of as a “sacred day”. It is invested with language of remembrance, blood, sacrifice, pilgrimage and observance. Despite this weighty terminology, it is “light with signifiers of standard [or recognisable] religious rhetoric”.<sup>58</sup> Australians “embrace the notion and power of the sacred in Anzac” but “mostly refuse its religious dimensions”.<sup>59</sup>

Graham Seal points out that in the political and social debates, especially during the 1920s, Anzac Day became referred to as “the 53<sup>rd</sup> Sunday”.<sup>60</sup> The language of “the 53<sup>rd</sup> Sunday” imbued it with a quasi-religious status.<sup>61</sup> Anzac Day is a clear illustration of Girard’s portrayal of violence as formative of human culture and religious ritual. In the standard rhetorical imagery associated with the day, the young, innocent Anzacs are sacrificial victims of nationhood, from whose blood a national identity and character were born.

Seal refutes the idea that Australia is a “post-Christian nation” as a “misreading based on the extremely low-key nature of religious expression”.<sup>62</sup> The Anzac myth, which is itself a conflation, contortion, and compromise of history, stirs, expresses and consolidates the

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<sup>58</sup> Graham Seal, “ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular”, in *Sacred Australia: Post-Secular Considerations*, ed. Makarand Paranjape (Melbourne: Clouds of Magellan, 2009), 210.

<sup>59</sup> Seal, “ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular”.

<sup>60</sup> Seal, “ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular”, 214-17.

<sup>61</sup> A suggested “Prayer of Remembrance” for the Anzac Day ceremony retains Christian language and references the fruits of a “sacralised violence”: “God of love and liberty, we bring our thanks this day for the peace and security we enjoy, which was won for us through the courage and devotion of those who gave their lives in time of war. We pray that their labour and sacrifice may not be in vain, but that their spirit may live on in us and in generations to come. That the liberty, truth and justice which they sought to preserve may be seen and known in all the nations upon earth. This we pray in the name of the one who gave his life for the sake of the world, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” Retrieved from:

<http://www.anzacday.org.au/anzacservices/adcommemservice/prayers.html> on 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Seal, “ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular”, 223. The 2011 Australian census identified 68.3% who nominated holding some form of religious affiliation. A further 9% failed to answer the question or answer it adequately. As stated earlier, 22.7% stated “no religion”. The question regarding religious affiliation is the only non-compulsory question on the quinquennial Australian census.

Australian spirit in a manner which is both a-religious and thoroughly religious. Without the appropriation religious language, the Anzac myth would need to invent its own. Ironically, with religious vocabulary, Anzac Day is able to express its a-religious character. Such is the spiritualised paradox of the commemoration. As Seal concludes:

The popular preference for any religious belief to be demonstrated through selfless acts rather than through conventional observations and expressions of piety is at the root of the sacred secular ambivalence of our central myth of nation [...] The invocation of the sacred through the doggedly secular is a characteristically Australian mode of observance.<sup>63</sup>

Anzac Day is one example of how cultural myths re-invent themselves in order to perform the function of religion and provide a deliberately-constructed social consciousness in Australia. The literary creation of the Australian bushman of the nineteenth century became the mythic Anzac digger of the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> In the early twenty-first century, the Anzac mythology continues to provide a malleable narrative to address times of adversity and misfortune.<sup>65</sup> It also reveals that religious instincts are never far from the surface in Australian life. A history of sectarianism and religious hostility has been a decisive factor in Australians' tendency to choose social harmony above outward displays of religiosity. This annual display of "sacredness" is quite sufficient for many Australians. Rather than generating a turn towards the transcendent, Anzac Day reassures many that an annual commitment (which can also be paralleled through church attendance at Christmas and Easter) fulfils our obligation to something Greater.

Through various lenses and measures, an ambivalent cultural picture of Australia emerges. On the surface, it would seem that connections with the formal, public and institutional dimensions of religious practice are declining. Secular expressions of ritual find

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<sup>63</sup> Seal, "ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular".

<sup>64</sup> Seal, "ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular", 221-2.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Seal notes the manner in which Anzac Day rituals and language were used in the ceremonies following the Bali terrorist bombings in 2002 which claimed the lives of 88 Australians. There were 202 recorded fatalities in total. See Seal, "ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular", 217-8.

a footing in the cultural mind. The cultural prejudice against formalised religion will demand creative forms of community connection and invitational thresholds which leave open the possibility of deeper involvement in the Church community.

#### 6.4 REFLECTION: A MYSTAGOGY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Australia's uneasy link with institutionalised religion cannot be separated from its Enlightenment foundation. At the time of colonisation, the "material" world was at the forefront, "not in the sense of preoccupation with the accumulation of wealth", but in "the sense of an overwhelming concern with the physical, the here and now".<sup>66</sup>

The first European settlers and missionaries found Australia an alien land and a religious wasteland.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, Indigenous spiritualities saw the land as full of sacred sites. The new land would not easily be tamed by rituals and festivities belonging to an old homeland.<sup>68</sup> The age of the Enlightenment coincided with European settlement, and from this standpoint, Australia was understood as "largely 'born free'".<sup>69</sup>

Gascoigne and Curthoys describe the three-way partnership forged between European settlement, the Enlightenment and Christianity:

<sup>66</sup> Ian Turner, *The Australian Dream: A Collection of Anticipations about Australia from Captain Cook to the Present Day* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968), ix. Quoted in Frame, *Losing My Religion*, 69.

<sup>67</sup> Australian religious historians frequently quote this appraisal of the spiritual desolation in new colony by Scottish Presbyterian Minister, James Denney as "the most godless place under heaven". Quoted in Frame, *Losing My Religion*, 43.

<sup>68</sup> John Gascoigne and Patricia Curthoys, *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 34.

<sup>69</sup> "Traditional forms of Christianity linked with public festival and ceremony gave way, in the Australian context, to more private manifestations of religion making the separation of church and state seem more natural and inevitable [...] Australia's European beginnings dated from a time of post-revolutionary 'desacralisation of the European world' with the result that religion was less a matter of custom and ritual and more institutionalised and intellectualised in character as it sought to appeal to personal belief and commitment. In many senses, then, the forms of religion that clashed with the Enlightenment were eroded or eliminated in Australia. Most importantly, religion did not have the overt support of the secular arm [...] The largely private character of Australian religion meant, then, a society where Enlightenment values could become established with much less of that overt conflict that was evident in many European countries [...] Australia was, from an Enlightenment perspective, largely 'born free' [...] As James Stephen, one of the main architects of the nineteenth-century Colonial Office, put it in a dispatch to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur of Van Diemen's Land in 1824: "The problem with Australia is how to render it Christian, virtuous and enlightened," *Origins of European Australia*. Internal quote from Stephen to Arthur, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1824 cited in Kelvin Grose, "The Educational Experiment of the 1820s: A Study of the Origins, Development and Demise of the New South Wales Clergy and School Lands Corporation" (University of Sydney, 1974), 67.

In Australia, religion and the Enlightenment learnt to coexist and, to some degree, to co-operate in the task of subjugating the strange and distant continent, while reshaping it better to accommodate the needs of its growing European population.<sup>70</sup>

The term “religion” in the above quote implies, more precisely, ‘Christian morality’ as the key ally of the State in the task of subjugation. ‘Religion’ in the Australian consciousness was an adjunct to settlement; a guardian of public and private morality to forge the national character. Institutional religion has been embedded as a socialising force, designed to bring civility to a young colony.<sup>71</sup> This remains a strong generic view among the broader population. In the Australian vernacular, ‘religion’ is often synonymous with morality. Marion Maddox notes that in contemporary political discourse, reference to religion retains this historicised sense of a civilising and stabilising influence:

Although around eighty per cent of Australians seldom or never attend church, many responded not to specific theological ideas but to a general, nostalgic sense of religion as character building and conducive to social order. Many voters perceived these qualities as necessary not for themselves, but for other people.<sup>72</sup>

The missionary seed of the early colonial period has left a residual association of Christianity with moralism and prohibitions. Yet the early colonial period was also a time of significant pastoral activity, practical charity and missionary zeal. Novelist Peter Carey’s tale of the frustrated efforts of Oscar Hopkins, a nineteenth century Church of England minister

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<sup>70</sup> Gascoigne and Curthoys, *Origins of European Australia*.

<sup>71</sup> “The romantic view persists that Irish convicts were largely innocent victims of injustice who treasured their faith as a priceless possession, but the truth is that, apart from a small proportion of rebels and political offenders, many of whom were men of high principle, the great majority of Irish convicts consisted of habitual criminals distinguished from their English fellows only by a greater tendency to violence. Life in the penal colony often brutalised them further: exiles in a strange, wild country, they lived among scourges and fetters in an unnatural society, where prostitution and illegitimacy were the norm, and drunkenness the almost universal refuge. Their spiritual wretchedness shocked the early missionaries; [...] victims, said Bishop Polding, of a system whereby a man ‘loses the heart of a man and gets the heart of a beast.’ Paul Chandler, *James Dempsey and John Butler: Pioneers of Australian Catholicism 1802-1838*, Carmelite Library Papers 2 (Melbourne: Carmelite Communications, 2002), 8. Internal quote from A. M. Grocott, *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1980), 140.

<sup>72</sup> Marion Maddox, “An Argument for More, not Less, Religion in Australian Politics”, *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 22, no. 3 (2009): 346.

who transported a church to rural NSW, paralleled early missionary labours of planting Christianity in this new soil. For the recently-arrived but determined Oscar:

Sydney was a blinding place. It made him squint. The stories of the gospel lay across the harsh landscape like sheets of newspaper on a polished floor. They slid, slipped, did not connect to anything beneath them. It was a place without moss or lichen, and the people scrambled to make a place, like troops caught under fire on hard soil.<sup>73</sup>

Missionary patience would be required. The search for meaning would need to gradually unfold. The new land would be understood as a place of strange proportions. ‘Religion’ and ‘spirituality’ remain competing forces in the social imagination. That which religion encloses, spirituality discloses. That which religion codifies, spirituality frees. Spirituality is most often understood as the opposite to religion: open, non-creedal, personal and eclectic.

Institutional religion and spirituality are not readily understood as companions in popular rhetoric. Carey’s description of the land as “hard soil” for the religious imagination to take root in is a recurring plot in much social and cultural discourse. Not unlike the biblical world, imagery of land looms large in the geography of spirituality and the search for meaning and place in the Australian context. Three key themes of land can be discerned in historical and cultural narratives:

- land as conflicted space;
- land as liminal space;
- land as relational space.

Each of these themes serve as prompts to reflection in the Australian consciousness, and offer mystagogical bridges to deeper conversations about spirituality, the search for place and the experience of transcendence.

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, 2001 ed. (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988), 300.



Land is understood here as an analogy of the relationship to earth, water, sky, light (and darkness) and all living things. For tens of thousands of years, the First Peoples discerned and imagined the land as sacred. Sacred spaces connect the landscape with the Dreamtime, the time of creation and birth. This evocation of the transcendent depths of the air, earth, sea and fire is fundamental to Aboriginal culture. To Indigenous people the land “is full of the spirits, thoughts and deeds of creative forces”, and where the “spirits of the ancestors of all human, plant and animal life are represented in the land forms”.<sup>74</sup> To the European mind, the land was large, empty and strange. Far from being a sacred space, the hard, dry soil proved to be difficult ground in which to plant religious festivals and rituals.<sup>75</sup> It proved to be a *conflicted space*.

Anthony Kelly identifies the land as one of a number of “limit-situations” which “make us recast our interpretation of everyday experience and provide an opening for a more genuine faith”.<sup>76</sup> Kelly doesn’t define what “a more genuine faith” might mean, but the term “limit-situation” describes the philosophical, social and physical symbols which confine reason, imagination and physicality. “Limit-situations” are the boundaries of conversation, the places where language falls silent. Of the limits of the land, Kelly acknowledges the sustained struggle to engage with “the vastness and silence and menace of the land”:

The land emerges as a symbol of the journey that all Australians must make to some centre, away from the noise and business of the periphery, to the silence and dispossession of the interior. Once we have lived in the whole land, we might more worthily occupy it with purified spirituality.<sup>77</sup>

This insight also speaks of the violence and brutality of the “dispossession of the interior” which implies more than geography. The relative harmony with which Indigenous cultures lived with the land was cast aside with European settlement. The land was seen not

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<sup>74</sup> Patrick Dodson, “The Land our Mother, the Church our Mother”, in *Discovering An Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1988), 83.

<sup>75</sup> Gascoigne and Curthoys, *Origins of European Australia*, 34.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”, *Compass Theology Review* 12, no. 2 (1978): 6.

<sup>77</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”, 6-7.

as “mother” or “sustainer” but as “property” and “resource”. In Grenville’s novel, this conflicted space is sketched powerfully in an exchange between an Indigenous man, Jack, and powerful landowner, William Thornhill, a beneficiary of dispossession. A “pang” of dislocation is felt by Thornhill as Jack claims a spiritual partnership with the land, “*This me, he said. My place*”. Thornhill’s emptiness was recognition that Jack’s connection with place would never been known by him:

He would have said he had everything a man could want. But there was an emptiness as he watched Jack’s hand caressing the dirt. There was something he did not have: a place that was part of his flesh and spirit. There was no part of the world he would keep coming back to, the way Jack did, just to feel it under him. It was as if the very dirt was a consolation.<sup>78</sup>

An ancient partnership had been broken. Pope Francis, in continuity with previous Church statements, has linked “intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation” with the unravelling of “the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community”.<sup>79</sup> This is true of an Australian context, not only for the Indigenous population, but also for many regional and rural communities which suffer from the depletion of natural and social resources. Land has been a source of profit and gain, often at the expensive of the social capital needed to sustain a healthy environment.

The damaged relationship between the colonisers and the Indigenous population continues to be a wound in the nation’s heart: “All Australians have inherited a tragic history”.<sup>80</sup> Attempts to import European religious institutions and impose them upon Aboriginal cultures met with limited success, while also causing new forms of harm and

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<sup>78</sup> Grenville, *The Secret River*, 329.

<sup>79</sup> *LS*, 145. See also: Paul VI, *Apostolic Letter: Octogesima Adveniens* (14 May, 1971), 21; John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis: Encyclical Letter at the Beginning of His Papal Ministry* (4<sup>th</sup> March, 1979), 15 (hereafter, *RH*); *Centesimus annus: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum* (1<sup>st</sup> May, 1991), 38; Benedict XVI, “Message for World Day of Peace: *If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*”, (1<sup>st</sup> January, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> Brennan, *Sharing the Country*, 2nd ed. (Ringwood: Penguin, 1994), 148.

dehumanisation. With some exceptions, it has taken time for the European mind to pay attention to the Indigenous religious instinct.

John Harris acknowledges the ignorance of the early Christian missionaries of the depths of Indigenous spiritualities. Few understood that Indigenous communities inhabited a spiritual world and that they “were possibly the most religious of people”.<sup>81</sup> The Indigenous people recognised that they were caught in a transcendent, spiritual world which encompassed them. Later settlers would grow to hold a similar spiritual outlook as they encountered “the handiwork of God in the gold of the wattle, the red of the desert, the blue of the sky, in parrot and kangaroo and kookaburra”.<sup>82</sup> Too few European Christians, “recognised that God was here and that he was discernible to Aboriginal people – that they, in their way, were reaching out for” God.<sup>83</sup>

While this is true of the First Peoples, it is also true of secular spiritual seekers who, in their own way, search for what is good and beautiful and true. The hope for evangelisation in an Australian context is to embrace a vision that proceeds from a similar set of assumptions for the whole cultural setting. In a secular culture, evangelisation must begin with an attempt to discern the manner in which the individual, communities, and the culture itself “reaches out in their own way for God”. A mystagogical approach emerges from such discernment and it must also be directed towards genuine healing and justice.

As the moral demand grows for a more harmonious and less exploitative use of land grounded in sustainability, Indigenous spiritualities serve to re-frame our relationship with the natural environment. The landmark speech of John Paul II in 1986 at Alice Springs recognised the strong spirituality of the Indigenous culture:

You lived your lives in spiritual closeness to the land, with its animals, birds, fishes, waterholes, rivers, hills and mountains. Through your closeness to the

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<sup>81</sup> Harris, *One Blood*, 905.

<sup>82</sup> Harris, *One Blood*.

<sup>83</sup> Harris, *One Blood*.

land you touched the sacredness of man's relationship with God, for the land was the proof of a power in life greater than yourselves.<sup>84</sup>

The land remains a conflicted space. It is a constant reminder of dispossession and the 'stain in the soil', of unmerited gift, of vastness, of danger, of beauty, of degradation, of uncertainty, of exploitation, of economic status, of creatureliness, of powerlessness. It is a theme in Australian culture which evokes and provokes. There is a silent, reflective heart in the Australian consciousness which parallels the vast, geographical silent heart in the centre of the land.<sup>85</sup>

In this sense, the land is also a *liminal space*. The relationship with the land is evolving from 'property' and 'ownership' to 'sustainability' and 'accountability'. Kelly observes that "a new movement, a new connection, a new comprehension of the whole is taking place".<sup>86</sup> Increasingly, the theological, social, political and economic conversation is shifting from identification of the land as asset and resource, to identification of the land as 'creation' as a unified, fragile, ecological gift which requires substantially shifts in the priorities of communities and nations.<sup>87</sup> Global initiatives are now at the forefront of the

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<sup>84</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the Aborigines And Torres Strait Islanders*, Alice Springs (29<sup>th</sup> November, 1986), 4. Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19861129\\_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia_en.html) on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Malone, "The Heart of Australia", *Compass Theology Review* 22, no. 4 (1988): 28. "Australia is blessed with a symbolic heart, the great red monolith in the centre, Uluru. It stands in a motionless, timeless landscape, imaging eternity. Perhaps thrust across the plains by a genesis cataclysm, it stands with majestic strength, a centering place for all to come to [...] Uluru is the articulate heart of Australia. It speaks to all of us [...] Uluru invites Australians to centre themselves, to reflect, to be aware of a presence in our land which transcends ourselves, which is godly. In the desert, the longings of the Australian heart can surface, be expressed and find some hope and reassurance."

<sup>86</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections* (Newtown: E. J. Dwyer, 1993), 5.

<sup>87</sup> In Malone's first project, *Discovering* (1988), the subject of ecology was primarily explored under the heading of "Indigenous theology", through Pat Dodson's contribution, "The Land our Mother, the Church our Mother". In the subsequent project, *Developing* (1999), ecology was linked with cosmology under a subsection, "Issues", in the chapter by Wendy Chew, "Cosmology and Ecology: The Way Ahead", in *Developing an Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Strathfield: St. Pauls, 1999), 189-208. Other examples of this development include: Neil Brown, "Earth and Spirit: A Spirituality For Our Times", *Compass* 37, no. 1 (Autumn 2003), 11-16; "Conscience and the Ecological Crisis", *Compass* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2004), 13-18; Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Changed Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006); Denis Edwards and Geraldine Corridon, *Jesus and the Natural World: Exploring a Christian Approach to Ecology* (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 2012). See also: John Paul II, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*", (1<sup>st</sup>

urgency for political consensus. This transforms regional and geographical concerns into an agenda for “our common home”.<sup>88</sup> In the Australian experience, the land stands as a testament to broken relationships and the calling to renewed visions of human existence and community.

Allied to this is the transcendent pull of landscape. Lonergan described this as a sense of “going beyond”.<sup>89</sup> The mystical, or transcendent, is not an overt dimension of Australia’s character but remains discernible. By mysticism, I refer to Kelly’s description of “a deep awareness of the whole experienced as No-thing – nothing that can be summed up, manipulated, reduced to something else – the mystery which abides”.<sup>90</sup> The Indigenous Dreamtime “lives from people’s experience of the Origin and its all-embracing continuing influence through the sacramentality of the land”.<sup>91</sup>

In the previously noted address of John Paul II to the Indigenous people, he commented on their spiritual instinct aroused by the land: “The silence of the Bush taught you a quietness of soul that put you in touch with another world, the world of God’s Spirit”.<sup>92</sup> “The Silence of the Bush” has touched not only the Indigenous soul, but also the soul of those who have found their own way to this land. In contrast to the high rates of urbanisation in Australia, this mystical sense of space has been a consistent theme in art, poetry, literature, music, film and spiritual writings.<sup>93</sup> The “Silence of the Bush” is an articulation of reverence, and a communion with speechless desire. Eugene Stockton connects this experience with “wonder”. This is the sense of the “wide-eyed child who once explored his or her new world”

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January, 1990); Benedict XVI, “Message for World Day of Peace: *If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*”, and Francis, *Laudato Si’*.

<sup>88</sup> *LS*, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 658. See thesis ch. 1, fn. 56.

<sup>90</sup> Kelly, *A New Imagining*, 119.

<sup>91</sup> Kelly, *A New Imagining*.

<sup>92</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the Aborigines And Torres Strait Islanders*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> In the 2011 census, 88.9% of the population were registered as living in urban Australia, which is identified as “built-up area” of towns and cities of more than 1,000 people. 60% of the population lives in capital cities.

Retrieved from:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30April+2013#back7> on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2015.

and opens a way forward “not only to followers of conventional religion, but also to the agnostic, the unbeliever, the searcher, the carer”.<sup>94</sup>

Frank Fletcher identifies this liminal sense with “primal imagination”. This “primal imagination” responds to “mystical immanence” as a “key element of the project of Australian spirituality” which innately yearns “to belong, to ‘connect’ with the earth” and sense of place.<sup>95</sup> Our understanding of the embodied space creates the imaginative space:

As we are not meant to live as disembodied spirits, so also we are not meant to live without some imaginative (heartfelt) relationship to landscape. We are beings of the physical cosmos.<sup>96</sup>

There is a natural reverence for the created world in the Australian temperament; a reverence of both its beauty and respect for its dangers. This mysticism is not a given, but merely noted as a possibility and a presence in the Australian consciousness. There are any number of modern realities which mitigate against the reception of a mystical sensibility: greater work demands, economic prosperity, ubiquitous technologies, flexibility and ease of travel, increased personal and family commitments, individuality and the fracturing of family and social bonds.<sup>97</sup> However, the sense of “the more” – the “No-thing” – remains a factor in social discourse.<sup>98</sup>

Land also encompasses the geography of relationship. Distance and the resultant need for community also play a dialectic role in the formation of Australian spiritual character. Land is a *relational space* which constructs a sense of place. It is the arena which forges

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<sup>94</sup> Eugene Stockton, *Wonder: A Way to God* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 1998), 18 and 22.

<sup>95</sup> Frank Fletcher, “Imagination for the Australian Spiritual Journey”, in *Developing an Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Strathfield: St Pauls, 1999), 275.

<sup>96</sup> Fletcher, “Imagination for the Australian Spiritual Journey”.

<sup>97</sup> See Andrew Leigh, *Disconnected* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2010), 200. Leigh identifies contributing factors which have eroded social capital – bonds of trust and connection – in recent decades in Australian life. Of these he identifies: “long working hours, the feminisation of the workplace, car commuting, television, impersonal technologies and tipping points”.

<sup>98</sup> Stockton, *Wonder*, 15-16: By way of example, Stockton describes the disposition of the surfer who gazes out toward the horizon and waits for the ultimate wave while allowing other waves to roll by. Stockton calls this “a parable of mystic waiting”.

relationships between individuals, groups or tribes and the wider community. Land is the taut connection between isolation and the creation for national identity.

“Never had a colony been founded so far from its parent state, or in such ignorance of the land it occupied”.<sup>99</sup> The realities of “the tyranny of distance” have produced what Kelly calls “an eerie spiritual nakedness” in the Australian consciousness.<sup>100</sup> It is imprinted in the landscape. The uniqueness of Australia’s flora and fauna is due to its isolation from other land masses. Indigenous culture developed relatively untouched; although there is evidence of significant trading links with South East Asia.<sup>101</sup>

Distance has a particular Australian flavour, shaped by a vast land and a small population. Isolation fashioned many of the Australian people’s deepest geographical, political and cultural concerns. Fearful of either being overrun or left behind, Australia has been menaced by real and imagined enemies. Yet distance also creates an aloofness from global politics and agendas. Distance can quarantine the Australian mind from international pressures and conflicts. Even those who have sought refuge in Australia have done so with this mind; a safe haven at the edge of the world. There is something of a dislocated, unsettled nature to the Australian character crafted by this isolation, which Kelly names as a profound sense of “uprootedness”; a pervading sense of all being “displaced persons,” adrift “from any nurturing tradition characteristic of the older cultures of other countries”.<sup>102</sup> Kelly suggests that the language of “community” in Australian mythic imagery is a form of “protest” against

<sup>99</sup> Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (London: Vintage Books, 1986), 1.

<sup>100</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1966). Kelly, "Theology in an Australian Context", 6.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Taçon and Sally May, "Rock Art Evidence for Macassan–Aboriginal Contact in Northwestern Arnhem Land", ed. Marshall Clark and Sally K. May, *Macassan History and Heritage: Journeys, Encounters and Influences* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013), 135: “One of the most important evidence for the activities of Southeast Asian or ‘Macassan’ visitors to Australia prior to the European settlement of this continent can be found in the rock art of northern Australia — from the Kimberley to the Top End of the Northern Territory to parts of northern Queensland [...] This is the case for the early encounters and ongoing regular interaction between Australian Aboriginal people and Macassans. Rock art illustrates some of this complex, sustained and diverse story. (Fn 2: Following convention, we use the term ‘Macassan’ to refer to those people from Southeast Asia visiting northern Australia as part of the trepang [sea cucumber] industry).” The Macassan traders were Moslem and there is some historical evidence of aspects of Islam being adapted and incorporated into Indigenous spirituality through this commercial contact.

<sup>102</sup> Kelly, *A New Imagining*, 28.

the sense of displacement and dislocation. It also emerges from a desire to belong and to establish “settlement”. Settlement, in the broadest sense, is a process of negotiation between “person” and “place” which requires more than migration and movement from one geographical space to another. It also implies a movement of consciousness, and a resetting of the embodied and social space that one inhabits.<sup>103</sup>

Even in colonisation, Australia was conceived as a penal colony of no return. Europe was far away, a place to be forgotten, distant, and over the horizon. The island was not only geographically a lifetime away from Europe, but also the land itself was incomprehensibly strange, beyond the familiar reference of colonisers’ spatial awareness. Colonising the land involved travelling great distances. Farms were scattered, and settlements were spread along the coastal roads and inland routes. Continental village life, and its associated forms of socialisation, was impossible to replicate in the new land.

Distance creates the necessity for community in particular forms. Waves of migrants have found security within their own communities, including religious communities, until they or their next generation felt the confidence and acceptance to become part of the wider community. Catholicism, in particular, has played a vital role in the emerging, post-Second World War multicultural society, as Europeans migrants found at least something familiar through religious practice in a strange land.

Australia prides itself on its egalitarian, non-hierarchical social structures. There are exceptions to this but the value of community remains paramount as an anecdote to the fear of isolation.<sup>104</sup> In a secular society, “community” is judged by many factors, often hesitating

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<sup>103</sup> See Jensen, *Unsettling Australia*, 135.

<sup>104</sup> As noted earlier, economic disparity demonstrates that the term “egalitarian” can be presumptive and inaccurate. Wealth is one marker of social divide, as is education, and geographical location. This is noted by the Social Determinants of Health Alliance (SDOHA): “Abundant evidence shows that the higher your income or level of education in Australia, the better your health will tend to be. People in the most disadvantaged social groups are also far more likely than those in the higher socioeconomic groups to have long-term physical or mental health problems. They are less able to gain an education or maintain a job to retirement and are more likely to die at a younger age.” Social Determinants of Health Alliance, “Everything But ‘Health’”, in *A Submission to the Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Australia’s Domestic Response to the*



at the threshold of commitment that the Christian concept of community requires. For both the secular and Christian mind, the point of connection for a mutual understanding of “community” is the notion of the common good which shapes the soul of a commonwealth.<sup>105</sup> The desired outcomes of the common good might not always be agreed upon by differing sectors of the community, but nevertheless, the common good does provide the ground for the national conversation.

On this point, John Thornhill recognises that the pursuit of the common good is more than a political task. Authentic common good “looks beyond material efficiency and benefits to a maintaining of the inalienable rights of each person”, which is not an achievement of governments alone, but of “the community as a whole”.<sup>106</sup> As Kelly notes, in an individualistic and fragmented society, the common good can present itself as “more like a truce amongst the selfish rather than a self-transcending concern for the good of all, especially the most defenceless”.<sup>107</sup>

Beyond this selfish truce, the common good is the balance of acknowledging the rights of the individual with a commitment to the betterment of the overall social good. The concept of the common good addresses Taylor’s description of the cultural progression of modernity as the embodied and imaginative shift of the dense constellation of background understanding of one’s relationship to others and the good. The search for meaning, most often expressed through various spiritualities, shapes the public discussion of the common good. In turn, this creates “spiritual meeting places” for a common discussion.

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*World Health Organisation's (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health Report 'Closing the Gap within a Generation' from the Social Determinants of Health Alliance (2012), 3.*

<sup>105</sup> GS, 26. “Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family.”

<sup>106</sup> Thornhill, *Making Australia*, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Kelly, “Hopeful Intelligence”, 22.

The protection of the common good is less a role of governments and more an act of the social imagination. Governments, important as they are in the process, are not sufficient. Promotion of the common good necessarily requires the participation of the broader community, which first requires a broad acceptance of the notion of common good and its fundamental principles. In this increasingly diverse and pluralistic culture, the desire for “community” provides a point of connection which can be explored as a mystagogical bridge between the social instincts of the human person and the Christian vision of just and equitable society.

Land as a relational space also incorporates legal status in the formal juridical sense of ownership, rights and obligations. “Place” is more than a localised concept. “Place” is a living reality which makes a claim over the persons and community, and vice versa. Land Rights and traditional ownership have been major political and social issues in recent Australian history. The “Mabo Case” dispelled the fiction of *terra nullius*.<sup>108</sup> This is a starting point for what will be a long-process of reconciliation. This is also a national spiritual necessity and a Christian obligation. As the moral demand grows for a more harmonious and less exploitative understanding of land use grounded in sustainability, Indigenous spiritualities serve to re-frame our relationship with the land. Juridical rulings have recognised the spiritual and traditional claims of the First Peoples and reordered the relational connection to the “land” of the whole population and its social and political institutions.

The religious dimensions of “reconciliation” are applied to the on-going task of healing the physical, emotional, spiritual and economic wounds brought about by European

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<sup>108</sup> “The Mabo Case” is the generic name given to the High Court decision, handed down on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1992, which resulted in Native Title being acknowledged to peoples of the Murray Islands group in the Torres Strait Island. It led to the *Native Title Act 1993* in Federal Parliament. “Prior to the Mabo decision, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were not recognised as having traditional rights and interests in their land.” See Brennan, *One Land, One Nation: Mabo - Towards 2001* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1995). Quotation from page xi.

settlement. Reconciliation “is both a national task and a personal commitment”.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps no other national agenda encompasses the full range of Australian social and political life as does this process. It is a work of culture and life, as Australians attempt to free the social space to enable proper Indigenous progress in health, education and employment. It is a work of spirituality as Australians seek to learn lessons from the only native spirituality.<sup>110</sup> It is also a work of theological reflection on many levels, as Christians seek to learn from the past and attempt to discern a truly Divine healing of the scar on the nation’s heart. It is certainly a continued work of – often tried and failed - praxis. “Land” as the place of healing is the terrain of the communal pilgrimage to the “interior”. The stained and damaged “land” calls forth a spirit of reconciliation between the ancient dwellers and the new-comers, between people and place, and between creatures and creation.

The search for meaning and place continues to be a strong element of Australian spirituality. The “land” is a primal character of this pilgrimage to meaning and place. It remains a conflicted space, a liminal space and a relational space. Religion, as it has been culturally understood, is often seen to be insufficient, or even an obstacle for such a journey. In contrast, “spirituality”, in smaller and larger guises, is understood to open the horizons of possibility. A mystagogical approach seeks to connect to this landscape of spiritual awareness and offer a pathway towards a more fully religious and communal expression of faith.

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<sup>109</sup> Brennan, "Introduction", in *Reconciling our Differences: A Christian Approach to Recognising Aboriginal Land Rights*, ed. Frank Brennan (Richmond: Aurora, 1992), 1. “Reconciliation between Australia’s indigenous people and the migrants and their descendants requires personal commitment and changes to laws and policies which have driven a wedge between us for so long. We need to become more comfortable with the differences which enhance our lives and cultures, while overcoming the differences which separate us and do violence to our lives and cultures.”

<sup>110</sup> Dodson, "The Land our Mother, the Church our Mother", 84. “Sacred sites help make present the powers of ‘the Dreaming’ and so they help to sustain people in the present. They are vital for the continuance of religion and culture, for the maintenance of kinship ties and environmental balance, and be a source of continuing pride and self-respect. Clearly, Aboriginal religions have a beautifully worked out spirituality, complete with a full and coherent sacramental theology. Christians have all too little appreciation of these things, just as they have little appreciation of the Aboriginal experience of the last 200 years.”

## 6.5 INTERPRETATION: A MYSTAGOGY OF THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION

There are native factors which both stimulate and stifle theological reflection in Australia. Given these tensions, a strong theological tradition has emerged within and for the Australian context. To what degree one can claim the emergence of a genuine “Australian theological consciousness” is open to question. Robert Banks concluded that theology in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century demonstrated “a notable lack of serious intellectual interest in, or understanding of, distinctively Australian attitudes, values and culture, and a consequent lack of theological appreciation and critique of them”.<sup>111</sup>

Slowly emerging throughout the twentieth century, and particularly in the second half of that century, new categories of theology developed across the globe. In a rapidly changing milieu, contextual and native theologies emerged as strong and influential methodologies, no less so in Australia. Theology became more consciously local and concrete. Kelly summaries this reflective awareness by noting that “being Australian enters into the foundations of our theological thinking”.<sup>112</sup> Expanding on this, Kelly writes that theology in an Australian context “is enhanced or restricted by our national identity” becoming alert to “the presence or absence of God, in this place, within this history, in this time”.<sup>113</sup>

Building upon Lonergan’s axiom that a “theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix”, Kelly defines the cultural matrix as “that set of meanings and values that inform a given way of life”.<sup>114</sup> This matrix is the *locus* of theological engagement, as theology speaks “to, within, and from such a matrix” and becomes increasingly attentive to a broad range of meanings and values.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Robert Banks, “Fifty Years of Theology in Australia, 1915-1965: Part One”, *Colloquium* 9, no. 2 (1976): 16.

<sup>112</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”.

<sup>114</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”. See also Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.

<sup>115</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”.

On this point, Malone raises a question of “content and method”: “Is there an Australian theology with a distinctive content? Or is it, rather, theologians doing theology in Australia, leading with a distinctive perception?”<sup>116</sup> In regard to foundational theological principles, Malone asks: “Does Australian experience raise particular, even unique questions about humanity, sinfulness and redemption, grace and understandings of God?”<sup>117</sup>

These questions demonstrate a certain “self-conscious” approach to the practice of theology in Australia and identify an eagerness to communicate in a distinctive manner. A more pertinent question emerges: If the cultural matrix shapes theologising, what enables or disables theological reflection in the Australian context? Kelly identifies a number of points of theological friction in contemporary Australia:

When [Australian] religious sensibility has been so ravaged by sectarianism and so cowed by the secular humanists of the [nineteenth] century; when, as a consequence, church life is ever seeking respectability in the sight of governments; when a mindless, bland pragmatism and gross materialism permit no philosophy, the ‘Australian Context’ does not look too promising for theology [...] The Christian community in Australia needs a theology if its protest is to have vision, if its persuasions are to have a point, and if its rhetoric is to be alive with the full poetry of the Word. Otherwise we are left with a welter of passionate, almost private amoralties without Christian reference or, more importantly, Christian proportion; and with an imagination deprived of the creativity that only the critical possession of tradition can afford.<sup>118</sup>

In the Australian context, passionate commitment frequently lacks a “Christian proportion” and, in Catholic institutions, “critical possession of tradition” is often tenuous. Michael Whelan notes that Catholic theology in Australia “can no longer take for granted a shared world of meaning amongst Catholics in this country”.<sup>119</sup> Whelan observes that popular

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<sup>116</sup> Malone, “Discovering”, 13.

<sup>117</sup> Malone, “Discovering”.

<sup>118</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”, 3.

<sup>119</sup> Michael Whelan, “Popular Theology in Australia: Where Are We as We Begin the Third Millennium?” in *Developing an Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Strathfield: St. Pauls Publications, 1999), 106.

theology in Australia is marked by a certain sense of “crisis”: both crisis within the broader Australian community and crisis within the Catholic Church.<sup>120</sup>

This sense of “crisis” is shaped by a number of factors. Polarisation, to some limited degree, has strained the pastoral and theological scene in Australia, often driven by an agitated sense of (real or imagined) crisis and the fear of ecclesial decay. Theological literacy continues to decline, as younger generations are decreasingly shaped by connection to an ecclesial world.<sup>121</sup> This gap between Catholic theology and the lived experience and practice

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<sup>120</sup> Whelan, "Popular Theology in Australia", 109: "The dying in a crisis is marked by the sorts of things that may normally accompany the experience of literal dying – anger, sadness, cynicism, denial, resistance, confusion, strange behaviour and various other expressions of grief [...] Popular theology in Australia is marked by this crisis situation".

<sup>121</sup> See Rymarz, "Isn't There A Town Named After Him?' Content Knowledge and Teacher Training in Religious Education", *Journal of Religious Education* 60, no. 2 (2012): 39-45. "One way of examining contemporary culture, which has clear implications for the discussion of the content knowledge of new religion teachers, is Modified Secularization Theory (MST). This arises from a broad sociological literature on the place of religion in culture. This theory offers a contextualization of the culture which has become increasingly dominant in the experiential world of present and future religion teachers. From the secularization perspective the journey of younger adults is one that leads them inextricably away from what the religious tradition regards as being of fundamental importance. This is a religious worldview where the believer is part of a worshipping community, shares in and expresses communal beliefs, is in relationship with a personal God and where beliefs have sustaining and directive force. Secularisation sees the disengagement of younger adults from a religious worldview as a continuing, albeit gradual, process. This does not eliminate religion from discourse but transforms it to a highly ameliorated, idiosyncratic form. In this view many younger adults are moving ever more away from a religious worldview to a highly personalized, eclectic range of beliefs that although hard to categorize share at least one unifying characteristic, that is, they are not life shaping and are indeed relatively inconsequential. Mason and his colleagues comment that many of these beliefs would be more accurately characterized as “inconsequential opinions on matters religious”. Rather than engaging in a formative and purposeful spiritual quest many younger adults are becoming increasingly secularised and are unlikely to reconnect with the faith community in anything other than a superficial and, in some ways, self interested way. In terms of teacher training very few assumptions can be made about the level and degree of religious socialization of candidates who enrol in teaching training programs. Whilst in the past wider society may have provided a degree of religious enculturation, this capacity is now greatly diminished” (37). See also Francis Moloney, "Vatican II: The Word in the Church Tradition", *The Mix* (May 2002). Retrieved from: [www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=193&catid=44:archive-vatican-ii-the-mix-essays&Itemid=102](http://www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=193&catid=44:archive-vatican-ii-the-mix-essays&Itemid=102) on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2014. “No doubt there was a great deal of naivety in those early decades after the Council, and many mistakes were made. We knew what we no longer wished to say and do within our believing community, but we were unsure of how to articulate what we did want to say and do! There was a moment of “stumbling in the dark”, often not recognised as we were so buoyed up by the excitement of those days. Thus, of course, there was the occasional abuse of the new freedom that we had been given, and these exceptional cases stood in the limelight, and added fuel to a growing “slowing down” of the original enthusiasm. As a professional biblical scholar of more than 30 years’ experience, I have had the mixed blessing of living through the pre-conciliar experience to our present moment in the life of the Church when, in my experience, the “slowing down” mentioned above has almost become a full stop. I suspect there are several reasons for this situation. We must admit to a period after the Council when the communication of the faith to a newer generation lost its way. A generation of young people emerged from that period – now parents of a newer generation – who ‘fell between the cracks’. My experience as the Professor of Theology at Australian Catholic University (1994-1998) taught me a great deal about the profundity of content and the pedagogical skills that are nowadays used in the process of communicating the faith. However, we have lost a generation, and they are not to be found working at their Bibles, or attending seminars and sessions that are now increasingly difficult to run

of those who identify as Catholic presents many dilemmas for the on-going “cultural” viability of Catholic parishes and institutions. Eclectic forms of spirituality substitute for genuine theological discourse. This, in turn, diminishes the ability to translate the intellectual inheritance of the tradition into meaningful language for the present day. Theological content and concepts are replaced, rather than accompanied, by purely affective and personal dimensions of religious experience.

Much of the theologising in a Catholic and Australian way has carried a rather self-conscious style.<sup>122</sup> Kelly raises a concern as to whether this self-consciousness has served the greater task of theology. Kelly questions whether “Australian theologians have given sufficient emphasis to the historical movement inherent in theological thinking”.<sup>123</sup> In other words, Australian theologising has tended to be overly spiritualised, contemporised and localised, and not sufficiently anamnetic, historicised and universalised. On this point, Kelly ponders “whether theology in the Australian context has served the mission of the Church as well as it might”:

Has a generic ‘spirituality’ bleached theology of its primary colours? Has our prevailing pragmatism stunted the ‘poetics’ of Christian communication in the Australian context? When you notice the readiness with which the Australian church communicates its concerns for social justice and moral values generally, but its comparative silence and insecurity when it comes to saying anything about God, how theological has Australian theology been?<sup>124</sup>

Kelly points to a deficiency in the Australia endeavour. The lines have often been blurred between an Australian theological context and an Australian spirituality. In recent

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successfully. The task of recapturing the interest and enthusiasm of the present generation of young people demands extraordinary dedication and considerable skill.”

<sup>122</sup> Gideon Goosen developed a somewhat proscriptive definition of “Australian theologies”: “They must be written in Australia; they articulate themselves in a way that shows that they have taken they have taken into consideration the culture of the people for whom they write; they must use the idiom of the language of the people to whom the theology is directed.” See Gideon Goosen, *Australian Theologies: Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millennium* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2000), 30. While Goosen acknowledges that these are not rigid categories, it does indicate an overly self-conscious stance, rather than an organic vision of theologising in an Australian context.

<sup>123</sup> Kelly, “From Cultural Images to Historical Reality”, 66.

<sup>124</sup> Kelly, “From Cultural Images to Historical Reality”, 80.

decades, efforts to translate faith into new cultural realities have sought to indigenise theological language. Yet, a more profound form of inculturated theology (and ecclesiology) is needed. Inculturated theology requires more than rhetorical devices; it presumes a profound dialogue and engagement between tradition and culture from which will emerge things both old and new.

Les Murray laments reluctance on the part of Catholic intellectuals to enter into greater dialogue and critique of Australian society.<sup>125</sup> This has limited the Church's ability to propose alternative visions for Australian society. Catholicism in Australia has maintained an ethical and social justice orientation in its public statements. However, it has also, at times, engaged in public debates in moralistic tones; a voice for the negative. The noise of moralisms quickly closes the Australian mind. The task of the Catholic intellectual is to walk the path of promoting a vision based in faith and reason, invitational in tone rather than dismissive, and positive rather than condemnatory.

This is not an easy task among a people whose own cultural world continues to evolve at considerable pace, quickly displacing long held values and presumptions with newer expressions. Immigration, significant social mobility, greater educational opportunities, fluid employment options, continued economic prosperity, advances in technology have fuelled decades of profound changes in Australian society.

Andrew Hamilton observes that contemporary notions of individuality, particularly the Australian sense of "the rugged individual", places an almost impossible burden on the quest for human fulfilment. Far from freeing the individual, the human person can become entrapped in a cycle of unattainable expectations resulting in a failed pursuit of happiness: "A

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<sup>125</sup> Murray, *The Quality of Sprawl*, 169. "By abandoning the field of higher intellectual life in Australia, or being browbeaten out of it, and not even having a high-quality magazine in which Catholic and Christian perspectives could be published, it left some of us either silenced altogether or forced to slip our thinking into journals highly antipathetic to it. By electing not to have an intellectual presence in society, the Church removed its people from the sphere of intellectual debate, because no one else was going to give them more than the barest sufferance. As a result, no criticism of the tone and style of Australian polemic has been possible, and no alternative spirit in which to describe our society has had a natural home."



strong individualism often places a higher weight on the private world than the individual can bear”.<sup>126</sup> In a Christian sense, personal identity is discovered within relationships and community rather than found in being freed of such relational commitments. Hamilton identifies strong individualism as a dilemma for theology in an Australian context, given that “Christian theology has developed a more rich understanding of individual lives and destiny than is easily accepted in Australia society”.<sup>127</sup> Accordingly, “theological address” requires greater nuance if it is to move beyond reassuring “the committed” and be considered by a more general audience.<sup>128</sup> The Christian impulse pushes the horizon of personal identity and fulfilment, seeking to retrieve the fundamental orientation of one who lives for others and, who ultimately, belongs to the Other. In the age of the individual and a fluid sense of community, Christian theology must re-propose relational and social visions of the human person in language which inspires the individual and engages with contemporary discourse.

The language of theology is both inherited and formed in particular contexts. As noted earlier, Michael Whelan advocates that “we can no longer assume that words like ‘God’, ‘salvation’, ‘church’, ‘sin’, ‘grace’, ‘tradition’, and ‘renewal’ carry unambiguous meanings” that most accept.<sup>129</sup> At this point, the central Christic question of theology needs to be addressed: “Who is Jesus Christ for the men and women of today?”<sup>130</sup> This is a question as old as the Gospel itself.<sup>131</sup> Imbelli’s call for a renewed “Christic imagination” as a critical aspect of *NE* places before Australian theologians the task of presenting and reinvigorating the proclamation of Jesus Christ with renewed energy, richer insights, and concrete

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<sup>126</sup> Hamilton, “Theology and the Suburbs”, in *Developing an Australian Theology*, ed. Peter Malone (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 1999), 102.

<sup>127</sup> Hamilton, “Theology and the Suburbs”.

<sup>128</sup> Hamilton, “Theology and the Suburbs”.

<sup>129</sup> Whelan, “Popular Theology in Australia”, 107.

<sup>130</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture: Evangelizing Today's Cultures*, 3. See thesis ch. 2, fn. 176.

<sup>131</sup> Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20.

connections which invite faith, instil hope and generate love.<sup>132</sup> The conceptual language of theology appears to have run dry in the modern age or at least under stress.

“Salvation” and “redemption” are frequently understood on a small scale set against an immanent horizon. “Freedom” is found in personal autonomy, usually far from a church community which is considered as the dominion of moral and rational enslavement.<sup>133</sup>

“Community” is a loose functional bond which requires measured commitment and needs to be secured against intrusions which might otherwise affect its homogeneity. “Sin” is replaced by public shaming which keeps deeper and more personal anthropological questions at bay.

“Good News” appears on Facebook and has limited transcendent value. In “a secular age and environment” representatives of religion are considered to be either “martyrs or hypocrites”.<sup>134</sup> “Church” and its “leadership” are terms that are viewed with a long-standing posture of indifference and scepticism, and in more recent times, open hostility, reinforced in the wake of scandals and a variety of public inquiries and commissions which have damaged the credibility of the Church, its hierarchy and the proclamation of the Gospel.

This prognosis recognises the limits of theology in Australia, not its demise. The doorway to reflection remains ajar, as Brennan’s list of dialectical theological possibilities reminds us:

- People are “open to the transcendent,” while being “fully grounded” in the material;
- This age is marked by “the prizing of the individual, human rights, self-determination and non-discrimination,” which are balanced by “a commitment to community, the common good and the public interest”;
- The “quest for meaning and transcendence” is defined by “a uniquely personal journey and that tradition, authority, ritual and community count for less for many who find institutional religion a bar rather than an aid to spiritual enlightenment”.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Imbelli, *Rekindling the Christic Imagination*. See thesis ch. 3, fn. 94-96.

<sup>133</sup> Hamilton, “Theology and the Suburbs”, 103.

<sup>134</sup> Brennan, “What I Believe”.

<sup>135</sup> Brennan, “What I Believe”.

These contrasting patterns of connection highlight the possibilities for a mystagogical approach which is grounded in a dialogue between transcendent experience and lived experience. This pre-religious engagement will necessitate a theological richness that is both penetratingly local and consciously universal.

Beyond “the local”, there has also been a shift towards a global theological consciousness, particularly in the area of the ethics and justice. The local becomes informed by response to broader ethical concerns. Pope Francis’ advocacy and promotion of the plight of the world’s poorest and most marginalised people has turned this theological shift into an ecclesial one. Tom Ryan argues that “global changes are bringing a new local awareness of social, economic and political issues in people’s lives elsewhere”.<sup>136</sup> This does provide one way forward for a contextual theology that consciously and concertedly thinks globally (and historically) and acts locally.<sup>137</sup>

The often clichéd, superficial observation is that Australia is a secular, post-Christian culture. The reality is far more opaque, ambiguous and contradictory. Dimensions of spirituality, community belonging, and personal ethics remain unmistakeable dimensions of cultural discourse. Mystagogical evangelisation takes this as a presumptive starting-point. The Sacred is never far below the surface in the Australian experience, yet the Australian shyness of sacred expression is an obstacle for theology and evangelisation. Catholic theological reflection has contributed significantly to Australian educational, social, political and cultural life. More recently, a strong tradition of creative theological reflection has provided a platform to continue the critical task of speaking about God and Gospel in an Australian accent.

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas Ryan, "Christian Ethics Today: Is the Ground Shifting?", *Compass* 48, no. 1 (Autumn 2014): 19.

<sup>137</sup> Ryan, "Christian Ethics Today".

## 6.6 RESPONSIVENESS: A MYSTAGOGY OF PRAXIS

Australia's only official saint is Mary MacKillop, who was a woman of action rather than words. It is this practical, pragmatic dimension which appeals to the Australian character.<sup>138</sup> Murray describes the "religious tendency" of the majority of Australians as "residual Christianity", a reminiscence of Christian ideals "with side servings of such themes as stoicism, luck, heroism" and imbued with "pieties of various kinds, for example toward the extended family".<sup>139</sup> This "residual Christianity" frequently takes the form of various sentimentalities, courtesies and moral constraints. The Christian hope in a new creation moves far beyond these small ambitions. This eschatological vision has concrete, historical consequences. As "creation groans in one great act of giving birth", the Church's vocation of mid-wife calls the People of God to be mystagogical witnesses to the prophetic word of hope in the here and now.<sup>140</sup> Accordingly, *NE* must present a vision of, in Gallagher's words, "a form of alternative cultural agency".<sup>141</sup> This requires that the communities of believers live and proclaim Christ's differentiated vision for the human family.

Pope Francis models a creative evangelising agency with global reach. *EG* presents an *ad intra* vision of alternative ecclesial cultural agency based in "missionary discipleship".<sup>142</sup> *LS* presents an *ad extra* vision of alternative and integral ecological agency intended for the

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<sup>138</sup> At the Thanksgiving Mass in Rome for the canonisation of Mary MacKillop, Cardinal George Pell expressed this spiritual realism in these words: "St Mary of the Cross was kind and commonsensical. She told her sisters to expect crosses and realize that "we also give them" and encouraged them to have patience with their own failures, to bear with the faulty "as you hope God will bear with you". She regularly dispensed good Christian advice. We thank God for the life, wisdom and contribution of St. Mary of the Cross. We are grateful that she was not eccentric, not religiously exotic. We warm to her advice, are encouraged by her perseverance in sickness and adversity. Her faith and moral goodness are heroic, but not in a way which is off putting or surreal. She does not deter us from struggling to follow her." George Pell, *Homily at Thanksgiving Mass for the Canonization of St. Mary of the Cross* (Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, Rome, 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2011). Retrieved from: [www.sydneycatholic.org/people/archbishop/homilies/2010/20101019\\_1393.shtml](http://www.sydneycatholic.org/people/archbishop/homilies/2010/20101019_1393.shtml) on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2014.

<sup>139</sup> Murray, *The Quality of Sprawl*, 41.

<sup>140</sup> See Romans 8:22.

<sup>141</sup> Gallagher, "Religious Readings of Our Culture", 148.

<sup>142</sup> *EG*, 27.

whole human family.<sup>143</sup> It is an urgent ecclesiological task to localise these visions. As will be discussed in the next chapter, a mystagogical mode of evangelisation must create and engage with cultural spaces which prompt questions of alternative visions of the human person and society against the great horizon of Mystery.

The task of a mystagogical dimension of engagement is to provoke questions and promote the vision of the Gospel in the broader socio-cultural context. Mystagogical witness also emphasises the social and public significance of belief, breaking through the distortion of privatised religion and personalised spirituality. Particularly in an Australian setting, issues such as social justice, the common good and ecology are important intersections of a mystagogical engagement. Dialogue and encounter are forms of witness which seek to accompany society in its search for the common good, whilst reminding the human community of its greater obligations to justice and peace. Dialogue and engagement also presume that an on-going conversation is possible and prospective partners are open to such exchanges. In a pluralist society, the Church remains one voice among many, and often speaks with muted authority. Individual witness and commitment continue to offer an under-appreciated form of arousing a mystagogical curiosity in a secular world.

*NE* has prompted renewed questions of the Church's vocation in and for the world. In exploring these questions further, Kelly identifies a "new praxis orientation" in theology.<sup>144</sup> Kelly notes six orientations, the first of which is the awareness that theology is "an activity", and "a conduct" through which the "intelligence of faith must function within a movement of inclusive love".<sup>145</sup> Secondly, theology must make sense in its concrete historicity, for the Church "is always coming into being in the world within a given horizon of grace".<sup>146</sup> As Pope Francis emphasises through his style of Petrine leadership, Christian hope "always

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<sup>143</sup> *LS*, 13 and 112.

<sup>144</sup> Kelly, "Praxis and Pragmatism in an Australian Theology", *Australasian Catholic Record* 71, no. 3 (July 1994): 262.

<sup>145</sup> Kelly, "Praxis and Pragmatism", 262-3.

<sup>146</sup> Kelly, "Praxis and Pragmatism".

generates history”.<sup>147</sup> In this process of generating history, theology attends to the space of “critical detachment and creative imagination” which serves the “deeper corporate conversion to more authentic Christian meaning and value”.<sup>148</sup>

Thirdly, Kelly identifies the essential process of proclaiming faith in a pattern that is “worded *in* and *for*” particular cultures.<sup>149</sup> Culture is a key determinant of the praxis and vocabulary of theology. Fourthly, praxis requires an engagement with history in all its particulars: “At any historical point, there are crises, challenges, imperatives”, which demand a redemptive voice and prophetic response.<sup>150</sup> Fifthly, praxis is a corrective against “amnesia”, as “theology must develop an effective and affective solidarity with the victims of history”.<sup>151</sup> Lastly, a praxis-orientated theology seeks to pursue the concrete requirements of following the Gospel. It is therefore “political”: “Not to take sides is to be enlisted with the unredeemed way things are. A society predicated on a jaded liberal tolerance is expertly repressive of the radical issues of the Gospel”.<sup>152</sup>

Kelly also insists that praxis must not become the defining characteristic of theology. When this happens, the “promise of transformation” is obscured and the “actual communicative praxis of the Church” is “reduced to that of a moral guardian, the voice of cultural reproof, of true and demanding ethical responsibilities, but little else”.<sup>153</sup> Andrew Hamilton makes a similar point as he observes that “any praxis theology is broken winged

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<sup>147</sup> *EG*, 181.

<sup>148</sup> Kelly, “Praxis and Pragmatism”, 263.

<sup>149</sup> Kelly, “Praxis and Pragmatism”. “Hence, the legitimacy of pursuing a theological *praxis* appropriate to an Australian culture.”

<sup>150</sup> Kelly, “Praxis and Pragmatism”, 263-4.

<sup>151</sup> Kelly, “Praxis and Pragmatism”, 264.

<sup>152</sup> Kelly, “Praxis and Pragmatism”, 265.

<sup>153</sup> Kelly, “Praxis and Pragmatism”, 268. Kelly explains that praxis is not the limit of theological endeavour: “[To] downplay the cognitive is to be part of a gradually shrinking universe; to ignore the constitutive is to leave out the language of heart and soul; to narrow the communicative tends toward the ideology of a sect, just to omit the effective is to ignore the energy of faith as a movement within human history,” 266.

unless feathered by other theologies, and any attempt to construct an Australian theology by concentrating only on distinctively Australian themes is to be condemned to triviality".<sup>154</sup>

Hamilton recognises a dichotomy between prized aspects of Australian culture and Christian theology. Pragmatism, freedom of choice, and "largeness of heart", each challenge a "distinctively Catholic theology" at various levels: "The question then, is inescapable: can there be a theology of praxis which will be both genuinely Australian in its style and development and at the same time be Catholic?"<sup>155</sup>

On this question, a point of connection can be established in matters of ethics, fairness and justice. These concerns are established as major fields of scriptural and theological consideration and persist as matters of principle in secular humanism. Ethics, as a discipline "at the service of the world", seeks to enlarge our "capacity to make wise judgments".<sup>156</sup> Ethical principles identify the values beneath the rules, in order "to clarify what it means to lead a good life, what that requires and to help people to do so".<sup>157</sup> In a pluralist democracy, this ethical reflection can lead to a re-discovery of the Christian roots of these values. Secular humanism frequently concludes that its surest recourse is to lean on these Christian foundations.<sup>158</sup> Australian social researcher, Hugh Mackay, has ventured in this direction in two published volumes: *The Good Life* and *The Art of Belonging*.<sup>159</sup> *The Good Life* re-states for a secular audience this ancient axiom:

Virtually every philosophical and religious tradition tells us, with the clarity and urgency of a ringing bell, there's only one good way for humans to live [...] we must learn to treat other people in the way we ourselves would wish to be treated – the so-called Golden Rule.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Hamilton, "Having a Go: Praxis Theology in the Australian Context", *Australasian Catholic Record* 71, no. 3 (July 1994): 282.

<sup>155</sup> Hamilton, "Having a Go".

<sup>156</sup> Ryan, "Christian Ethics: Moral Dilemmas or Something More?", *Compass* 46, no. 1 (Autumn 2012): 36 and 33.

<sup>157</sup> Ryan, "Christian Ethics: Moral Dilemmas or Something More?" 33.

<sup>158</sup> For example see Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believers Guide to the Uses of Religion* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

<sup>159</sup> Hugh Mackay, *The Good Life: What Makes a Life Worth Living?* (Sydney: MacMillan, 2013); *The Art of Belonging: It's Not Where You Live, But How You Live* (Sydney: MacMillan, 2014).

<sup>160</sup> Mackay, *The Good Life*, 1.

*The Art of Belonging* is an extension of this into an ethical world of communal engagement and social responsibility. These works reformulate Christian principles into generic humanistic values. These two titles mirror a prevalent, basic ethical orientation of many in Australian society. Evangelisation must engage with this form of amnesia which translates ancient wisdoms into modern insights without attention to their historical development. As will be explored more fully in the next chapter, education, social justice and welfare have been strong cornerstones of the commitment to praxis of the Australian church. The missionary impulse also entails advocacy for those who are disadvantaged through poverty, deprivation or social exclusion, as well as prophetic action to transform social conditions which create and maintain such disadvantage.<sup>161</sup>

In short, the utilitarian pragmatism of the Australian moral character works for and against a distinctively Catholic theology of praxis. However, theology is directed towards concrete, pastoral practice. Without praxis, religion becomes separated from faith, and is left bereft of its living witness. While Australian religious practice has inherited many devotional forms, it has also responded energetically to the physical and moral needs of the moment. In the social complexities and contradictions of the modern age, Australian society will continue to measure the value of religious commitment by its contribution to society as a whole. It will remain a delicate task for the Church to be the voice of encouragement and the voice of protest in the “democratic pluralism” of modern Australia.

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<sup>161</sup> Peter Saunders, Yuvisthi Naidoo, and Megan Griffiths, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia* (Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, November 2007), 2. This report identifies “disadvantage” in terms of three overlapping concepts: “poverty (defined in terms of low income), deprivation and social exclusion”. In the Church task of the promotion of social equity and opportunity for all, terms such as “social disadvantage takes many different forms, and the identification and measurement of poverty and other forms of disadvantage must be grounded in the actual living standards and experiences of people in poverty. This involves identifying the different forms of deprivation and exclusion and developing indicators based on the factors that restrict people’s ability to acquire the items and participate in the activities that are widely regarded as essential for full membership of society.”



## 6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has utilised the four dimensions of a mystagogical approach outlined in the previous chapter and adapted these dimensions for a particular cultural setting. “Secular” or “post-Christian” are titles frequently used to describe Australia’s a-religious context. A broader inquiry reveals a subtler sense of spirituality and transcendence. In general, this experience is personal, rejecting doctrinal constraints, and eclectic in nature. Australian religious instincts are best described as forms of spiritual pluralism. The interaction between culture, spirituality, theological reflection and praxis form dimensions of a mystagogical model of evangelisation. This chapter has outlined some factors which drive, direct and distort these interactions, with the narrative threads of land, space, and place inextricably linked.

The following chapter will seek to identify the “social spaces” of engagement and conversation which promote a mystagogical approach to evangelisation. Evangelisation does not occur simply because the Church speaks or acts. Evangelisation is an approach and outreach through a form of intentional cultural conversation. The focus of this thesis is the development of a mystagogical mode of intentional cultural conversation which serves as a bridge between *fides qua* and *fides quae*. In order to identify the concrete, cultural ground of *NE* more precisely, I will now examine the “social spaces” which provide the environment and meeting place for a mystagogical evangelisation in contemporary Australian culture.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### ***SPACES OF CONVERSATION:***

#### ***Mystagogical Approaches***

## **Conversational Spaces: Mystagogical Approaches**

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the patristic era, mystagogy was an interpretive method of catechesis which deepened the sacramental initiatory experience of the neophytes. It was a form of unveiling the generative character of Christian initiation as a living reality for the newly baptised. In the modern age, Rahner urged the development of a contemporary mystagogical strategy, and proposed a theology more alert to personal human experience. Applying Rahner's theological proposal to the evangelising needs of the contemporary moment, a mystagogical evangelisation is an imaginative and creative form of catechesis which seeks to awaken the "Godlike seed" sown as a dimension of grace in the depths of every person.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has explored Rahner's mystagogical proposal as a possible form of *NE* in an Australian setting. *NE* has been understood as an activity directed towards those who are baptised but are only tenuously connected to a worshipping community. This thesis has stressed that there is a broader issue at play: namely, the methods and modes of communicating "faith" today in a culture which by-passes structured religion and institutionalised spirituality. To reprise an earlier comment, forms of *NE* must take into account that "what is at stake today is not the content of the creed but the very ability to believe".<sup>2</sup> *NE* must take into account that a post-modern era resists formalised doctrinal claims and moralisms.

A mystagogical style of *NE* proposed in this thesis is a "conversational" style of engagement which involves stages of awareness, reflection, interpretation, and responsiveness. These four dimensions are not intended to describe progressions.

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<sup>1</sup> *GS*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Gallagher, *Unbelief*, 31. See thesis ch. 4, fn. 112.

Nevertheless, these four categories can provide a basis for a mystagogical pathway, or “stepping stones” into a more committed religious faith. These categories are better interpreted as opportunities to establish points of connection within culture.

The preceding chapter sketched some of the features of the Australian cultural setting. Developing these observations further, this chapter seeks to identify some of the “spaces” in which *NE* might fruitfully engage with Australian culture in a local accent.

## 7.2 SPACES OF CONVERSATION

When Pope Francis articulated a vision for *NE* in *EG*, he identified seven areas of ecclesial missionary activity as requiring particular attention. These were listed as:

- Ecclesial reform;
- Renewal of pastoral energy;
- Evangelisation as a task of the whole Church;
- Communication of the Word;
- Attention to the most vulnerable and in need;
- Engagement in the work for peace and the common good;
- Developing a spirituality for mission.<sup>3</sup>

These priorities are directed towards re-awakening the Church’s missionary vocation. The broad scope of the above agenda situates *NE* within the fundamental missionary vocation of the Church. *NE* is simply a description of the missionary activity demanded by the contemporary situation. Pope Francis identifies these aims with a pneumatological renewal of mission and evangelisation. The Holy Spirit, as “the soul of the Church”, is the source and guide of all “spirit-filled evangelization” and stirs and impels the Church to proclaim the Good News.<sup>4</sup> Francis applies a mystagogical dimension to this pneumatological renewal:

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<sup>3</sup> *EG*, 17.

<sup>4</sup> *EG*, 261.

The work of evangelization enriches the mind and the heart; it opens up spiritual horizons; it makes us more and more sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and it takes us beyond our limited spiritual constructs.<sup>5</sup>

The Christian roots of mystagogia are found in Christian preaching, as a distinct pattern of communicating the new life of Jesus Christ. Mystagogy is a form of performative language which acts upon the whole person through the imagination. It is a living conversation which draws attention to the eternal newness which is always already present (*awareness*). It functions as the language of accompaniment for believers and non-believers alike in the on-going search for meaning and fulfilment (*reflection*). It is generative in its quest for new expressions and breaking through conceptual limitations (*interpretation*). It enables self-transcendence by drawing forth a desire to participate in the on-going rhythms of faith and action. This dialogical rhythm with cultures is one from which the Church also learns and advances in fidelity to the summons of the Gospel (*responsiveness*).

This mystagogical evangelisation requires points of intersection, places of dialogue, with contemporary culture. Accordingly, Rowan Williams describes the main task of the Church today as the mission “to create ‘spaces’ for an alternative story – to challenge the self-evidence of the narrative of secular modernity”.<sup>6</sup> For Williams, these “spaces” are “spaces of conciliation”: The task of the believer “becomes one of negotiating how much of

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<sup>5</sup> EG, 272.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 43. See also William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Christian Practices of Space and Time* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 53-4. Williams presents the work of William Cavanaugh who examines the political relationship between the Church and State. For Cavanaugh, the State presents “an alternative [and incompatible] soteriology to that of the Church”, 9. In contrast, Cavanaugh promotes a Eucharistic vision which directs “Christian involvement in the public square [as] a visible celebration of the sacramental reality by which believers live”. (Quoted in Williams, 44 from Cavanaugh, 112-22). The Eucharist is a ‘refracted space’ in which “one becomes more united to the whole the more tied one becomes to the local”, 115. His is an argument against the political and economic forces of globalisation which threaten the “local space” and its array of customs, loyalties and obligations. As understood by Cavanaugh, Eucharist is the alternative vision of human community. It is enacted “‘spatial story’ about the origin and destiny of the whole world” which “collapses spatial divisions” by gathering the local community in this greater whole, 113. Arguing against a geo-political presentation of globalisation, Cavanaugh endorses a sharper distinction between Church and State than Williams’ conclusions.

[the content of faith] a diverse population can own for itself".<sup>7</sup> These "spaces of conciliation" must also be "spaces of conversation".

David Tracy's analysis of Hans Georg Gadamer's dynamics of "interpretative conversation" offers a framework for mystagogy in the public realm. The public realm is the space in which "we are all interpreting all the time".<sup>8</sup> This space, best described in the Western context as the "pluralistic, liberal, democratic public realm", offers the ground to articulate one's reasoning, "to provide arguments" and "to be public" in a colloquial sense.<sup>9</sup> Central to this understanding is the "to-and-fro movement" of "questions and responses" with distinguishes conversation from argumentation.<sup>10</sup> This "to-and-fro movement" presumes that there is "some phenomenon to be interpreted, someone interpreting that phenomenon, and some interaction between these first two realities".<sup>11</sup> Conversation implies that there is no final disclosure but rather a cyclical ebb and flow of interpretation:

Conversation is a game with some hard rules: say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict to change your mind if the evidence suggests it.<sup>12</sup>

The "disclosive and transformative possibilities" of any interpretative process "come to us through the more elusive, but no less real, form of a conversation than through the more usual form of 'argument'".<sup>13</sup> By its very nature, conversation appeals firstly "to the

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> David Tracy, "Is There Hope for the Public Realm? Conversation as Interpretation", *Social Research* 65, no. 3 (1998): 608.

<sup>9</sup> Tracy, "Conversation as Interpretation", 598. Tracy adds that the criteria for conversation must follow the criteria for argument: "criteria of intelligibility (coherence), truth (warrants/evidence), right (moral integrity), and equality (mutual reciprocity). These general criteria can serve as *de facto* conditions of possibility for the presence or absence of both argument and conversation", 598-9. Tracy is particularly speaking of interpretations of the "classic" or "paradigmatic" of art, reason or religion, 599. The use of the word "colloquial" is intended to reference the Latin *colloqui* – "to talk together".

<sup>10</sup> Tracy, "Conversation as Interpretation", 599.

<sup>11</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco Harper & Row, 1987), 10.

<sup>12</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Tracy, "Conversation as Interpretation", 600.

imagination".<sup>14</sup> In the ebb and flow of conversation, "imaginative possibilities" emerge as the basis "for some new consensus" because they "now function with the public impact of a truth as possible disclosure" and not through the insistence "of an explicit conclusion of argument".<sup>15</sup>

Tracy moderates Gadamer's development of conversation with Ricoeur's three objections. These three corrections are identified as interruptions, suspicion and otherness. "Interruptions" allow "explanations, theories, and methods" to be aired "in order to develop, to challenge, or to change one's original understanding".<sup>16</sup> While Tracy notes that the prospects "for conversation can decrease as these interruptions increase", they remain fundamental to the nature of conversation.<sup>17</sup> "Method, theory, and explanation" are important forms of interruption which "aid every conversation" and force new questions upon the process of interpretation.<sup>18</sup> However, none of these can substitute or "replace conversation itself".<sup>19</sup>

The second correction is the "hermeneutic of suspicion". Approaching conversation with a "hermeneutic of suspicion" takes into account ambiguity and plurality by identifying the "unconscious and systematically functioning illusions" of the texts of culture.<sup>20</sup> A hermeneutic of suspicion admits "the need for ethical and political criticism of the hidden, even repressed, social and historical ideologies in all texts, in all language as discourse, and, above all, in all interpretations".<sup>21</sup> Conversation must be alert to all "unconscious systemically functioning distortions in a tradition", manifest as presumptions, biases, lacunae,

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<sup>14</sup> Tracy, "Conversation as Interpretation".

<sup>15</sup> Tracy, "Conversation as Interpretation".

<sup>16</sup> Tracy, "Conversation as Interpretation", 606.

<sup>17</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*.

<sup>20</sup> Tracy, "Conversation as Interpretation", 607.

<sup>21</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 61.

silences and falsehoods.<sup>22</sup> Conversation as interpretation is a process of stripping away concealed linguistic deceptions.

The third correction is “otherness” which can be described as recognition of the generative space necessary for genuine interaction.<sup>23</sup> Tracy admits that public discourse often excludes “others who might disrupt the established hierarchies or challenge the prevailing hegemony of power”.<sup>24</sup> On this point, Tracy recognises a major obstacle to conversation by acknowledging that “all the victims of our discourses and our history have begun to discover their own discourses in ways that our discourse finds difficult to hear, much less listen to”.<sup>25</sup> Tracy observes their “voices can seem strident and uncivil — in a word, other”.<sup>26</sup>

However, the most critical interruptions to religious conversations of today are provided by those who are civil, reasonable, a-religious and atheistic. They are those who have settled on a perspective which is not anti-religious, but humanistic and free of any transcendent claims. The most ‘other’ in conversations of faith are those who have no need of the “Other” to construct a persuasive and fulfilling horizon of meaning. It is these conversations which constitute the greatest conceptual challenges to the contemporary language of faith.

Tracy’s treatment of conversation-as-interpretation implies a dialogical process.<sup>27</sup> As Ratzinger demonstrates, a conversational approach is more than a sociological strategy. In the

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<sup>22</sup> Tracy, “Conversation as Interpretation”, 607.

<sup>23</sup> Tracy, “Conversation as Interpretation”, 607-8.

<sup>24</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*.

<sup>26</sup> Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note the classical and ecclesiological distinction between “conversation” and “dialogue”. For a useful discussion on this distinction see Ann Michele Nolan, *A Privileged Moment: Dialogue in the Language of the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006). The Latin term *dialogus* is derived from the ancient Greek words *διάλογος* (*dialogos*) meaning “a philosophical conversation”, and another closely related word *διαλέγεσθαι* [*dialegesthai*] means “to speak alternatively”.<sup>27</sup> See D. P. Simpson, *Cassell's Latin-English, English-Latin Dictionary*, 5th ed. (London: Continuum, 1987), 187. The Greek form of the word “dialectic” [*διαλεκτική*], meaning the art of discussion or debate, is from the same root word. See Nolan, 136. The documents of the Council also use another term: *colloquium*. *Colloquium* is the classical Latin word for conversation or exchange. *Dialogus* is a word borrowed from the Greek which spoke of a more specialised, intellectual and philosophical mode of argumentation, Nolan, 136. *Colloquium* also came to be identified with a speech or public address and therefore, unlike *dialogus*, did not necessarily imply a partner or interlocutor,



human experience of Divine exchange, God is disclosed as “not only *logos* but also *dia-logos*, not only idea and meaning but speech and word in the reciprocal exchanges of partners of conversation”.<sup>28</sup> The human person is orientated towards these “reciprocal exchanges”. In a theological reading, this conversation is predicated upon the acceptance that it has an origin, context and destiny. It is not aimless. It is a continuous conversation between the *fides qua* and the *fides quae*. The Spirit which arouses our awareness and reflection (*fides qua*) is the same Spirit which guides the expression of tradition through interpretation and responsiveness (*fides quae*). Therefore, a mystagogical approach is not intended as a program. It seeks to be an evangelisation of engagement through “conversations” which firstly promote “awareness and reflection” (*fides qua*), and secondarily, lead to further “conversations” of “interpretation and responsiveness” (*fides quae*). A mystagogical proposal is situated between the “to-and-fro” of these two broad arcs of conversation. The previous chapter explored the layers and horizons of cultural conversations in an Australian context. If the gap between the Gospel and culture is the drama of our time, the counter possibility of identifying some conversational bridges offers hope.

### 7.3 CONVERSATIONAL SPACES OF ‘AWARENESS AND REFLECTION’

A mystagogical evangelisation remains guided by two critical theological criteria. The first is the concept of the Divine missionary impulse: *Missio Dei*. God is a missionary God, mostly clearly evident in the incarnational mission of the Son and the pneumatological

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Nolan, 182. Both *dialogus* and *colloquium* are used in the Council documents, but in different senses. As Nolan explains, *dialogus* implies a structured and formal process, most frequently in reference to ecumenical dialogue, whereas *colloquium* is used to express a mode of communication and “conversation” which is less formal and more open-ended. *Colloquium* generally expresses the Church’s desire to understand the context of the human family and the issues facing the modern world, in particular for the purposes of evangelisation and mission: “The Latin [of the documents] shows a two-tier system which is quite clear; whenever the Church is engaged in ecumenical talks or is proclaiming its mission then *dialogus* is used [...] Whenever there are conversations and discussions which do not directly involve [an official representation of] the Church hierarchy the word *colloquium* is used”, 221.

<sup>28</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster and Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 183.

mission of the Spirit to all creation. This is a mission not solely *to* the Church, but fully *to* the world. The Church is an anticipation of God's reign, not its fullest expression. The Church "exists not as an answer, as it were, but as a response — a response to God's call to continue God's loving, redeeming, healing, reconciling, liberating, forgiving, and challenging mission".<sup>29</sup> The second is the Catholic sense of sacramentality. In this sacramental view, creation is a graced world where the most simple of things and the most ordinary of experiences carry the possibility of Divine encounter. Cultures too, even given their propensity to be lured towards darker tensions, are worlds of grace and provide endless points of connection.

*GS* was criticised for presenting an overly-optimistic view of the modern world.<sup>30</sup> A mystagogical view might be accused of the same error. Any cultural reading is deficient without a sense of the dimensions of light and dark, grace and sin. "Light" and "Darkness" are primordial metaphors of the spiritual consciousness and they are potent images in the Australian psyche. In particular, "light", also a powerful Christological term, resonates with the Australian experience. Carey's conflicted newly-immigrated pastor, Oscar, found Sydney a "blinding place" which "made him squint".<sup>31</sup> Expatriate writer, Clive James, reminisced about the sunlight of his childhood in his native land:

The most beautiful cicada was the Yellow Monday. He was yellow as a canary and transparent as crystal. When he lifted his wings in the sunlight the

<sup>29</sup> Bevans, "The Mission has a Church, the Mission has Ministers", *Compass* 43, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 5.

<sup>30</sup> For example see Dulles, "From Ratzinger to Benedict", *First Things*, no. 160 (February 2006): 28. "The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* in final form was primarily the work of French theologians. The German group did not control the text. At the time of the council Ratzinger already noted many difficulties, beginning with the problem of language. In opting for the language of modernity the text inevitably places itself outside the world of the Bible, so that as a result the biblical citations come to be little more than ornamental. Because of its stated preference for dialogue, the constitution makes faith appear not as an urgent demand for total commitment but as a conversational search into obscure matters. Christ is mentioned only at the end of each section, almost as an afterthought. Instead of replacing dogmatic utterances with dialogue, Ratzinger contends, it would have been better to use the language of proclamation, appealing to the intrinsic authority of God's truth. The constitution, drawing on the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, links Christian hope too closely to the modern idea of progress. Material progress is ambivalent because it can lead to degradation as well as to true humanization. The Cross teaches us that the world is not redeemed by technological advances but by sacrificial love. In the section on unification, *Gaudium et Spes* approaches the world too much from the viewpoint of function and utility rather than that of contemplation and wonder."

<sup>31</sup> Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, 300. See thesis ch. 6, fn. 73.

membranes were like the deltas of little rivers. The sun shone straight through him. It shone through all of us. It shone straight through everything.<sup>32</sup>

A mystagogical evangelisation will take the light of the gospels and adjust its angles in the hope that this light might “shine straight through everything”. The encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (hereafter, *LF*) begins with a reflection on this interplay between “light” and “vision”. For some, faith is “an illusory light” which stunts the growth of human reason and restricts genuine human searching.<sup>33</sup> Despite this modern verdict against religious faith, Pope Francis appeals to the penetrating nature of the “light of faith” which is capable, like the southern sun, “of illuminating *every aspect* of human existence”.<sup>34</sup>

For evangelisation to have some footing, a “coming-to-terms” with the world that the Church addresses, and in which the Church lives, is vital. As already noted, one cannot draw a picture of the whole but only evoke parts and listen carefully to the signature tune, as it were. The Indigenous peoples speak of the “songlines”; the ancestral tracks of navigation through the bushland which require a particular form of spiritual listening to the rhythms of the landscape. Over many generations, these tracks have remained remarkably consistent.<sup>35</sup> Mapping these “songlines” produces a “social, historical, geological, biological, ecological and archaeological” trial which pin-points living “junctions” of social connections, highlighting “influences from several directions at once or changing influences over time”.<sup>36</sup>

The Church in Australia requires the same properly-formed, indigenously-attuned ear, and listening heart, to discern the cultural “songlines” and “signature tunes”. These will map

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<sup>32</sup> Clive James, *Unreliable Memoir* (London: W. W. Norton, 2009), 221.

<sup>33</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei: Encyclical on the Light of Faith* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2013), 2. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130629\\_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html) on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> *LF*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Taçon, “Chains of Connection”, *Griffith Review*, no. 9 (Spring 2005): 72. “If we were to plot all of these tracks, a number of fascinating details would become apparent. First of all, we would see that many correspond with traditional seasonal travel routes and that some also correspond with modern roads and highways. Second, we would see a strong correlation between sacred sites associated with Ancestral Beings and Dreaming Tracks. We would also find correspondence between Dreaming Tracks and meeting places, some types of rock art and some forms of stone arrangement. Finally, we would observe links to places of geo-diversity and biodiversity.”

<sup>36</sup> Taçon, “Chains of Connection”.

the opportunities for meeting places with the, often subterranean, search for meaning.

Learning these social ‘songlines’ identifies some possibilities for evangelisation in the current moment. Listening is a key task of a mystagogical conversation.

Not all of these ‘songlines’ travel through welcome territory. In Australia, as in many Western countries, the promise of the light of faith (and religion) is threatened by the eclipse of scandal.<sup>37</sup> The Australian Government’s Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse exposes the dark culture inherent in religious and public institutions. This excoriating yet necessary moment does not make the work of evangelisation any easier. It is an example of the light of justice being shone *into* the Church, illuminating that which was hidden. It feeds into a prevailing secular bias that religious institutions are opposed to authentic human growth rather than being its facilitators. The cultural impact of these historical moments of accountably cannot be underestimated.

The Catholic Church in Australia, indeed all churches, will need to work hard, in a sincere and humble fashion, to regain trust and enable any proclamation to be heard as Good News. Paul VI recognised that the first step of evangelisation was the evangelisation of the Church itself.<sup>38</sup> In a similar sense, reform is a priority of the pontificate of Francis.<sup>39</sup> Authenticity remains a powerful precondition for evangelisation.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Increasingly, religion in general is viewed with suspicion and as an unhealthy partner in the development of a strong, secular society. Islam is seen as a growing threat to social harmony through radicalisation and terrorism; Christian Evangelicals and Pentecostals have promoted their political activism through the Australian Christian Lobby but are resisted in their influence by secular groups; mainstream churches have a damaged reputation through the longline of abuse complaints. In this setting, evangelisation must begin by pointing to the Divine at the heart of the human, and the glimpse of Mystery amid the ordinary, reinforcing that faith is truly about authentic human flourishing. Evangelisation which begins by emphasising the institution will attract some, but will leave many untouched.

<sup>38</sup> See Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam: Encyclical “On the Church”* (6<sup>th</sup> August, 1964), 9-11. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html) on 7th July, 2014. See also: *EvN*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> *EG*, 26-31.

<sup>40</sup> *EvN*, 76. “It is often said nowadays that the present century thirsts for authenticity. Especially in regard to young people it is said that they have a horror of the artificial or false and that they are searching above all for truth and honesty. These ‘signs of the times’ should find us vigilant. Either tacitly or aloud - but always forcefully - we are being asked: Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for

A form of ‘theological listening’ is required to further develop a mystagogical approach to evangelisation. This form of listening requires attention to:

- language and silence;
- image and imagination;
- self-transcendence and embodiment.

The awakening of a mystagogical beckoning begins with awareness and continues through reflection. The previous chapter sketched some cultural patterns in an Australian context. Mindful of these patterns, the following points of connection aim to identify some mystagogical spaces through which *NE* might initiate cultural conversations of awareness and reflection.

### 7.3.1 Language and Silence

Spaces of silence are as necessary to conversation as words. Coleridge recalls the rabbinic imagery of a scriptural interplay of word and silence described as “black fire on white fire”.<sup>41</sup> The “black fire” refers to “the words”; the “white fire” to the “gaps [and margins] between the words”.<sup>42</sup> Scriptural silences “are a kind of wound that becomes a doorway” to “a whole world of meaning”.<sup>43</sup> Extending this point, Coleridge writes:

If you learn to read the silences of Scripture, the gaps, you will learn to read the silences of God and you will learn to read the great – at times overwhelming – silences of your own heart and of the world.<sup>44</sup>

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real effectiveness in preaching. Precisely because of this we are, to a certain extent, responsible for the progress of the Gospel that we proclaim.”

<sup>41</sup> Coleridge, “The Word of God as Vital Source for Preaching”, in *The New Evangelisation: Developing Evangelical Preaching*, ed. Julian Porteous (Ballan: Connor Court Publishing, 2008), 47.

<sup>42</sup> Coleridge, “Vital Source for Preaching”.

<sup>43</sup> Coleridge, “Vital Source for Preaching”.

<sup>44</sup> Coleridge, “Vital Source for Preaching”, 48.

What is true for scripture is also true for culture. As was noted in the previous chapter, Kelly defines these “white fire” cultural spaces as “limit-situations” where language reaches its limits, and reason, imagination and physicality become confined within these boundaries.<sup>45</sup> The search for meaning extends beyond the limits of language to places where silence takes up residence – that “little shadow, the thing not spoken of”, to use Grenville’s evocative phrase.<sup>46</sup> Both white and black fire play a role in shaping religious imagination and discourse. Silence, as a form of attentiveness to both absence and anticipation, is a powerful dimension of receptivity and sensitivity to Mystery.

James McAuley prayed for “pools of silence in this thirsty land”. These pools would be an antidote for those who “sow their hopes in sand” and who “sometimes feel an evanescent sense” of probing and mysterious questioning, even though “they do not know from whence”.<sup>47</sup> The search for “pools of silence” remains a spiritual thirst in modern culture. As a modern manifestation of the religious art of contemplation, “mindfulness” has emerged as a secular and therapeutic alternative. Mindfulness is described as the meditative task of “being aware, cultivating a moment-to-moment awareness of the reality of one’s own experience”.<sup>48</sup> Whatever names are applied, basic patterns of religious practice retain an appeal and benefit in the contemporary sphere. As Williams explains, these practices

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<sup>45</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Grenville, *The Secret River*, 324. See thesis ch. 6, fn. 28.

<sup>47</sup> James McAuley, “A Letter to John Dryden”, in *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry*, ed. Les A. Murray (Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1986), 173.

<sup>48</sup> Lorne Ladner, “Mindfulness”, in *Spiritually Oriented Interventions for Counseling and Psychotherapy*, ed. Jamie D Aten, Mark R McMinn, and Everett L. Worthington Jr (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2011), 230. “Over the past few decades, more than 1,000 research articles and many books have been written on the benefits of mindfulness and related forms of meditation for an amazing array of problems. These benefits include, but are not limited to, treating anxiety disorders (Antony, 2002; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995; Roemer & Orsillo, 2002), reducing stress (Astin, 1997; Benson & Klipper, 2000; Goleman & Schwartz, 1976; Specia, Carlson, Goodey, & Angen, 2000), boosting immune function (Davidson et al., 2003); Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Smith, 2004), enhancing empathy (Sweet & Johnson, 1990), recovering from addictions (Bien & Bien, 2002; Breslin, Zack, & McCain, 2002; Witkiewitz & Marlatt, 2004); managing chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burnety, 1985), enhancing cancer treatment (Carlson, Specia, Patel, & Goodey, 2004), treating borderline personality disorder (Koerner & Linehan, 2000; Robins & Chapman, 2004; Westen, 2000), and preventing relapse of depression (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Teasdale, Segal, Williams, Ridgeway, Soulsby, & Lau, 2000)”, 229-30.

constitute an alternative to the rhythms of modern life. The language of silence encourages us to live more humanly, “living with less frantic acquisitiveness, living with space for stillness, living in the expectation of learning”, which runs counter to “the gratification of this or that impulse of the moment”.<sup>49</sup>

This thirst opens a door to evangelisation. As Williams rightly observed, those “who know little and care less about the institutions and hierarchies of the Church these days” are often drawn to “new and renewed religious communities that most effectively reach out to those who have never known belief or who have abandoned it as empty and stale”.<sup>50</sup> These religious communities, frequently ecumenical, “become focal points for the exploration of a humanity broader and deeper than social habit encourages” by making “space for a profounder human vision”, which offers a “discipline of personal and common life that is about letting the reality of Jesus come alive in us”.<sup>51</sup>

Without developing these spaces of stillness and encounter, the Church comes “to look unhappily like so many purely human institutions, anxious, busy, competitive and controlling” attempting to “sustain faith on the basis of an un-transformed set of human habits”.<sup>52</sup> A posture of contemplative stillness is the mark of “a true enterprise of evangelisation” which begins as “a re-evangelisation of ourselves”, recovering “our own new humanity” and, in turn, rediscovering “why our faith is different” and “transfiguring”.<sup>53</sup>

Williams’ wise counsel is important on this point:

Do we look anxiously to the problems of our day, the varieties of unfaithfulness or of threat to faith and morals, the weakness of the institution? Or are we seeking to look to Jesus, to the unveiled face of God’s image in the light of which we see the image further reflected in ourselves and our neighbours? That

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<sup>49</sup> Rowan Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”, in *Synodus Episcoporum Bollettino* (9) (10<sup>th</sup> October, 2012), 15. Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02\\_inglese/b09\\_02.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b09_02.html) on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”.

<sup>52</sup> Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”.

simply reminds us that evangelisation is always an overflow of something else - the disciple's journey to maturity in Christ, a journey not organised by the ambitious ego but the result of the prompting and drawing of the Spirit in us. In our considerations of how we are once again to make the Gospel of Christ compellingly attractive to men and women of our age, I hope we never lose sight of what makes it compelling to ourselves, to each one of us in our diverse ministries.<sup>54</sup>

Discovering “pools of silence” is one form of mystagogical engagement, but *NE* needs to be equally attentive to the use of language. A fear of language “going dead”, of “losing its resonance”, pervades modern culture.<sup>55</sup> This recurrent fear is expressed in terms of the demise “of the performative power” of language.<sup>56</sup> This power is lost when language becomes “levelled down”, losing the distinction between “ordinary, routine, everyday descriptive and calculating-operative speech” and forms of “poetic” creative speech.<sup>57</sup> Comparable to Tracy's principles of interpretation-as-conversation, Taylor argues that all literary canons require new contexts, “a range of contemporary voices, which can serve as its interlocutors, with which it can resonate again”.<sup>58</sup> Without these living contexts, religious language may remain a “handy tool of reference” but in reality, becomes “routinized”.<sup>59</sup> It becomes “unthinkingly invoked” as a commonplace “dead metaphor”, losing its transformative power.<sup>60</sup>

On the counter side, living traditions of faith are refreshed through the dynamics of language which circulate among us. Language, “in its constitutive [Poetic] use”, or in its “performative force”, opens up “contact with something deeper or higher”.<sup>61</sup> As this deeper reality is encountered, a “new word resonates in/for” the hearer, and reveals something *of* the

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<sup>54</sup> Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”, 16-7.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 759.

<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>58</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 758.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.



hearer, for him or herself.<sup>62</sup> In the modern age, the “very demand for authenticity seems to drive us towards new languages, which *can* resonate within us”.<sup>63</sup>

Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel describes words as “sacred”, Divine tools which create worlds.<sup>64</sup> As Crowley indicates, belief is less a series of doctrinal propositions to which people assent or reject, and more “mythological worlds within which people live their lives, both religious and secular”.<sup>65</sup> Here, we approach a central concern of the transmission of faith today. Patterns of language can douse or inflame the religious imagination. One of the objectives of *NE* must be to resurrect contemporary religious imagery from its inability to resonate, and thereby, open a doorway to the larger conceptual worlds of theological insight.

Louis-Marie Chauvet describes language as “womb”: “the milieu in which the subject becomes the subject”.<sup>66</sup> This is to suggest that language is the cultural mediation through which the human person interprets and expresses his or her “humanness”.<sup>67</sup> One task for theology must be to rediscover the “sacramentality of language”. Language, even in a pre-linguistic sense, opens up a world of understanding and engagement, richly engaging “the imagination, not as fantasy but as insight into and the projection of life in the world”.<sup>68</sup> The sacramentality of language, in its most poetic form, integrates “the tragic and the comic of life, within a vision of the future”.<sup>69</sup> A pre-creedal, pre-catechetical mystagogy will be most effective (and affective) by grasping an awareness of the sacramentality of language as the womb of transcendent sensibility.

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<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 759.

<sup>64</sup> Susannah Heschel, “Introduction”, in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays by Abraham Joshua Heschel*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), viii.

<sup>65</sup> Crowley, “Mystagogy and Mission”, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>67</sup> See Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 6-13.

<sup>68</sup> David Noel Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 63.

<sup>69</sup> Power, *Sacrament*, 73.

Ecclesial language in its many categories – liturgical, theological, doctrinal, catechetical, spiritual, moral, canonical, organisational – is a womb of expression and invitation into a “mythological world” which always points to deeper realities. However, as Coleridge states plainly, the Church has “a communication problem” beyond purely linguistic limitations.<sup>70</sup> This is not an issue of theological terms alone. The language of theology must be subtle and robust enough to carry the mythology worlds which these terms convey, and function as performative acts of Divine wisdom and transcendent horizons. Perhaps this “communication problem” is why religious silence is seemingly more attractive than “religious speak” in today’s world.

Primary to this issue is O’Malley’s description of the Second Vatican Council as a “language event”.<sup>71</sup> It shifted from the “legislative-judicial traditions of discourse developed in the Roman empire” to an “epideictic” rhetorical style common among ancient Latin orators, early Church fathers and renaissance expositors. This style of discourse sought to encourage, exhort, excite and elicit a response of striving for the highest ideals.<sup>72</sup> This genre is persuasive and conciliatory. It seeks to foster “among those it addresses a realization that they all share (or should share) the same ideals and need to work together to achieve them”.<sup>73</sup> O’Malley points out that there are limits to style as no institution can be entirely open-ended. There is a balance to be struck between encouragement and counsel, ideals and practicalities. Nevertheless, words not only create worlds, they give voice and expression to worlds already in existence. A mystagogical language is an interplay between silence and word, acknowledging the power of both.

Tracy likens language to a form of musical rhythm existing innately in cultural consciousness: Each of us “has somewhere, in preconscious form, the rhythms of our native

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<sup>70</sup> Coleridge, “Vital Source for Preaching”, 50.

<sup>71</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?*, 306.

<sup>72</sup> O’Malley, “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?”, 24-25.

<sup>73</sup> O’Malley, “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?”, 25. See thesis ch. 2, fn. 142. Gallagher calls this a “new wavelength of conciliar language”. Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 42. See thesis ch. 2, fn., 143.

language”.<sup>74</sup> In a mystagogical sense, this is also true of the rhythms of the language of transcendence. A purely secular culture is not sufficient to satisfy the deeper needs and desires of the human person. This is why spiritual language, gestures, practices and symbols continue to rise to the surface. Les Murray noted that “conscience resembles a permanent poem of ourselves that we carry within” which does not claim our attention “unless we try to circumvent it or some external influence challenges it”.<sup>75</sup> Conscience, in this light, can be understood in its etymological sense as “knowledge within”, not only of right and wrong, but also of the intuition embedded in spiritual experiences of presence and absence, speech and stillness. This is the language of desire to which Gallagher refers.<sup>76</sup>

Mystagogy is the task of bringing to awareness the eternal beckoning which is aroused through limitless human experiences. As a pedagogical, spiritual and mystagogical pathway, contemporary evangelisation is also a personal “language event” through entering more fully into the Divine dialogue of word and silence.

### 7.3.2 Image and Imagination

Australian culture has a strong heritage of poets, artists and lyricists who name something of the spirit of place. The receptive mystical sensibility is present in cultural imagery, although it is frequently unnamed, and rarely drawn into deeper reflection. The naming of the experience gets caught in the Australian throat.

The poetry of James McAuley was particularly attentive to this. Writing after his reception into the Catholic Church in the 1950s, he denounced with satirical lament a modern disposition of spiritual indifference. In *A Letter to John Dryden*, speaking with the vibrant

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<sup>74</sup> Tracy, “Conversation as Interpretation”, 603.

<sup>75</sup> Murray, “Embodiment and Incarnation: Notes on Preparing an Anthology of Australian Religious Verse”, (Aquinas Memorial Lecture: Aquinas Library, 25 September, 1987), 18.

<sup>76</sup> Gallagher, *Dive Deeper*, 122. See thesis ch. 2, fn. 167.

conviction of the newly-converted, McAuley was fierce in his condemnation of the intellectual state of his peers and of Australian society in general. “Who cares now for reason?” McAuley asked. This lack of reasoned reflection resulted in a spiritual listlessness, whereby “powers, long untried, have atrophied for lack of use and died”, and many “do not think or dream, deny or doubt, but simply don’t know what it’s all about”.<sup>77</sup>

This harsh criticism is moderated by others such as David Tacey who suggests that the deeper dimensions of the Australian character go further than indifference. Tacey observes that Australian sacred instincts are “not ‘religious’ in the traditional sense” but are more “spiritual and mystical”.<sup>78</sup> Tacey acknowledges the thread of spiritual searching in the work of some contemporary Australian writers.<sup>79</sup> He concludes that some of these authors “are negative about organised religion, but not about the human pursuit for spiritual truth”.<sup>80</sup>

As a further point, David Malouf highlights fellow novelist Patrick White’s role in changing the orientation of Australian literature. White turned the spotlight onto the interior world, with “the kind of writing that goes behind inarticulacy or unwillingness to speak, writing that gives the language of feeling to people who don’t have it themselves”.<sup>81</sup> This observation hints at the evangelising task in Australia; the necessity to move behind “inarticulacy” and give expression to deeper human feelings and instincts.

Across decades, prolific Australian playwright David Williamson has also been a voice depicting the urban Australian experience with a critical eye and stinging observation. His vast body of work provides a cultural history and presents tableaux of the search for meaning through often flawed characters attempting to make sense of their circumstances. In

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<sup>77</sup> McAuley, "A Letter to John Dryden", 166-174.

<sup>78</sup> David Tacey, "Spirituality in Australia Today", in *Sacred Australia: Post-Secular Considerations*, ed. Makarand Paranjape (Melbourne: Clouds of Magellan, 2009), 50.

<sup>79</sup> Tacey, "Spirituality in Australia Today". "It is found in the novels of Patrick White and Tim Winton, in the poetry of Judith Wright and Les Murray, in the paintings of Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan, in the music of Peter Sculthorpe and Ross Edwards, in the cartoons of Michael Leunig."

<sup>80</sup> Tacey, "Spirituality in Australia Today".

<sup>81</sup> Tom Gilling, "Inspire: David Malouf", *The Weekend Australian Magazine* (2nd August, 2008). Retrieved from: [www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/inspire-david-malouf/story-e6frg8h6-1111117082190](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/inspire-david-malouf/story-e6frg8h6-1111117082190) on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2015.

a distinctly Australian way, Williamson's theatrical plays and screenplays are filled with irony and satire. It is perhaps no coincidence that Australia's most prominent playwright focuses on moral inconsistency and a barely-concealed cynicism. As a chronicler of social habits, Williamson's self-described focus centres on "the probing of human lives to find out why there was so much emotional distress".<sup>82</sup>

Williamson's characters constantly evade the narrative redemptive arc. The male characters in particular exhibit a pragmatic, stoic, and somewhat neurotic, spirit.

Williamson's storylines remain distant from the mythic, hero journey which, by his own admission, he satirises rather than takes seriously. To some extent, Williamson's plays present characters who lack moral ambition, admitting only the barest possibility of conversion. Nevertheless, the representation of the basic human condition in Williamson's scripts does allow for at least the beginning of a dialogue about the satirical flaws of urban culture. The task of evangelisation is to highlight the redemptive possibilities in any storyline.

With the same sense of the absurd, but with sharper and more developed redemptive wit, the work of Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig has gifted spiritual searchers with a fine storehouse of praise for the simple and ordinary. John Honner compiled a volume which aligned the simplicity of Leunig's verse with the density of Rahner's theology. For Honner, Rahner's metaphysical explorations sit easily beside Leunig's spare anthropological observations.<sup>83</sup> The point of connection is that both take "the human condition as something wonderful, mysterious, foolish, and sacred".<sup>84</sup> Leunig's ponderings demonstrate the mystagogical approach which Rahner foresaw as a vital need. In his introduction to *A*

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<sup>82</sup> David Williamson, "David Williamson", in *The Wisdom Interviews*, ed. Peter Thompson (ABC Radio National, 22nd February, 2004). Retrieved from: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/the-wisdom-interviews-david-williamson/3376046> on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2015. All following quotes in this paragraph are taken from this interview.

<sup>83</sup> John Honner, "Introduction", in *Michael Leunig and Karl Rahner: A Common Philosophy*, ed. John Honner (Richmond: David Lovell Publishing, 1992), 3. "Both are pre-occupied with human yearning, with loneliness, with the heart, with the materialism, evil and guilt that goes with human freedom, with the mysteries of the spirit, with angels, sleep and death, with innocence and Christmas, and with the joy of coming home."

<sup>84</sup> Honner, "Introduction".

*Common Philosophy*, Honner provides a keen analogy which summarises the ambitions of a mystagogical style of *NE*:

Just as a keyhole discloses the sort of key that will unlock it, if there be such a key, so also our human longing and sense of incompleteness discloses the sort of God who can save us, if there be such a God.<sup>85</sup>

In this regard, the artistic realm offers a great service to evangelisation by revealing the keyholes embedded in cultural forms. Art is the crossroad of the cultural and spiritual imagination and is, therefore, an important mystagogical instrument.<sup>86</sup> The artist, Christian or otherwise, serves the Australian consciousness by breaking open the drama of the immediate against the back-drop of the eternal.

Aesthetics, a theology of “beauty”, provides much scope for mystagogy. In 1950, Michael Scott, a Jesuit priest, and Richard Morley, a Jewish businessman, established the annual Blake Prize.<sup>87</sup> It remains a significant driver of religious art and poetry in Australia. Scott and Morley’s original vision incorporated a mystagogical intent: to elevate the standard of religious art through the direct patronage of the Church, while also seeking to move the artistic community into a conversation with religious faith.<sup>88</sup> The role of art in the religious consciousness is no new insight. The Church has long known the significance of image and symbol. Art has the power and potential to expand the horizons of the religious imagination:

The ways we choose to frame our lives, and how tight we make these frames, will influence what we are able to see. Paintings are symbols which reveal and invite; they are not doctrines which define or oblige.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Honner, “Introduction”.

<sup>86</sup> *GS*, 62. “Literature and the arts are also, in their own way, of great importance to the life of the Church. They strive to make known the proper nature of man, his problems and his experiences in trying to know and perfect both himself and the world. They have much to do with revealing man’s place in history and in the world; with illustrating the miseries and joys, the needs and strengths of man and with foreshadowing a better life for him. Thus they are able to elevate human life, expressed in multifold forms according to various times and regions.”

<sup>87</sup> In 2014, the Blake Prize became a bi-annual event.

<sup>88</sup> Rosemary Crumlin and Judith Ryan, *Images of Religion in Australian Art* (Kensington: Bay Books, 1988), 16.

<sup>89</sup> Crumlin and Ryan, *Images of Religion in Australian Art*, 13.

Rod Pattenden identifies a growing artistic interest in spirituality and religion. Global politics, local agendas and cultural diversity have brought a “new relevance to the nature of belief, faith and imagination”, and in this context, religion “has made a stark return to cultural life”.<sup>90</sup> Australian art, far from refusing spiritual dimensions, increasingly explores the eclectic nature of spirituality and religious belonging. In “a complex consumer age”, this artistic vision affirms “the roles of experimentation, choice and innovation” rather than “intellectual belief”.<sup>91</sup> Despite these disparate spiritual agendas, certain themes are constant. Land as conflicted space, liminal space and relational space remain recurring motifs.

These spiritual themes, even in their dissonance with conventional religious imagery, insist that art is an important conversational partner. Jane Magon concurs with the view that spiritual interest is growing in the artistic sphere and, indeed, goes further, proposing that Australia is “in the early stages of forming a national spiritual art”.<sup>92</sup> She argues that art historians have generally ignored the spiritual dimensions of the Australian artistic imagination. Presenting an alternative view to mainstream assumptions about Australian culture, Magon argues that many “artists are involved with spiritual issues but the majority of art historians tend to be either biased towards secular interpretations of contemporary art or largely ignorant of religion”.<sup>93</sup> This artistic spiritual renewal is “informal, private and often associated with nature and the land” with a view to enrich an otherwise “a nihilistic and spiritually depleted [twentieth] century”.<sup>94</sup>

The artist does not live in a parallel world, detached from the concerns, attitudes and outlook of those around them. The author, the poet, the painter, the musician, all sketch “maps of our dreaming” – our cultural songlines. If the artist is wishing to resist the nihilistic

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<sup>90</sup> Rod Pattenden, "Seeing the Spiritual in Australian Art: The Blake Prize", *Art Monthly Australia* Dec 2011/Jan 2012, no. 246 (2011): 46.

<sup>91</sup> Pattenden, "Seeing the Spiritual in Australian Art".

<sup>92</sup> Jane Magon, "Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art: Some Contexts and Issues in Interpretation", *Artlink* 18, no. 1 (March 1998): 38.

<sup>93</sup> Magon, "Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art".

<sup>94</sup> Magon, "Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art".

tones of a spiritually depleted century, it could also be argued that they are reading a broader resistance of many citizens of Western nations, while McAuley's assessment of the mood of indifference remains a more substantive and accurate claim.

To accept Honner's metaphor that "the keyhole discloses the sort of key that will unlock it" is to acknowledge that the art forms of our social and public imagination present the restlessness of the human imagination. Even at their most theologically uncomfortable, these "maps of our dreaming" reveal the silent spiritual longing of the modern age. The canvas of imagery and imagination place in stark detail Rowe's three challenges to theological interpretations of artistic meaning: an interpretation that must take into account: divine absence; divine paradox; divine hiddenness.<sup>95</sup> To presume that art can disclose more about Divine Mystery than it simultaneously conceals is to place upon it an idolatrous burden. The conversation between the "crucifixion of meaning" and the "meaning of the crucifixion" generates an essential intensity in a mystagogical conversation, and a corrective to glib and predictable narratives.

### 7.3.3 Self-transcendence and Embodiment

Taylor asserts that "understanding" is formed against the horizon of a "dense constellation of background meanings".<sup>96</sup> These background meanings are in a constant state of transformation, and with new discoveries and new knowledge these dense constellations are increasingly nebulas. An evolving cosmic consciousness entails consequent shifts in the interpretation of the embodied space of the human person.

"Embodiment" is the experience of time, place and space, a living sense of the material world and of one's connection to the "world of things" which moves beyond the

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<sup>95</sup> Rowe, "Australian Literature and Theology", 142. See thesis ch. 6, fn. 23.

<sup>96</sup> Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity", 29-33. See thesis ch. 6, fn. 19-21.



physical and into a conscious cosmic relationship. To re-state Fletcher's point, we live with a sense of embodiment, with an imaginative and heartfelt relationship to the physical cosmos.<sup>97</sup> These relationships have been stretched, expanded and, to some degree, dissipated through science, rationality and technology.<sup>98</sup> The cosmic "eternal silence" of "the infinite spaces" which terrified Blaise Pascal in the 17<sup>th</sup> century names something of the cosmic loneliness and disorientation which plagues the postmodern age.<sup>99</sup>

The human race is now consciously aware that we are situated on a small, fragile planet within an ever-expanding universe. We have the ability to view this planet from beyond, while looking out into the seemingly endless expanse of space. The notion of a "fixed universe" has fallen away dramatically to reveal "an evolving, emerging cosmic process".<sup>100</sup> The world of "fixed natures" arranged in a vertical, hierarchical order, described as "the great chain of being", is now a web of connections linked horizontally, a web which holds "matter, consciousness, spirit together" in "ever more complex phases of universal becoming".<sup>101</sup>

In this earthly terrain, the human family has the ability to communicate globally in an instantaneous and disembodied fashion, establishing us as citizens of a globalised world. In parallel with these advances, medicine, science and technology permit levels of control over human physicality to unprecedented and powerful degrees. These, in turn, transform basic and historical patterns of relationship with created order. These shifts in the dense constellation of background understandings contribute to creating a new metaphysical

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<sup>97</sup> Fletcher, "Imagination for the Australian Spiritual Journey", 275. See thesis ch. 6, fn. 96.

<sup>98</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 771.

<sup>99</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter, Dover Philosophical Classics (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), fragment 206. "When I consider the brief duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant and which know me not, I am frightened and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, and why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this time and place allotted to me? *Memoria hospitis unius diei praetereuntis* (*The memory of a guest who stayed but a day*)." (fragment 205).

<sup>100</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 73.

<sup>101</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*.

consciousness. The historical boundaries of physicality and ‘embodiment’ are being re-written. Human consciousness is rapidly being re-situated within an evolving, (dis-)embodied universe. *NE* must negotiate this conceptual transformation – and disorientation – of time and space. As human knowledge of the physical universe expands, the internal, embodied universe of the human person can become the space of unsettling “eternal silence” and of questioning “infinite space”. The dark silence of the infinite spaces looms large in the postmodern dense constellations of background meaning.

Taylor argues that degrees of religious “embodiment” have been lost in our present context. In previous eras, “the presence of the sacred could be enacted in ritual, or seen, felt, touched, walked towards (in pilgrimage)”, whereas today, particularly in Western cultures, religious life is more “in the mind”.<sup>102</sup> This cognitive space is a sphere of “contested interpretations”.<sup>103</sup> It becomes a contested space defined by “our political identity as religious defined, or of God as the authority and moral source underpinning our ethical life”.<sup>104</sup> In this sense, the divine becomes an idea to be argued or defended, a concept to be reasoned or dismissed, or a proposition to be accepted or rejected. To use Taylor’s term, this has led to an “excarnation” of Christian embodied expression.<sup>105</sup> Leaving aside the “rebellion of popular piety” against this shift, official Christianity has replaced “enfleshed” religious experience with a cognitive operation of an intellectual and philosophical propositional kind.<sup>106</sup> At issue is not affirmation of “the body” – these abound in “atheistic materialism” and “Liberal Christianity” – but the extent to which human beings are drawn out of the contested arguments of modernity and into the conversational space of “embodied” forms, rituals and language.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 554.

<sup>103</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>105</sup> See thesis ch. 4, fn. 132.

<sup>106</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>107</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

Embodied forms of spirituality continue to emerge as popular expressions. The increase of participation in yoga is one example.<sup>108</sup> The practice of pilgrimage is also an increasing secular phenomenon.<sup>109</sup> As a fully-embodied spiritual quest, the slow progress of the pilgrim unites the spiritual journey with the geography of history, present location and experience in the body.<sup>110</sup> The uneven appropriation of religious practices and language are signs of spiritual needs still unfulfilled by the bare humanism of contemporary culture. This secular reflection on the experience of walking *El Camino* ends with a mystagogical query:

In fact, a huge number of agnostic, atheist or religiously indifferent folk find themselves trudging The Way of St James, including myself [...] Symbolism means a lot on this journey, which captures the imagination of people from all walks of life, especially those aged between 30 and 60. I was enticed by the idea of a walking meditation, that simply concentrating on where next to place my feet could somehow become a gateway to mental or spiritual enlightenment. Instead, I felt wholly grounded, constantly focussing on my physical discomfort and wishing for the end. Yet now I find myself inexplicably drawn back to attempt the entire walk, for reasons that remain unclear.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> See Stephen Penman and Marc Cohen, "The Prevalence and Use of Yoga in Australia: A National Survey", *RMIT University School of Health Sciences* (2004), 1. "In the United States, Yoga or tai chi increased by 95% over the period 1998 to 2002, yoga with 4.4% of the population, 83% of them female. Based on participation rates published in 2003 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 311,000 people had participated in yoga in the previous 12 months."

<sup>109</sup> Évêques du Chemin Français de Saint-Jacques, *Lettre Pastorale. Le Chemin de Saint-Jacques: Quête et Rencontre* (Bayonne-Saint-Jacques-de-CompostelleJulliet, 2015), 5. Retrieved from: [http://www.webcompostella.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/El-Camino-de-Santiago\\_Frances-LETTRE-PASTORALE-2-avec-filligrame.pdf](http://www.webcompostella.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/El-Camino-de-Santiago_Frances-LETTRE-PASTORALE-2-avec-filligrame.pdf) on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2015. "Parmi les marcheurs qui se dirigent vers Saint-Jacques de Compostelle, on constate une typologie variée: tous ne sont pas des pèlerins de la Foi, certains ne sont pas même croyants. L'attraction millénaire du chemin de Saint-Jacques invite des gens très différents à réaliser cette expérience personnelle. Mais beaucoup d'entre eux sont secrètement à la recherche de quelque chose qui les rende meilleurs et les enrichisse, de quelque chose qui les unisse. (Among the pilgrims heading to Saint James de Compostela, there is a varied typology: not all are pilgrims of the Faith, some are not even believers. The attraction for a millennium to the way of Saint James invites very different people to undertake this personal experience. But many of them are secretly looking for something that enriches them and makes them better people, something that unites them). (My translation). This is also true of the large number of Australians and New Zealanders who travel to Anzac Cove at Gallipoli in Turkey for the annual Anzac Day commemorations.

<sup>110</sup> Secular humanism philosopher, Alain de Botton acknowledged the "embodied" experience of medieval pilgrimage: "These medieval pilgrims had gone out of their way to make travel as slow as possible, avoiding even the use of boats and horses in favour of their own feet. They were not being perverse, only aware that if one of our key motives for travelling is to try to put the past behind us, then we often need something very large and time-consuming, like the experience of a month long journey across an ocean or a hike over a mountain range, to establish a sufficient sense of distance. Whatever the advantages of plentiful and convenient air travel, we may curse it for being too easy, too unnoticeable - and thereby for subverting our sincere attempts at changing ourselves through our journeys", Botton, "A World Without Planes", *BBC* (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2010). Retrieved from: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/today/newsid\\_8626000/8626927.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/today/newsid_8626000/8626927.stm) on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Koren Helbig, "Walk of Life", *QWeekend*, November 8-9th, 2014, 22.

As described above, pilgrimage is not a spiritual liberation from the body, but a sensation of being “grounded” in a way that suggests some form of transcendence. Physicality – embodiment – becomes the gateway to being “inexplicably drawn” to a larger and longer path. In this regard, pilgrimage counters a dualism that would seek to free the spirit from its bodily limitations. At the other extreme is “celebrity” culture with its obsession with physical form. The Christian emphasis on incarnation can address both extremes. Incarnation, as a remedy to “excarnation”, opens the way to conversation with a contemporary consciousness of embodiment. To speak of incarnation is to move towards the explicit content of faith, and to engage in a process of interpretation and response to self-transcendent awareness and reflection. This leads into the second stage of a mystagogical conversation.

#### 7.4 CONVERSATIONAL SPACES OF ‘INTERPRETATION AND RESPONSIVENESS’

Reflection upon self-transcendent awareness is aided by conversations drawn from personal experience (*fides qua*). Conversations which support an on-going process of interpretation and responsiveness are drawn from the collective reflection of the Christian tradition (*fides quae*). Christian faith is not an overlay or imposition upon the human sphere, but emerges from an on-going encounter with authentic and full humanity revealed in Christ Jesus. To appeal to Augustine’s classic distinction, “the faith with which we believe” (*fides qua creduntur*) is one thing, and “what we believe” (*ea quae creduntur*) is another thing.<sup>112</sup> These find a unity in the mystagogical instinct of faith that is “etched in the heart of everyone who believes”.<sup>113</sup> The hermeneutical conversation of connecting the individual experience of

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<sup>112</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Charles Dollen (Boston: St. Paul, 1965), XIII, 2: “*Aliud sunt ea quae creduntur, aliud fides qua creduntur.*”

<sup>113</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIII, 5.

believing with the larger Christian story of faith, that is, to bring to a closer unity the *fides qua* and the *fides quae*, is the primary concern of evangelisation.<sup>114</sup> To do so in a manner in which the current situation demands is the task of *NE*.

*NE* does not necessarily require the creation of new structures or the promotion of new programs. *NE* does involve a re-imagining of current structures and existing forms of outreach and service. By way of example, two spaces of conversation which already exist are education and social justice. These are spaces in which the personal experience of faith is placed in direct proximity to the living tradition of faith. Education and justice already provide the ground for conversation, even if a more intentional evangelising conversation is required.

The Catholic Church in Australia manifests a practical instinct orientated to social engagement. The focus of this development is education, itself a product of a Catholic social agenda for a century and a half at least.<sup>115</sup> In the 2011 census, over one-fifth of all school students in Australia attended Catholic schools.<sup>116</sup> This network of Catholic schools has created an invaluable conversational space for evangelisation.

Michael Putney noted that the role of the Catholic school is evolving not only “because of the changing culture within which they are situated but also because of the

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<sup>114</sup> Rahner, “Theology of the Future”, 40-1. See thesis ch. 5, fn. 73.

<sup>115</sup> Hans Mol, *Religion in Australia: A Sociological Investigation* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1971), 194. Writing in 1971, Hans Mol observed that “the Catholic Church seems to have realised quite early that the priority of a religious framework of meaning in a secular age cannot be maintained by separating the two kinds of knowledge institutionally. Its decision to increase its influence over the entire process of education has certainly proved to be a redoubtable barrier to the secularisation of its membership”.

<sup>116</sup> Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (Pastoral Research Office), *A Profile of the Catholic Community in Australia*, 3. “The 2011 Census tells us that 272,542 Catholic children of primary school age attended Catholic schools, and 210,514 Catholic students of secondary school age attended Catholic schools. That means that 52.8 per cent of Catholic students attend Catholic schools – it’s the same percentage for primary and secondary students. But it also means that almost half of all Catholic students do not attend Catholic schools. Most of these go to Government schools, although six per cent of Catholic primary students and ten per cent of Catholic secondary students attend other non-Government schools. The Census also tells us that Catholic students account for 72.5 per cent of Catholic school enrolments. Another 14.9 per cent are from other Christian traditions, 2.6 per cent belong to a non-Christian religion and 7.8 per cent have no religion. Altogether, Catholic schools in 2011 educated more than 666,000 students, more than one-fifth (21.6 per cent) of all school students in Australia. It’s not just the Catholic community that benefits from the presence of Catholic schools.”

changing ecclesial context itself".<sup>117</sup> In this context, the nature of Catholic education becomes a complex question in so far as Catholic identity becomes a negotiated reality in theory and practice.

In a culture which prizes pragmatism, a "Shared Christian Praxis" approach to religious education became the dominant model in the later part of the twentieth century and remains a strong focus of religious formation in schools.<sup>118</sup> As a result, practical spirituality and ethical models focus religious attention on the immediate and immanent. The transcendent dimension of religious formation, while remaining present, is frequently diminished. In this context, Catholic schooling risks merely inculcating the humanistic values of the broader secular culture. The extent to which Catholic schools can offer the experience of being "alternative communities" based in the "Good News" will be the measure of their evangelising witness.<sup>119</sup>

Catholic education in Australia stands as a testimony to the contradictory rapport between culture and religion. Government funding has been a crucial element of its growth, and remains a cause of disquiet in secularist circles. In a society which is characterised by demonstrating a detachment from religious institutions, Catholic education continues to be an important social contributor. Many Catholic schools tend to be amongst the poorest and least resourced in the nation.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Putney, "A New Ecclesial Context for Catholic Schools", in *Catholic Schools: Hope in Uncertain Times*, ed. Anne Benjamin and Dan Riley (Mulgrave: John Garratt, 2008), 30.

<sup>118</sup> Peta Goldberg, "Transforming Religious Education: Implications from the Second Vatican Council", in *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, ed. Neil Ormerod, et al. (Mulgrave: Garratt Publishing, 2012), 288. "One approach which became popular in Australia during the 1980s and which is still used by at least one-third of Catholics is Thomas Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis* Approach [...] The praxis approach is organised around five movements: present action, dialogue, the story, the vision, and the present dialectical hermeneutics," 288-89.

<sup>119</sup> Therese and Jim D'Orsa, "Mission and Catholic Schools", in *Catholic Schools: Hope in Uncertain Times*, ed. Anne Benjamin and Dan Riley (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 2008), 42.

<sup>120</sup> "Catholic schools operate at 90% of the recurrent resources of government schools. Catholic school students receive, on average, 20 per cent less government funding than students in government schools. Students with disability in Catholic schools receive less funding from government than if they were going to a government school." Retrieved from: [www.fundinginfo.catholic.edu.au/background/dsp-default-b.cfm?loadref=26](http://www.fundinginfo.catholic.edu.au/background/dsp-default-b.cfm?loadref=26) on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014.

The evangelising ability of Catholic schools is a vexed question. The lack of connection of teachers and parents to a worshipping community is a recurring lament. Nevertheless, the fact that the Catholic school network exists raises the hope of a greater evangelising focus. Evangelisation requires more than generic spirituality. The secondary conversation of bringing spirituality into contact with the Church's tradition will require an inventive mystagogical formation for leaders, teachers, parents and students, with the necessary formative and ecclesial accompaniment to the practical, ethical and communitarian commitments of Catholic education.

The path ahead is not entirely obscured in the current climate. Rymarz develops five principles for *NE* in Catholic schools.<sup>121</sup> The first of these is the need to enhance and maintain the value of personal Christian witness. Rymarz notes that if a Catholic school cannot maintain a significant proportion of the school community “who are animated by the Gospel and who see themselves as [...] disciples of Christ, then the justification of its Catholic identity is not straightforward”.<sup>122</sup> Christian commitment remains a key definer of Catholic identity. The second is the need to “revitalise and reconceptualise religious education” into “a more proclamatory” framework of religious education.<sup>123</sup> This model develops the distinctiveness of Catholicism as the basis for religious education through presenting various responses and doctrines - “answers” - which have emerged from the long reflection of the tradition. These provide the basis for “content driven religious education” through focussing on a pedagogical method which presents the “Catholic vision” in “a clear and cogent presentation”.<sup>124</sup> The intellectual formation of the religious educator must also accompany the many avenues of spiritual formation.

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<sup>121</sup> See Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 159-192.

<sup>122</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 165-6.

<sup>123</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 166.

<sup>124</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 170-9.

Rymarz's third principle is to celebrate the "distinctiveness of Catholicism", the core of which is the presentation of "a strong Christocentric tone".<sup>125</sup> Christ is the guiding curriculum of all genuine human formation. The fourth principle outlined by Rymarz is to create spaces "where religious commitment is recognised, valued and respected as a legitimate option".<sup>126</sup> These spaces can overcome the sense of alienation felt by many younger people and develop a deeper sense of community.<sup>127</sup> The final principle is the promotion of outreach to parents as the primary formators of their children.<sup>128</sup> As Rymarz acknowledges, these principles establish a much larger ground for "future discussion, elaboration, and reflection".<sup>129</sup> Catholic schools are a microcosm of both the need for *NE* and the arena in which strategies of *NE* can be introduced. They remain indispensable laboratories for evangelisation; spaces which simultaneously resist and demand ecclesial connection. As Australia drifts towards more secular assumptions, the current model of government funding and support should not be assumed into an indefinite future. Catholic schooling in Australia may well depend upon promoting stronger ecclesial bonds if it is to survive any secular challenges.

While the Catholic Church's greatest social commitment has been in the area of education, extensive work of advocacy for justice and practical action for those in need has framed much of the Church's social outreach. In this context of social action, the Australian Catholic Bishops have released regular Social Justice statements since 1940.<sup>130</sup> For the most

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<sup>125</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 179 and 181.

<sup>126</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 181.

<sup>127</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 182.

<sup>128</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 188.

<sup>129</sup> Rymarz, *Issues and Challenges for Catholic Schools*, 168.

<sup>130</sup> Michael Costigan, *Social Justice and the Australian Catholic Bishops*, vol. 2 (no. 1), "Voices: Quarterly Essays on Religion in Australia" (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 2009), 11. "The bishops' decision for the Church in Australia to observe a Social Justice Sunday every year and to publish annual statements on social justice was influenced by the Australian National Secretariat for Catholic Action (ANSCA), established by the bishops' Fourth Plenary Council in 1937, largely on (Archbishop Daniel) Mannix's prompting. The first annual statement, written by Archbishop Justin Simonds of Hobart, appeared in 1940. It was simply titled *Bishops Statement on Social Justice*." From 1941 to 1956, B. A. Santamaria, deputy director of the Australian National Secretariat for Catholic Action (ANSCA), drafted most of the statements. Costigan notes that those produced



part, these have been forthright, if often overlooked, efforts to join and direct the social and political conversation. *Common Wealth for the Common Good* (1992) is a prime example of entering into the broader national debate. This statement was “immediately recognised as a most opportune contribution by the leaders of the largest religious community in Australia to an intense debate on the nation’s economy and future”.<sup>131</sup>

The new millennium has seen statements on such diverse areas as rural and regional issues, environmental challenges, racism, peace, dignity and justice for Australia’s Indigenous peoples, global citizenship, poverty, violence, prisons and the justice system, family, the role of sport in society, and asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>132</sup> Michael Costigan, acknowledging the contribution of the Catholic Church to Australian political and social life, writes: “It is hard to think of any significant national issue over the past two centuries where a Catholic influence has been entirely absent”.<sup>133</sup>

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“after 1954 give the impression that, presumably for pastoral reasons, the bishops felt obliged to limit themselves to ‘safe’ general themes [...] Hence they chose such matters as urbanisation, road safety, the world population problem, the natural law and encouragement of good literature”. Prior to the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, a pastoral letter was released on Social Justice Sunday, and another was not written until a singular publication in 1966. From 1973 onwards, a Social Justice Statement has been released every year. See *Social Justice and the Australian Catholic Bishops*, 11-13.

<sup>131</sup> *Social Justice and the Australian Catholic Bishops*, 27. “In a nutshell, the message of the statement is: that the Gospel-based values widely accepted by those who work from a Christian perspective to attain a just society include: a recognition of the essential dignity and freedom of all persons; the need to work for the common good; our duty to stand alongside poor people and to ensure they are treated justly. That ours is not a just society is apparent from the great and increasing inequality of wealth and income in Australia, the presence of serious poverty, unemployment and homelessness, and the growth of what is commonly called an underclass.” Secretariat of the Bishops’ Committee for Justice Development and Peace, *Common Wealth for the Common Good: People’s Edition*, ASCJC Occasional Paper No. 12 (North Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1992), 4.

<sup>132</sup> For a list of recent Social Justice Statements see Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference and Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, *Building Bridges: Social Justice Statements from Australia’s Catholic Bishops 1988 to 2013* (Alexandria: Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 2014).

<sup>133</sup> Costigan, *Social Justice and the Australian Catholic Bishops*, 54. The specific structures of justice committees have evolved over the decades, in part due to conflicting views on the agenda of social justice and public policy, and in part, due to review and renewal. “Partly as a result of the controversies that had arisen about the CCJP, partly in the light of criticisms directed at the use allegedly made of some of ACR’s (Australian Catholic Relief) Project Compassion grants and partly because the renewal of the CCJP’s mandate was due to be considered [...] in 1986 the bishops decided to call for a comprehensive review of episcopal initiatives for the promotion of education for justice, peace and development,” *Social Justice and the Australian Catholic Bishops*, 17. In the new millennium, ecology has become a strong focus, with the title and commission of Bishops Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, changing to incorporate ecology. The renewed title is the Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development (BCJED). In 2002, Catholic Earthcare Australia was established under the supervision of BCJED. CEA remains an active voice in promoting “ecological conversion” through articulating a scriptural, spiritual and social perspective of creation “Ecological conversion” was a term used by John Paul II and incorporated into the mandate of ECA: “We must therefore

The scientific, social, economic and political aspects of climate change ensure that issues of ecology, sustainability and the environment remain prominent in public discourse. Into this conversation, the Church can speak of the human, spiritual and social dimensions necessary for “ecological conversion” and remain an engaged participant in the broader public dialogue. “Ecological conversion” serves as an important mystagogical bridge, providing an opportunity for articulating faith within the on-going social and communal discernment in global and local responses to climate change. This is particularly true among the young, and the moral demands of ecological concern provide a fruitful sphere for religious formation within Catholic Education, and an introduction into broader connections of religious faith and spirituality.

The extent to which the above-mentioned interventions have influenced public and political discourse is not easily gauged. Certainly, the Church does retain some standing as a moral voice on social issues. Regardless of its reception, it is important that the Australian Church continues to offer reflections of substance and reasoned opinion which communicate the social, moral and ethical demands of the Gospel.

In these spaces of conversational connection to the Church’s tradition, a mystagogical turn of evangelisation will look to engage the dynamics of the search for meaning. A mystagogical strategy will dialogue with the full range of human experience:

- through an on-going meditation on the person of Jesus Christ;
- by accompanying those who search for truth along the path of discernment;
- and offering witness to Christian faith through dialogue and service.

Each of these three constitutes particular forms of conversation and patterns of communication, engage different styles of reflection and interpretation, and offer diverse

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encourage and support the “ecological conversion” which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to ecological concern.” CEA has issued statements on the protection of the Great Barrier Reef by the Qld bishops, and the sustainability of the Murray-Darling River Basin endorsed by the eleven bishops of the region, a paper on the care of the Western Australia coastal waters, a position paper on climate change on behalf of the ACBC, and a number of regional educational resources. *Social Justice and the Australian Catholic Bishops*, 43. See also: [www.catholicearthcare.org.au/resources.html](http://www.catholicearthcare.org.au/resources.html).

modes of responsiveness and action. These patterns of dialogue look to place in a continuous, unifying conversation the *fides qua* with the *fides quae*.

#### 7.4.1 The Christic Conversation

Jesus Christ is “the centre of the universe and of history”.<sup>134</sup> The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the evangelising conversation which frames all others: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”.<sup>135</sup> Without Jesus Christ, there is no Christian faith nor is there a message to proclaim.

The Church, as the Body of Christ, proclaims a person in whom is found “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”.<sup>136</sup> Christian anthropology is not an abstract reality ideologically forced on the human spirit, but has emerged from a long and reasoned contemplation “of the *humanum* that the Son assumed”.<sup>137</sup> The Christic conversation is a public meditation on this distinctive *humanum*. It also embraces the great cosmic story which connects all things to the Divine Mystery and through which Divine Mystery is present to all things. Williams’ Christic acknowledgement that “evangelisation is always an overflow of the disciple’s journey to maturity in Christ” is central to this discussion.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *RH*, 1. The Christic conversation refers to the full, Trinitarian revelation of Jesus Christ: The One “‘who is the head’, ‘through whom are all things and through whom we exist’, who is both ‘the way, and the truth’ and ‘the resurrection and the life’, seeing whom, we see the Father, and who had to go away from us - that is, by his death on the Cross and then by his Ascension into heaven - in order that the Counsellor should come to us and should keep coming to us as the Spirit of truth. In him are ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’, and the Church is his Body. ‘By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind’, and the source of this is Jesus Christ the Redeemer”, *RH*, 7.

<sup>135</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est: Encyclical Letter on Christian Love*, Australian ed. (Homebush: St Pauls Publications, 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2005), 217 (hereafter, *DCE*).

<sup>136</sup> Colossians 2:3.

<sup>137</sup> Crowley, “Mystagogy and Mission”, 27.

<sup>138</sup> Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”, 17.

Incarnation is a fundamental Christian concept, and is foundational to a Christian concept of embodiment as a “singular, constitutive event”.<sup>139</sup> A Christian interpretation of incarnation and embodiment also incorporates the corporeal and theological dimensions of the language of the Body of Christ. It is “the point of convergence for all other considerations of the bodily dimensions of human existence”.<sup>140</sup> The Word embodied (incarnation), and the embodied Word transformed and consummated (resurrection), constitutes the Christian originality of the Good News. In Kelly’s words, the “bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ inaugurates a new expansion of the incarnation”.<sup>141</sup> This is to suggest that “we human beings are not yet fully embodied in the Body of Christ”.<sup>142</sup> In this expanding reality, the consummation of the incarnation, resurrection and ascension of Christ makes an eschatological claim over every human being, most explicitly realised through baptism.

Therefore, the story of the incarnation and resurrection contains a “cosmic value”.<sup>143</sup> It reveals that “the Word has become a participant in the human conversation”, and through such conversation, “ultimate meaning” is transformed and expands human consciousness into “a new luminous horizon”.<sup>144</sup> The Incarnation is limited to an historical event, but continues as “an unfolding event” through which “God’s self-communication does not cease to be incarnational and continues to be actualized in the Church as the Body of Christ”.<sup>145</sup>

The challenge for Christian theology, as Kelly identifies, “is to expand the sense of the materiality and embodiment implicit in incarnational faith”.<sup>146</sup> In a culture attuned to a radically altered sense of embodiment, what is necessary for theology is the continued development of “its own sense of incarnational reality” which takes into account the insights

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<sup>139</sup> Kelly, ““The Body of Christ: Amen!”: The Expanding Incarnation”, *Theological Studies* 71, no. 4 (2010): 792.

<sup>140</sup> Kelly, “The Expanding Incarnation”, 793.

<sup>141</sup> Kelly, “The Expanding Incarnation”, 802.

<sup>142</sup> Kelly, “The Expanding Incarnation”, 803.

<sup>143</sup> John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente: Apostolic Letter on the Preparation for the Year of Jubilee 2000*, Australian ed. (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1994), 3 (hereafter, *TMA*).

<sup>144</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 71.

<sup>145</sup> Kelly, “The Expanding Incarnation”, 794.

<sup>146</sup> Kelly, “The Expanding Incarnation”, 797.

and discoveries of cosmology. Theology must continue to seek worthy ways of speaking of the “communion between the self-incarnating Word and human beings in their embodiment in this world”.<sup>147</sup> For *NE*, this Divine-human conversation cannot be merely a form of disembodied theological logic, or a succession of Christological praises. Embodiment in time and place situates the requirements of an inculturated proclamation.<sup>148</sup> John Paul II reinforced a similar point on his first visit to Australia in 1986:

Look, dear people of Australia, and behold this vast continent of yours! It is your home! The place of your joys and your pains, your endeavours and your hopes! And for all of you, Australians, the Way to the Father’s house passes through this land. *Jesus Christ is the Way!*<sup>149</sup>

As an exercise in mystagogy, this embodied sense of time and place is also a task of imagination, and may be variously called “Catholic imagination”, “sacramental imagination”, “primal imagination” or “analogical imagination”.<sup>150</sup> In the methodology of David Tracy, the “analogical imagination” presumes that there is a fundamental consistency and order to be found in created reality. The key to unlocking this imaginative horizon is finding this consistency and order “in some focal meaning (some prime analogate) which focuses upon the basic clue to the whole and, then by means of that clue envisions all the ordered relationships in reality itself”.<sup>151</sup> It is a form of universal imagination; that is, a view that particular narratives can be gathered into one primary story.

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<sup>147</sup> Kelly, “The Expanding Incarnation”.

<sup>148</sup> *NMI*, 29.

<sup>149</sup> John Paul II, “Homily”, (Canberra, 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1986). Retrieved from: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/homilies/1986/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19861124\\_canberra\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861124_canberra_en.html) on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2014.

<sup>150</sup> For an example of Catholic imagination, see Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). For an example of sacramental imagination, see Ormond Rush, “Symposium: Full, Conscious and Active Participation”, *Liturgy News* 33, no. 4 (December, 2003), 3-4. For an example of primal imagination, see Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, Theology in Africa (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 95.

<sup>151</sup> Tracy, “Presidential Address: The Catholic Analogical Imagination”, *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 32(1977): 236-37. “For Catholics, the focal meaning — the clue to the whole of reality may be found in incarnation — for incarnation tells us who God is; who we are; how the cosmos itself is finally a sacrament of God’s love; how ordered community really is possible; how reason, as part of the incarnate image of God in each of us, can be trusted; how the final reality is neither error, nor illusion, nor death,

In Tracy's view, "*the focal meaning*" in Catholic thought is Incarnation.<sup>152</sup> To extend this to a mystagogical framework, "*the focal meaning*" is 'Christic' which stands at the core of evangelisation. A mystagogical proclamation requires an imaginative unfolding of the kerygma, giving renewed rhythm to an ancient message of salvation. The predicament for analogous, imaginative reflection in the modern age is that the postmodern perspective denies the possibility of grand narratives, preferring a "dialect imagination" where "there is no such hope of order", freed of "illusions and idolatries", and preferring "suspicion and negation".<sup>153</sup>

Christian theology presupposes that there is a primal, singular thread running through all narratives. Lash's image of religion as a "school" which challenges human idolatries and purifies the language of desire re-focusses the task of theology in the modern era.<sup>154</sup> Theology becomes a holistic venture encouraging a renewed vision of a life-long pneumatological accompaniment into conversion and life. The Holy Spirit possesses a Divine "infinite creativity" which "loosens the knots of human affairs, including the most complex and inscrutable".<sup>155</sup> A mystagogical evangelising theology will be an agent of this Divine "infinite creativity".

As an expression of 'analogical imagination', Kelly identifies three Christological rhetorical arcs of meaning which serve the process of "wording the word" and bringing "experience to expression". These three Christic rhetorical arcs are:

- the rhetoric of fulfilment;
- the rhetoric of participation;
- the rhetoric of cosmic extension.<sup>156</sup>

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nor sin itself but a radical non-sentimentalized love as radical relationality, indeed as the final key to the order and trustworthiness of all reality."

<sup>152</sup> Tracy, "The Catholic Analogical Imagination," 236.

<sup>153</sup> Tracy, "The Catholic Analogical Imagination", 237.

<sup>154</sup> Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 21. See thesis ch. 1, fn. 36.

<sup>155</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesis* (24<sup>th</sup> April, 1991), 6: *Insegnamenti* 14/1 (1991), 856. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19910424.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19910424.html) on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2014. Quoted in *EG*, 178 and *LS*, 80.

<sup>156</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 73. Kelly defines his use of the term rhetoric in "a more classical sense: the creative effort to bring experience to expression, to word reality; in this case, to seek for words, for ways of speaking, ever more worthy of the Word".

The first arc of meaning, the rhetoric of fulfilment, contains a two-fold description of Christic realisation. Christ is the manifestation of salvation history and the embodiment of the ancient promises of the God of Israel born into time.<sup>157</sup> Patristic theologies would expand this further into “the all-fulfilling role of Christ” with later Scholastic theology speaking of Christ as Divine imprint sown into the metaphysical fabric of the universe.<sup>158</sup> A modern, scientific understanding of the cosmos can no longer conceive of a static universe. With such an expansive understanding of the universe, Christic fulfilment is expressed as the hope of final consummation of all things into the gift of a new creation.<sup>159</sup> This fulfilment comes not from “outside” or “above” the universe, but as a “cosmic event”, as the creative, mysterious power of the *Logos* coming into being as the universal Divine “logic”. For contemporary culture, the language of fulfilment represents various forms of “self-possession”. The language of Christic fulfilment is as “gift”. Christ stands as the unifying meaning of all creation, and offers an alternative narrative to the dark despair of the cosmic grand silence.

The second arc of meaning is the rhetoric of participation. Christ, as the impregnated Divine presence in every moment, is “the finality of creation already present”.<sup>160</sup> All creation participates in the process of being incorporated into Christ. The “whole of creation, physical and spiritual, is like a eucharistic host, offering itself to be consecrated, and thereby transformed into the Risen Lord”.<sup>161</sup> The sacramental sense to which Kelly refers provides some further dimensions for exploration.

The Greek term, *koinōnia*, means participation.<sup>162</sup> It also has powerful ecclesiological resonances. While the term itself might not be adequate for the purposes of *NE*, the concepts

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<sup>157</sup> For example, see Hebrews 1:1-4.

<sup>158</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 73.

<sup>159</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 74.

<sup>160</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*.

<sup>161</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*.

<sup>162</sup> Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of NT*, 448. “*Koinōnia* means ‘participation’, ‘impartation’, or ‘fellowship’.”

behind the term provide some possibilities. As an evangelising representation of *koinonia*, Taylor wisely reminds us that “God didn’t just make us so that we could live according to the laws of his creation, but to participate in his love”.<sup>163</sup> Eucharist is an enactment of this “agapic pedagogy” of the Gospel.<sup>164</sup> Participation is an embodied, sacramental and liturgical reality. John Paul II wrote of the cosmic dimensions of *koinonia*, of participation, as a liturgical realisation of the bonds of all created reality:

Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing [...] Truly this is the *mysterium fidei* which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ.<sup>165</sup>

Pope Francis has coupled these concepts of cosmic participation with global responsibility. In *LS*, human wonderment at the transcendent mystique of the universe becomes the basis for our moral obligation to care for the earth as the common home of all humanity.<sup>166</sup> Cosmic participation requires an entry into the mutual dialogue of global responsibility. The Christian anticipation of universal fulfilment in Christ is also measured by daily moral choices.

Participation, in this sense, becomes a practical requirement which calls forth from the Christian community the daily demands of love and justice. It is a participation in the coming

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<sup>163</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 764.

<sup>164</sup> O'Malley, *Liturgy and the New Evangelization*, 11. See thesis ch. 3, fn. 157.

<sup>165</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia: Encyclical letter on the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2003), 8 (hereafter, *EE*). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/special\\_features/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_20030417\\_ecclesia\\_eucharistia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html) on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.

<sup>166</sup> *LS*, 79. “In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation. This leads us to think of the whole as open to God’s transcendence, within which it develops. Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction.”



of God's Kingdom. Pope Francis' call for a global dialogue on the future of the planet is the starting point of transforming transcendent wonder into an everyday mysticism of action.<sup>167</sup>

Belonging remains a deep yearning in the human psyche, particularly as one contemplates the "eternal silence" of the "infinite spaces". Participation in moral guardianship of the planet and engagement in the common good, provoke and deepen the connections which engender a human sense of belonging. Christ, who is the source and motivation of all Christian participation in the created order, is also the giver of a more profound and personal sense of belonging. The conversation of cosmic and communal participation serves as a counter-conversation to cosmic dissipation.

This leads to the third arc of meaning, which Kelly describes as the rhetoric of cosmic extension. This might otherwise be described as the language of inclusivity. In the same way that there is always more to God than human concepts, there is always more to creation than the visible horizons, there is always more to history than memory, and there is always more to the human family than immediate relationships. Christ, the Word incarnate, "mediates the inexpressible 'more' of the Father" revealing "the all-encompassing reality of that love which, beyond all the categories of this world, welcomes creatures into 'his house of many rooms'".<sup>168</sup> Indeed, the "wider the extension and the deeper the inclusion of the 'all' of present experience, the richer the apprehension of the Christian mystery".<sup>169</sup> The challenge is to "integrate into the intimacy and universality of faith", the multiplicity of history and "the

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<sup>167</sup> LS, 201. "The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. Dialogue among the various sciences is likewise needed, since each can tend to become enclosed in its own language, while specialization leads to a certain isolation and the absolutization of its own field of knowledge. This prevents us from confronting environmental problems effectively. An open and respectful dialogue is also needed between the various ecological movements, among which ideological conflicts are not infrequently encountered. The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that 'realities are greater than ideas'."

<sup>168</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 72. "The silence out of which the Word is spoken, the radiance out of which this light has shone, remains. God is the abiding mystery."

<sup>169</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 74.

varied commonwealth of life in which we share”.<sup>170</sup> This Christic vision of inclusivity must indeed “be kept as large as creation”, for no matter “how large we discover the world to be, the figure of Jesus, risen from the dead, must embrace it in its entirety”.<sup>171</sup> Kelly expresses the radical, redemptive inclusivity of resurrection and consummation as a gathering together of all that is; an on-going process of universal transformation into the world of God’s new creation. This redemptive inclusivity is the coming to full birth of “the light that shines through everything”, restoring all that needs mending and banishing all that remains dark. The impregnated presence of Christ, which now groans in one great act of giving birth, becomes the redemptive gift of transforming all things and every ‘thing’ in the light of love and grace.<sup>172</sup>

Fulfilment, participation and inclusivity are potent expressions of human desire. The search for personal fulfilment becomes the language of “life choices”; the yearning to belong motivates participation in many layers of community life; the claims of inclusivity as the mark of a secular and tolerant society emerge from Christic vision and Christian longing. These arcs of meaning are connecting points along the way of a broader consideration of our place in the cosmos.

In the Christic conversation, no dimension of life is omitted; no possibility for life is excluded. It is a conversation which begins by receiving “the world as a sacrament of communion” and leads the Christian to hold the “humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet”.<sup>173</sup> There is no detail too small or too large, too personal or too cosmic, to be gathered up into the Christic conversation. Fulfilment, participation and inclusivity offer

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<sup>170</sup> Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 74-5.

<sup>171</sup> Teilhard de Chardin quoted in Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, 75. Original citation in Christopher Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (Collins: London, 1966), 136.

<sup>172</sup> Romans 8:22-23.

<sup>173</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, "Global Responsibility and Ecological Sustainability Halki Summit I Conference: Closing Remarks" (Istanbul, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2012). Quoted in *LS*, 9.

a triad of possible avenues of conversation – a dialogue which in turn will also demand something of the believer and the Church itself. It is also a dialogue which aims to re-introduce the guarded believer to the person of Christ whose memory has faded from mind because of a tepid or bland proclamation.<sup>174</sup>

Simply using terms such as fulfilment, participation and inclusivity is not an act of evangelisation in itself. As a note of contrast, many have not found the experience of community worship “fulfilling”, or the structures of the Church “participatory”, or the language of doctrine “inclusive”. Here is the tense reality of evangelisation. No matter how expansive boundaries of theology may be, the limits of tradition and the ordinariness of the mundane shape the reception of the Church’s rhetoric. The secular humanist vision of human freedom embedded in such terms as “fulfilment”, “participation” and “inclusivity” creates a tension with Church doctrine. For secular humanists, fulfilment is self-created through the exercise of personal freedom. For Christians, fulfilment comes as a gift, through the acceptance of the freedom to release the *imago Deo* implanted within the uniqueness of each life. The core conversation is one of our *humanum*, the distinction between a true and false humanism. More visceral words such as “beckoning”, “belonging”, and the “becoming” may well provide greater evangelising connections.

The language of incarnation, in all its cosmic and earthy dimensions, with its positive view of the material world and embodiment, provides *NE* with rich possibilities and great challenges. *NE* must continue to search for a refined incarnational language which provides an alternative to the cold horizons of the infinite spaces and disembodied darkness. The categorical dimensions of incarnational theology require a reimagining which better communicates human consciousness as an embodied gift. Incarnation personalises the

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<sup>174</sup> See John 1:35-42.

experience of the universe; it is a declaration of the deep Christic longing, pregnant within all human embodied consciousness.

#### 7.4.2 Accompaniment and Fresh Conversational Rhythms

The Latin American Bishops' Aparecida document of 2007, of which Jorge Bergoglio (later Pope Francis) was a prime architect, stressed the importance of a multifaceted strategy of accompaniment.<sup>175</sup> The concept is referred to 33 times in the text.<sup>176</sup> Building on this, in *EG*, Pope Francis envisioned an "evangelisation of accompaniment" with two foci. Firstly, "accompaniment" describes a spirituality of outreach and evangelisation. The "art of accompaniment" requires that we "remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other".<sup>177</sup> The art of accompaniment requires a patient rhythm and genuine disposition of inquiry, learning and listening. It also requires the art of good teaching; to engage the capabilities of the learner and lead them into deeper wisdoms.

Accompaniment does not dissolve the tensions of the gospels, nor does it imply accommodation to prevailing societal attitudes. However, it does imply the necessity for a gradual "evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables and symbols" designed to introduce "people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery".<sup>178</sup> Francis describes the possibilities of an evangelising mystagogical accompaniment in this address to the Bishops of Brazil:

Here we have to face the difficult mystery of those people who leave the Church, who, under the illusion of alternative ideas, now think that the Church – their

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<sup>175</sup> Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*. The bishops spoke of "pastoral accompaniment" (100e; 411), "assuring accompaniment" (306), "continual accompaniment" (394), "accompaniment of the drug addicted" (422), "accompaniment of the family" (437g), "accompaniment of young women in difficult circumstances" (437m), "vocational accompaniment of young people" (446c), "formation and accompaniment of lay advisers" (518k). On Bergoglio's editing of the text see, Ronald D. Witherup, "Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel: A First Glance", *The Pastoral Review* 10, no. 1 (January/February, 2014): 4.

<sup>176</sup> See "Index," *Aparecida Document*.

<sup>177</sup> *EG*, 169.

<sup>178</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20. See *EG*, 171.

Jerusalem – can no longer offer them anything meaningful and important. So they set off on the road alone, with their disappointment [...] Faced with this situation, what are we to do? We need a Church unafraid of going forth into their night. We need a Church capable of meeting them on their way. We need a Church capable of entering into their conversation. We need a Church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning. From this point of view, we need a Church capable of walking at people's side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the "night" contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture.<sup>179</sup>

This leads to the second facet of missionary accompaniment. This privileged accompaniment requires "solid human, cultural, effective, spiritual and doctrinal formation" and "practical wisdom" so that the voice of discipleship is not reduced to another mute voice among the throng.<sup>180</sup> Accompaniment becomes counter-productive when it is merely "a sort of therapy" supporting another's "self-absorption" and fails to be a genuine "pilgrimage with Christ to the Father".<sup>181</sup> In contrast, a mystagogical formation shapes those who are "able to step into the night without being overcome by the darkness and losing their bearings"; who are capable of listening without being seduced by the despair and bitterness of others; who are empathic and attentive to "the brokenness of others without losing their own strength and identity".<sup>182</sup>

*NE* cannot be a universal strategy rigorously applied to each and every situation, but is enriched by local community formation in which "missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples" in grass-roots activity.<sup>183</sup> Structures, processes and spaces which assist this model of mutual accompaniment and formation require greater ecclesial attention and

<sup>179</sup> Francis, *Address to the Bishops of Brazil* (28<sup>th</sup> July, 2013), 3. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130727\\_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html) on 30th July, 2013.

<sup>180</sup> *Address to the Bishops of Brazil*, 4.

<sup>181</sup> *EG*, 170.

<sup>182</sup> *Address to the Bishops of Brazil*, 4.

<sup>183</sup> *EG*, 173.

development, both locally and globally. This necessitates a freshness in the rhythms of public conversation. Rosemary Crumlin insists on the reinvigoration of religious language and imagery by speaking out of everyday life experience: “Otherwise, it dies of irrelevance and boredom”.<sup>184</sup> Theology is not limited by or to “context” and therefore strives to articulate the universal significance of the relationship between the Divine and human within every “context”.<sup>185</sup> In the task of evangelisation, theological reflection provides a necessary bridge between context and the universal, between history and the present, and between the temporal and the timeless. A mystagogical philosophy of evangelisation presupposes that a foundational proclamation is already present, in pre-creedal form, in the reflected experience of the human person. As the early mystagogical teachers demonstrated, experience carries its own “sacramental” value and potential for conversion.

Kelly observes “that the role of theology in Australia is to stimulate questions”.<sup>186</sup> These are questions directed both *ad extra* and *ad intra*. Kelly calls for “a much more alert kind of theology as it faces a culture distracted from ultimate concerns”.<sup>187</sup> It is clear that questions of the Church’s “redemptive position in Australian society have become urgent”.<sup>188</sup> The renewal of ecclesial and theological imagination must also subvert the current age of diminishment. The broader institutional religious conversation is framed by a dwindling horizon in almost every measurable sense. Theology in Australia is required to find a place in

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<sup>184</sup> Crumlin and Ryan, *Images of Religion in Australian Art*, 13-14.

<sup>185</sup> Kelly, “Whither ‘Australian Theology’? A Response to Geoffrey Lilburne”, *Pacifica* 12, no. 2 (1999): 196. Kelly defines context as a reality that “has to be at once discovered and created, as a more global theological context already in existence doubles back on itself to integrate, however dialectically, our particular context into its framework”.

<sup>186</sup> Kelly, “Theology in an Australian Context”, 5.

<sup>187</sup> Kelly, “Theology and Theological Education in Australia in the Wake of Vatican II”, in *Vatican II: Reception and Implementation in the Australian Church*, ed. Neil Ormerod et al (Mulgrave: John Garratt, 2012), 260.

<sup>188</sup> Kelly, “Theology and Theological Education in Australia in the Wake of Vatican II”. “What occurred with the council was an intense activity of faith open to its primordial experience, while, at the same time, showing elements of remarkable creativity as the corporate faith of the church continues to ‘seek understanding’ of what is entailed in its community and mission at this period of its history. A more catholic ecclesiology must reach even these shores [...] It is no longer the case of Australia being hermetically sealed in its cultural and geographical isolation. Australians are provoked into absorbing new realities of a multiethnic, multireligious kind,” 261.

accompanying and situating the Church within the “signs of the times”. The rhythms of the conversation of accompaniment must be fired by the Catholic theological endeavour charged with continuously stimulating the imagination of the Church.<sup>189</sup>

#### 7.4.3 Conversations of Witness and Service

Paul VI indicated the evangelising power of Christian witness by stating clearly that, before all else, “the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness”.<sup>190</sup> He expanded on this point by offering this key mystagogical insight:

Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization.<sup>191</sup>

This, perhaps idealised, vision nevertheless insists upon the dimension of Christian life without which all other efforts are in vain. Authentic witness is the contemporary measure of any claims which affirm the validity of religious faith and commitment. The task of the mystagogical dimension of engagement is to provoke questions and promote the vision of the Gospel in the broader socio-cultural context. Engagement also presumes the on-going conversion of the Church and individual believers.

Mystagogical witness will emphasise the social and public importance of belief, breaking through the distortion of privatised religion and personalised spirituality. Particularly in an Australian setting, issues such as social justice, the common good and ecological conversion have become important mystagogical crossroads of conversation.

As theological reflection requires imaginative expression, so too does the realm of communication and engagement. Kelly stresses that “genuine praxis of Catholic theology

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<sup>189</sup> Kelly, “Theology and Theological Education in Australia in the Wake of Vatican II”, 260.

<sup>190</sup> *EvN*, 21.

<sup>191</sup> *EvN*, 21.

must be a splendid work of imagination".<sup>192</sup> To jolt the public imagination is to participate in the "ministry of meaning".<sup>193</sup> In the Australia context, this "ministry of meaning" requires a pragmatic form and the Catholic Church in Australia has a proud tradition of operating as an fruitful agent in the pastorally concrete, social sphere.

In the age of authenticity, credible witnesses make the most fruitful teachers.<sup>194</sup>

Francis connected *NE* to the calling of every baptised person "to be a peacemaker and a credible witness to a reconciled life":

In a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter, it is time to devise a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society [...] We do not need plans drawn up by a few for the few, or an enlightened or outspoken minority which claims to speak for everyone. It is about agreeing to live together, a social and cultural pact.<sup>195</sup>

The language of a "social and cultural pact" appeals to a pluralist political reality. It is language which withholds dominance and inspires cooperative models of social engagement. *NE* cannot be content with a narrow agenda of returning the disconnected to the practice of faith. It must also consider the broader ecclesial vocation of communal witness in the public square and the role of the Church in service to the human family in a secular, pluralistic society. Mystagogical witness is "the *diakonia* of truth which the Church exercises in the

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<sup>192</sup> Kelly, "Praxis and Pragmatism", 272. Kelly identifies this with the term *poiesis* which he uses not "in Aristotle's sense of mere 'production', but in a more modern sense of 'imagining'".

<sup>193</sup> Kelly, "Praxis and Pragmatism", 273. "[The] praxis of theology in Australia must not leave out 'imagination', that 'irrepressible revolutionist' (Wallace Stevens), that which lights 'the slow fuse of the possible' (Emily Dickinson), that permanent inner poem (Les Murray) by which a tradition lives and breathes and communicates. It is imperative [...] to align a praxis of theology in Australia with that of literature [...] Has our 'doing theology' learned as much from [writers] as it might? [...] And yet, words can do only what words can do: words are cheap, but sometimes they are all we have: we speak them in a ministry of meaning, to construct and deconstruct our world in the light and presence of what can never be fully spoken; to inspire an identity and consciousness beyond roles and masks and mirrors of our practical worlds; where before was incomprehension, to invite conversation on what is deepest in our joys and sufferings; to summon one another into new paths of action [...] Our doing in theology is in our speaking."

<sup>194</sup> *EvN*, 41; *EG*, 150.

<sup>195</sup> *EG*, 239. See also *GS*, 75.



midst of humanity”.<sup>196</sup> Prompted by the Spirit of Pentecost, mystagogical praxis is embodied proclamation through witness.

A key concern of the modern age is the attention to the stories of “victims”. To restate Girard’s claim, no point of human history has paid attention to “victims” in the manner that modern society does.<sup>197</sup> An evolving consciousness of our moral responsibilities and obligations, coupled with the demands of justice, has created a space in which the voice of “victims” cry out to be heard. In the age of the power of image, the faces of “victims”, and their provocative stories, become etched in social consciousness. The plights of others are continually placed before us in powerful ways. Images stir hearts to action and justice. The task of ecclesial communities, however, is to provide the conversational space in which these stirrings become a commitment to a way and pattern of life. A heart that is concerned for others is a conversational space of discernment and invitation to greater commitment.

Reconciliation is also a key dimension of justice. More is required for the healing of victims of history than institutional responses; a sincere and holistic response is required and conversations of broken personhood are necessary. The slow rhythms of accompaniment and the entering into a spirituality of healing offer more than the limited horizons of secular humanism. The process of reconciliation in its many forms is a social requirement and a necessity of itself. Secondly, it serves as a witness to the Divine intention of new possibilities which lead to a new creation. Social reconciliation stands as a testament to a power and grace which is beyond human limitations and understanding. Despite the brokenness of personal and human history, the hope for conversations which spark hidden potentialities of reconciliation and justice requires trusting and creative space for initiatives of grace.

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<sup>196</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to Catholic Educators* (Catholic University of America in Washington: 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008). Retrieved from: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080417\\_cath-univ-washington.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080417_cath-univ-washington.html) on November 10th, 2013.

<sup>197</sup> Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 161. See thesis ch. 2, fn. 46.

Connected to this is the formation of communities of resistance. Contextual and practical theologies, if they are to be regarded as theologies, require more than reflective and interpretative dimensions. Local theologies must also involve themselves in local realities as local gospel responses. Walter Brueggemann describes this era as a time of “technological individualism” and “unbridled corporate power”.<sup>198</sup> The only proper Gospel response to this circumstance is “resistance”.<sup>199</sup> A mystagogical turn requires committed communities of alternative narratives who “stir up irresistible questions”. Christian communities must be more than a meagre endorsement of the prevailing culture, embracing forms of humanism with minimal spiritual reference. Rather, Christian communities, no matter how imperfect, must strive to localise the demands of the Gospel. They must recognise their place within the Christian heritage, opening themselves to imaginative forms of conversation with the world immediately around them. Mystagogy is ultimately a lived reality of new forms of story-telling; nevertheless, the story must first take root in the lives of believers, in order for a new, fruitful, living conversation of witness to unfold. Resistance does not imply a rejection of or removal from one’s cultural circumstances; it does imply a considered and critical engagement with the world of today. Resistance calls forth a Christic pattern of living in today’s world, and in doing so, the life of the believer becomes a mystagogical, living word of “good news”.

Resistance provides a form of interruption in the cultural conversational space. Resistance recognises that cultural values and behaviours also conceal “hidden conflicts” which require patterns of confrontation and the refusal of participation.<sup>200</sup> At stake is the acknowledgement that cultural engagement is also “a deep battlefield” of imagery and

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<sup>198</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Always in the Shadow of Empire”, in *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. M. L. Budde and R. W. Brimlow (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 39. Quoted in Michael Paul Gallagher, “University and Culture: Towards a Retrieval of Humanism”, *Gregorianum* 85, no. 1 (2004): 162.

<sup>199</sup> Brueggemann, “Always in the Shadow of Empire”.

<sup>200</sup> Gallagher, “University and Culture”, 161.

imagination.<sup>201</sup> A particular function of *NE* is a process of “genuine cultural discernment” which sifts “the lights and the shadows” of the “always ambiguous terrain that is human culture”.<sup>202</sup> In this line of thought, Graham Ward identifies cultural subversion as one of the tasks of Christian apologetics, and by extension *NE*, which necessities an “in-depth reading” of the cultures being addressed. Without this effective reading of “the signs of the times”, the Christian message becomes either too foreign and alien, or too syncretistic and secularised. It fails to speak of the vital newness which is always fundamental to evangelising narratives and does not aid in the task of opening up new vistas to human experience.<sup>203</sup>

As a further path of Christian discernment, dialogue is a key approach to engagement in the modern age. Despite the professed desire of the Church to engage in dialogue with non-believers, the lack of structures and “engaged dialogue partners” has hindered efforts in this regard. The “Courtyard of the Gentiles” is one structure which attempts to engage non-believers in apologetical dialogue.<sup>204</sup> Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue remain

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<sup>201</sup> Gallagher, “University and Culture”, 162.

<sup>202</sup> Gallagher, “University and Culture”, 162-3.

<sup>203</sup> Graham Ward, “Cultural Hermeneutics and Christian Apologetics”, in *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* ed. Andrew Davison (London: SCM Press, 2011), 125. “If Christian apologetics is to ‘speak’ to the culture they are addressing, then without the in-depth reading of culture they will not be effective; people won’t listen because the apologetics is not helping them to understand something about that culture that they have not seen before; the apologetics is not helping them to understand the lives, values, activities that socially embed them in a specific cultural terrain. Apologetics, viewed in this way, assists the Gospel in setting people free – from false desires, assumed needs, bewitching ideas, unreflected habits and substitutions for the real objects of their long – to worship God and recognize the true orientation of the human heart toward such worship.” Another formulation of reading the signs of the times is presented by John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra: Encyclical On Christianity And Social Progress* (15<sup>th</sup> May, 1961), 236. Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html) on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2014. “There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.” This is known as the Cardijn method after Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn. And further, Gallagher’s triad of discernment provides a useful, mystagogical language for reading and addressing the signs of the times. This triad consists of *disposition*, *direction* and *decision*: *disposition* requires a hermeneutical openness which trusts that the Divine presence can be perceived on its own terms by putting aside “prejudiced evaluations” and presumptive conclusions; the second step of *direction* scrutinises the various pulls of cultures by evaluating the movements which enhance or diminish the humanising goal of cultures; and thirdly, *decision* is the ground of Christian response which requires the formulating of one’s “lived priorities and commitments” which emerge as a result of the two prior stages. See Gallagher, “University and Culture”, 165-6.

<sup>204</sup> *EG*, 257. “A special place of encounter is offered by new Areopagi such as the Court of the Gentiles, where ‘believers and non-believers are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science, and about the search for transcendence’. This too is a path to peace in our troubled world.”

essential tasks, both for the goal of communion and for co-operation within society. The common witness of Christian churches and collaboration of monotheistic faiths is a vital sign, particularly in the secular rejection of religions as provoking social and cultural divisions.

#### 7.4 CONCLUSION

Evangelisation is the proper vocation of the Church. The spiritual heart of Australia, which still beats, even if in a shy rhythm, requires an evangelisation born from a spirit of place. In this sense, *NE* for an Australian consciousness requires modes which are contextual (raise awareness), spiritual (promote reflection), incarnational (offer a frame of interpretation) and oriented towards communal witness (practical responsiveness). The interaction between human experience, spirituality, theological reflection and praxis establishes the framework for a mystagogical evangelisation. Some foundational dimensions of the Australian character identified in the previous chapter provide a rich agenda for mystagogy.

A mystagogical proposal presumes that the receptive sensibility of the human person is approachable through the affective and imaginative dimensions of human experience. Mystagogy is the art of accompanying fellow pilgrims in the great search for meaning, using the immense heritage of the Church as signposts to guide the way. To name the heart of the matter, mystagogy understands evangelisation as a communication event which illuminates the “always already” Divine Presence. The mystagogical “content” of evangelisation is not filled with countless words, but with the One Christic Word made flesh. This Christic Word asserts its own vibrancy and “performative force” through its new utterance in a new context. Mystagogy is the instinctive language of self-transcendence, and its natural rhythms are the “songlines” which expand the horizons of the religious imagination. The Christ Event is an event of Word and Spirit, breaking through linguistic limitations and into the mystagogical

realm of the continuous sacramental enactment of the new creation. The demands of the contemporary situation require a proclamation born of this “splendid work” of the Divine imagination.<sup>205</sup> Mystagogy is the evangelising acknowledgement of Newman’s principle that the “heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination”.<sup>206</sup>

New or old, evangelisation is more often the result of personal models of faith rather than public models of communication. Modes of communication, however, remain necessary dimensions of evangelisation. Offered in this chapter are pointers to spaces for conversation. In these spaces, the mystagogical aim is to reveal a more subtle, intuitive human desire. The One who initiates this dialogue is the ‘always already’ presence of the One desired. The mystagogical conversation is an invitation to unlock the native speech rhythms of self-transcendence. What remains is to identify the “locations” of these conversational spaces, and the modes or styles of “participation” within the spaces. This serves as the content of the concluding chapter.

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<sup>205</sup> Kelly, "Praxis and Pragmatism", 272. See thesis ch. 7, fn. 192.

<sup>206</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 92. See thesis ch. 2, fn. 152.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### ***CONCLUSION:***

#### ***Review, Prospects and Directions***

## **Conclusion: Review, Prospects and Directions**

### 8.1 REVIEW

The driving concerns of this thesis are pastoral, as the initial question emerged from parish experience. Nevertheless, the pastoral cannot be separated from the theological. By some measures, the practice and lived experience of religious faith is a declining phenomenon in the contemporary Australian scene, mirroring trends elsewhere in the Western world. Yet at the same time, fundamental expressions of spirituality remain observable and discernible. Even in the most a-religious context, secular humanism utilises ethical, moral, and spiritual language as a part of public discourse.

The decline in participation in Church practice is an old story. The letters of St. Paul urge Christian communities to remain steadfast and faithful despite temptations to revert to former religious practices, follow false prophets or participate in pagan practices.<sup>1</sup> These issues of religious adherence are not “new”. What is “new” is the reframing of what constitutes horizons of meaning in the modern world.

The dramatic split between the Gospel and culture identified by Paul VI has evolved into a profound separation of perceptions of “the real”. Things of the spirit can be imagined and expressed without reference to any divine source. Ebb in one dynamic of culture – religious practice – coincides with a flow into another element of culture – secular humanism. Religious terminology is deeply affected by secular idiom.

This thesis has examined the history of *NE* and its diverse interpretations. An important historical feature of the development of *NE* has been its emergence in the Latin American context, and its subsequent formulations in the English-speaking world. The

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<sup>1</sup> For example: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, 5:1-13, 10:1-31, 8:1-13; 2 Corinthians 6:1-18, 11:1-15; Galatians 2:11-3:14.

succinct definition of *NE* by John Paul II as “new ardour, new methods and new expression” in evangelising activity has provided the fundamental methodological matrix of this thesis, with its blend of culture considerations, pneumatology in spirituality, theological reflection, and the praxis of mission. An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Rahner’s mystagogical endeavour was examined under these headings. This, in turn, provided a structure for the proposal of a mystagogical category of evangelisation through four frames, namely, awareness, reflection, interpretation and responsiveness.

The leadership of Pope Francis has re-situated *NE* within a broader framework of ecclesial reform and pastoral activity. *NE* thus becomes not an extra category, but a missionary impulse which takes into account the historical moment and social location. In the “Franciscan era”, evangelisation is re-interpreted through a Christological prism of mercy and a pneumatological openness to fresh pastoral outreach. Francis re-frames *NE* as primarily relational rather than catechetical. Given this, *NE* has tended to merge with the broader missionary vocation of the Church, with a consequent diminishing emphasis on *NE* as a distinct or separate evangelising strategy.

A mystagogical approach draws on this relational agenda. Firstly, a mystagogical approach presumes that there is an “always already” Divine encounter within personal, concrete experience. Secondly, a mystagogical approach aims to draw upon this relationship through an evangelising accompaniment in the search for meaning. It is a pre-creedal, aesthetical, imaginative conversation which aims to relate transcendent experience to the grand Christian narrative. In this sense, it is a bridge between *fides qua* and *fides quae*.

A particular focus of this thesis has been the Australian context. The aim has been to explore mystagogy within particular cultural patterns, while acknowledging limitations in naming such patterns. Murray’s note that the whole cannot be described but only evoked is as a corrective to over-analysis, which fails to consider the marginal and disparate voices who



contribute to the Australian context. While diversity has been acknowledged, a richer assortment of contrarian and marginalised voices is always desirable when it comes to an evaluation of the cultural realities of Australia. In part, this absence of diverse perspectives is due to the historical shortage of alternative contributions and analysis. Multiculturalism, as successful as this has been, has tended to flatten out cultural otherness, and to become a deceptively coercive view which masks social complexity. Within the Catholic Church, the decline of the Anglo-Celtic contribution has opened a space for a growth of ethnic spiritualities and traditions, revealing a cultural diversity which had previously been partitioned from the mainstream. In the broader social space, technology is creating cultures and providing the means for a diversification of relational and interpretative dynamics, and thus the fracturing of a dominant cultural field of reference.

One of the premises of this thesis is the need to develop cultural forms of evangelising conversation. A mystagogical approach must develop forms of cultural engagement in the public square. Some interpretations of *NE* have emphasised cultural pathologies and deficiencies. The argument for a mystagogical approach in an Australian setting, however, asserts that the cultural ear is more attuned to patterns of social participation and partnerships. Forms of moral rebuke are less effective in attracting interest in questions of ultimate concern.

Western Christianity has provided the basis for Australia's moral codes since European settlement. It has been less successful in developing a genuine indigenous spirituality which incorporates the Judeo-Christian story into the heart and soul of the people of the land. Mystagogy alone will not do this. Nonetheless, it may well provide an inventive cultural key which unlocks something of the deeper natures of Australian consciousness. There is no shortage of cultural avenues to this end. The aim of mystagogy is to engage and extend the basic human intuitions inherent in the search for meaning.

The Australian theological contribution since the Second Vatican Council has provided a significant resource to further the indigenisation of theology. Australian theologising has, to some extent, remained self-conscious with a tendency to settle for “Australianisms” without an in-depth historical dialogue with the Church’s tradition. “Context” has been too narrowly interpreted as “linguistics” or “native themes”, whereby theologising becomes a process of translating concepts and imagery into expressions of idiom. As has been noted, a “generic spirituality” has filled the vacuum left by the absence of more fundamental and systematic theologising.

A mystagogical theology must take care not to over-simplify theological concepts and reduce them to affective formulations. For example, the Holy Spirit is more than “feelings” or “moods”. An Australian theology must travel the hard road from accent to meaning and language with a more expansive and encompassing methodology. The tension between the universal and the subjective requires further theological consideration. In the dialogue of proclamation, dialect, embodiment and location must encounter revelation, tradition, and history. The continuing concern for theology in Australia is the gathering of the universal and the local into a reflective endeavour which is both properly Catholic and Australian.

The relationship between evangelisation and catechetics is also an important consideration for a mystagogical mode. Rahner’s emphasis on the “catechism of the heart” opens his methodology to criticism of excessive subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, his core position regarding the intuitive, self-transcendent possibilities of the human subject stands at the centre of a mystagogical theology. Evangelisation is fundamentally an invitation to interpret subjective experience within the genuine and real experiences of an historical and universal story. In its turn, the universal story expands the measure of particular personal histories.

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<sup>2</sup> For use of the term “catechism of the heart” see Egan, “Karl Rahner’s Theological Life”, in *Finding God in All Things: Celebrating Bernard Lonergan, John Courtney Murray, and Karl Rahner*, ed. Mark Bosco and David J. Stagaman (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 148.

A contemporary dilemma is experienced when the world of the universal tends to be collapsed into a world of subjectivity. Personal worlds now overlap through impersonal webs of interconnectivity. In this respect, evangelisation must contend with a narrower and pervasive view of the embodied personhood. Evangelisation must negotiate one of the great paradoxes of the age: as scientific knowledge has expanded our understanding of the outer world, the capacities of the inner world have narrowed. Mystagogy seeks to provide a meeting place between the subjective and the universal, in the hope that the culturally muted Word might take flesh and find a new hearing.

Coleridge identified “evangelical imagination” as a key strategy in the renewal of the Church’s proclamation.<sup>3</sup> This amounts to a call to develop a “mystagogical imagination”. Ancient mystagogical preachers such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo and John Chrysostom developed a post-baptismal evangelising narrative which interpreted the neophytes’ sacramental experience.<sup>4</sup> So too today, an imaginative reading of cultural realities is needed for a renewed post-baptismal evangelising narrative.

From an ecclesiological perspective, many presentations of *NE* have tended to be shaped by an ideological agendas. From a theological perspective, Rahner’s mystagogical proposition continues to be a potential resource for evangelisation, even if it still needs greater systematic development. From an historical perspective, the interpretative dynamics which now shape twenty-first century secular humanism have much deeper roots in the intellectual and philosophical schools of the preceding centuries. From a cultural perspective, indicators of the search for meaning in the Australian consciousness can be identified as spaces of intentional engagement. Accordingly, this thesis argues that an inventive and intentional mystagogical conversation is a necessary dimension of the “evangelical imagination” required for today.

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<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, “Pope Francis leads in Evangelical Imagination”, *The Catholic Leader* 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2015, 2.

<sup>4</sup> See thesis ch. 4.2.

Elements of mystagogy have been firmly established in Australian theological practice and produced an abundance of theological reflection. What is further required is a renewed theological intensity designed to incarnate and inculturate the Living Word here and now. A genuine mystagogical methodology is predicated upon a contemplative wisdom capable of reading the cultural moment through the lens of grace. A mystagogical strategy takes seriously the previously quoted words of John Paul II: “The Way to the Father’s house passes through this land”. Evangelisation begins with a renewed appreciation of this inculturated salvific vision.

## 8.2 PROSPECTS

The previous chapter ended with a note on the “location” and “style” of mystagogical conversations. As a point of orientation to these questions of *loci* and *foci*, this brief summary aims to situate the multi-layered dimensions of the public square in Australian life. About 10am on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2014, an Islamic terrorist seized a number of hostages in a central Sydney café. The siege ended as police stormed the building at 2am the following day, resulting in the deaths of two hostages and the gunman. In an age which consistently demonstrates the accuracy of Girard’s assertion that violence and religious imagination are forged together in a complex psycho-cultural drama, acts of terrorism, even on a relatively small scale, prompt public questioning about the truth claims and social contribution of any religion.<sup>5</sup>

Martin Place, the location of the siege, is one of Australia’s busiest public spaces. The morning following the siege, a spontaneous public memorial developed. This is a common and universal response to public tragedy. However, journalist Jacqueline Maley reflected on

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<sup>5</sup> See thesis ch. 2.3.

the juxtaposition of the traditional Christmas tree in Martin Place and the unplanned public display of grief and shock:

The Martin Place Christmas Tree towers greenly, as it always does, between the Cenotaph and the GPO building. Usually, it is the focal point of pre-Christmas family activity in the Sydney CBD. But this year the tree stands rather lonely. It is the other end of Martin Place that has become the destination for pilgrims and the pre-Christmas shopping crowd [...] Martin Place, the heart of the Christmas activity, is as busy as ever, but as you walk up towards the scene of the siege, it becomes strangely subdued. The pathway is obstructed by the sea of flowers, which you smell before you see.<sup>6</sup>

Anzac memorials, which commemorate the war dead, are deliberately devoid of religious reference, and stand as public testaments to Australia's sectarian history and secular instincts. In similar fashion, this spontaneous communal memorial was decorated, not with religious symbols, but with Australian flora, expressing a diversity of spiritualities; a natural and fragrant search for meaning amid the meaningless. In the centre of Australia's largest city, social consciousness was jolted to contemplate issues of ultimate concern. This is not a uniquely Australian response, but the "space" between the artificial tree and the scented memorial, which was sensed before it was seen, is a "space" of profound complexity and drama. In this space, evangelisation is caught between the poles of traditional symbolism of the "routinised" seasonal fixture of Christmas tree and living expressions of unfiltered emotions following on a dramatic event expressed in the spontaneous floral memorial.

In Murray's prophetic poem "An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow" written some decades before this incident, a weeping man stands in Martin Place - a poetic parallel, it might be suggested, to the mournful expression of the ordinary rainbow of flowers. The narrator exclaims: "There's a fellow crying in Martin Place. They can't stop him".<sup>7</sup> The weeping is unrestrained yet dignified, drawing forth tears from some and derision from

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<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Maley, "Focus of Sydney Christmas is Martin Place, But Not by the Tree", *The Sydney Morning Herald* 19th December, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/focus-of-sydney-christmas-is-martin-place-but-not-by-the-tree-20141219-12agrr.html> on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Murray, "An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow", in *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry*, ed. Les A. Murray (Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1986), 100-1.

others: “Many weep for sheer acceptance, and more refuse to weep for fear of all acceptance”.

In extreme circumstances, private human boundaries are stretched into an open forum. The task of contemporary mystagogia is to accompany the public weeping with the possibility of meaning. At these points, the chasm between Gospel and culture narrows. This split is not fixed or static, but reacts to the movements of history. Secular theorists easily underestimate the strength of religious instincts and convictions. In this elastic relationship between faith and culture, history creates moments where questions of faith and meaning surface and are enacted in the public square.

*NE* needs to be alert to this vibrant and fluid relationship between faith and culture. The dramatic split may well be one of the realities of our times, but it is not a fixed, unyielding separation. It is better compared to a sea of meaning which ebbs and flows in a dynamic fashion. An evangelisation which is attuned to this will require a mystagogical imagination to ride the diverse currents of the contemporary age. Negotiating and engaging “the signs of the times” is the constituent dynamic of evangelisation.

To further locate the spaces of evangelisation, a parallel can be drawn with Tracy’s public frames of theology. Tracy identified three fields of reference, or “three publics” of theological address: society, the academy, and the Church.<sup>8</sup> The claim that Tracy stakes for the public nature of theology also extends to the public role of evangelisation: theology and, by extension, evangelisation, makes “a claim to public response bearing meaning and truth on the most serious and difficult questions, both personal and communal, that any human being

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<sup>8</sup> See Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3-46. Society includes the “technoeconomic structure concerned with organization and allocation of goods and services”, the realm of polity and the realm of culture, 7. The academy is the generic term for the “scholarly study of theology”, 14. The Church is a “community of moral and religious discourse” and exercises “a mediating function between individuals and society as a whole”, 21. Tracy further explores three disciplines of theology - fundamental, systematic, and practical - in relation to various modes of interaction with the three publics, thereby drawing attention to layers of pluralism in theological discourse, 54-58.

or society must face”.<sup>9</sup> Like theology, evangelisation must be “genuine public discourse”.<sup>10</sup>

In naming three areas of address, Tracy is describing the principal, rather than exclusive, location of discourse. Each audience shapes the nature of the theological and evangelical enterprise.

It is possible, therefore, to name “three locations” of *NE*. As Tracy’s three realms identify the principal forms of public theological address, so too there are three spaces of engagement regarding the principal spheres of evangelising conversation:

- the Performative Space: Church;
- the Dialectic Dialogical Space: Society;
- the Open Communicative Space: Culture.

These three areas represent different forms of conversation and modes of expression. The performative space is the sphere in which the Church operates on its own terms, through its own ritualised forms and theological framework. This is not to say that it is a self-referential, closed space, but it is to suggest that the performative space is where the Church is mostly visibly and actively “church”. The second sphere is the dialogical space in which the Church operates within the negotiated space of public and political engagement. In this space, the Church acts as social agent of transformation and justice. The third sphere is the open communicative space in which the Church participates in the cultural, intellectual and artistic life of communities. In this space, the Church exercises a sociological and anthropological contribution to the collective and highest good. Each of these spaces becomes a possible arena of evangelisation as the Church consciously and intentionally enters into an evocative conversation which enlarges the horizons of the religious imagination.

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<sup>9</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 5.

### 8.2.1 The Performative Space

The performative space is of particular interest to *NE*. The core purpose of *NE* is to re-connect with baptised but loosely-affiliated Catholics. Defined by Kelly, the performative space is the witness the Christian community gives to the living presence of Christ through “the mediations of liturgy and preaching, in its missionary outreach and dialogical encounters, in its serving Christ in the neighbour, and in loving him even in the enemy”.<sup>11</sup> In this performative or enacted register, “the church is the historical field of experience, witness and praxis in which Christian faith is formed – or better, performed – in thanksgiving for the gift of what has been given”.<sup>12</sup> The performative space is the fully-embodied ecclesial enactment of Christ’s command to “do this in memory of me”.<sup>13</sup> While manifest most fully in Christian liturgy, the performative space moves outward towards all forms of Church activity. In turn, this vocational and missionary activity is re-constituted through liturgical action.

The performative space envisioned here is predominantly the parish and/or school setting. However, it is not limited to these, as universities, hospitals, aged care and other places of Catholic service also provide opportunities for performative connection. This is the space to which baptised Catholics will return for a range of reasons, events and celebrations. At various moments, baptised Catholics will reconnect with a worshipping community for rituals such as baptisms, confirmations, first communions, weddings, funerals, Christmas, Easter, graduation or school ceremonies, and social or festival gatherings. These events, when people re-encounter the Church, open multiple possibilities of evangelising conversations.

At these moments, the pastoral temptation is to attempt to do too much or to be wearied by a seeming fruitlessness. The wisdom of a longer term view is beneficial, saving communities from unachievable expectations or a pastoral gloom. A mystagogical

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<sup>11</sup> Kelly, "The Expanding Incarnation", 799.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly, "The Expanding Incarnation".

<sup>13</sup> Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24.



conversation begins, not with the doctrinal claims of the Church, but with an awareness of the human experience of transcendence. The aim is to suggest that these experiences can be taken seriously, that our imaginations can be trusted to reveal goodness and beauty. The validation of these experiences through the collective witness of the Christian community can be the performative space in which these sensibilities gradually become formed into a pattern of living.

More energy, formation and inventiveness are required if these performative spaces are to become spaces of mystagogical accompaniment. Modes of communication which serve to enliven the ordinary with mystagogic potential are critical at these moments of reconnection. Practical theology offers a starting point for discerning the questions, tensions, confusions and hopes of those who return at these opportune moments. Beyond this, individual Christian communities must become more aware of the genuine opportunities these reconnecting moments offer as a doorway to humanising Christian commitment.

In this evangelising sense, the performative space is a relational space in which members of Christian communities are formed into mystagogical witnesses themselves. The performative space, as a continual, fully-embodied, ecclesial enactment, is directed towards “doing” what the Gospel demands.<sup>14</sup> This is not to suggest the performative space is situated only *ad intra*, but it is to suggest that the performative space is the crucible of Christian formation and imagination from which flow all other activities and encounters.

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<sup>14</sup> *Catholic Update Guide*, 2. See thesis ch. 1, fn. 24. “To evangelise [...] means to do the Gospel, to live it, to carry it out, as well as to proclaim it. To live the Gospel, to challenge others by one’s example and lifestyle, to uphold true values, to open people’s hearts to the saving power of God, to build community, to struggle against injustice, to work for the transformation of society – these are all vital elements of the activity known as evangelization.”

### 8.2.2 The Dialectic Dialogical Space

In many Western nations, the Church is no longer a persuasive cultural actor, or the dominant voice of spirituality, or the carrier of moral authority in personal decision-making. In pluralist societies, it is one voice among many, itself often a damaged or muted voice. In this space, the Church is also held accountable for its own failures in its duty of care, and for falling short of the standards it seeks to impose upon others. This is demonstrated most clearly in the scandal of the sexual abuse of children in many Western countries and exposure of irresponsibility in Church leadership. In the dialectic dialogical space, contrary horizons of meaning, conflicting understandings and divergent evaluations identify contested fields of interpretation.<sup>15</sup> These complex realities require a dialogical ecclesial engagement in a pluralist society.<sup>16</sup>

The tensions created by differing perceptions force “interruptions” upon the rhythms of conversation.<sup>17</sup> Encountering dialectical positions through dialogue generates important questions of challenge and conversion for the Church.<sup>18</sup> If a credible, evangelising witness is

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<sup>15</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 235-66. Lonergan lists “dialectics” as one of his eight interdependent “functional specialities” or sets “related or recurrent operations” of theology, 125-145. “The function of dialectic will be to bring such conflicts to light, and to provide a technique that objectifies subjective differences and promotes conversion,” 235.

<sup>16</sup> See also two articles by Kelly: “Lonergan's Dialectic and Australian Theology”, *Compass Theology Review* 20 (Autumn 1986): 18-24; ; “Lonergan's Dialectic: The Study of Conflicts”, *Compass Theology Review* 20 (Winter 1986): 11-15 and 31. In Kelly’s summation, “Lonergan’s essential point is this: if you are trying to cultivate the full dimensions of conversion in yourself, you can both appreciate its presence in others and spot its absence. How can you communicate this perception of absence might be a delicate matter. But at least you are inviting the other to move toward a fuller, richer sense of fulfilment, to shoulder the business of the universe rather than closing mind or heart to it.” “The Study of Conflicts”, 31.

<sup>17</sup> See thesis ch. 7, fn. 16-18.

<sup>18</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 237-44. Lonergan addresses three forms of conversion: Intellectual, moral and religious. Intellectual conversion “is a radical clarification” and subsequent re-formulation of the capacities of the intellect to understand, interpret and trust human experience, 238. The second form is moral which orientates the human person to the “truly good” and transforms the “criterion of one’s decisions and choices from satisfactions to values,” 240. The third form is religious conversion which Lonergan describes as “a dynamic state” and “under-tow of existential consciousness” likened to “other-world falling in love” and is characterised as a “total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations,” 240. Religious conversion is the ground of all subsequent choices and acts.

to be fashioned, this radical plurality of public discourse need not be the cause of disorientation, but welcomed for its interruptive value and transfiguring possibilities.

The previous chapter noted Williams' call for the creation of "spaces of conciliation" as a conversational method of negotiation within a pluralist society.<sup>19</sup> This is not to argue that Christian faith is a negotiable collection of beliefs which may be added to or subtracted from, but it is to suggest that the processes of conciliation and dialogue become both a space of listening and a space of evangelisation. The alternative is for the Church to sit on the sidelines, silent, or critical, disengaged and defensive, stances which are of no benefit to either itself or society.

As a space of listening, the dialogical-negotiated space is a crucial formative space for the Church. It is the space in which the Church can measure its own claims to truth, weigh alternative stances and responses, seek clear language for expressing the hopes of the Gospel, and discover a common ground for the progress of the society and the human family. To the extent to which these spaces already exist, they are found amid the social activity of the Church, the work for justice, co-operation towards the common good, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, intellectual engagement with the sciences, and personal and communal witness. Involvement in these spaces stimulates mystagogical qualities through concern for and witness to the genuine *humanum* envisioned in the Gospel.

The Australian ecclesial contribution to civic life has preserved a strong social, intellectual public discourse. The mystagogical task is to shape these positions into a creative conversation in order to transform the religious imagination of both the committed believer and the disengaged questioner. Newman's emphasis on the religious imagination is worth restating here: "The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 46. See thesis ch. 7, fn. 7.

imagination”.<sup>20</sup> “Real” religious assent “is discerned, rested in, and appropriated as a reality, by the religious imagination”.<sup>21</sup>

A mystagogy of dialogue and negotiation, therefore, requires more than reasoned argumentation. Accompanying such a dialogue of stories, there is the necessary component of stories, parables, imagery and a discerning, contemplative stillness through which “the heart” is reached. “Negotiation” and “conciliation” need not be interpreted solely in a socio-political sense, but can nevertheless find expression in public and holistic endeavours designed to avoid rationalistic reduction. This space presumes a genuine outreach by the Church. It requires the courage to enter into and sustain difficult dialogues and conversations, and demonstrate a capacity to learn and adapt, while still remaining faithful to the treasure of the Good News with which it has been entrusted. *EvN* and *EG* are formative documents for re-shaping the imaginative missionary activity of the Church as it negotiates new contexts. *LS* offers a template for entering into this space with a profound Christian vision by opening the way to participate in an urgent global conversation. These texts serve to remind the Church that the first and last dialogue, the dialogue between God and the Christian community, is the dialogue which sustains, guides and directs all others.

### 8.2.3 The Open Communicative Space

The open communicative space is the widest cultural space in which the Church is engaged. The Church is concretely manifest as an actor in the grand sweep of human activity. It exercises its mystagogical witness through “the *diakonia* of truth in the midst of humanity”.<sup>22</sup> Particular examples of involvement in the open space include the Church’s

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<sup>20</sup> Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 92. See thesis ch. 2, fn. 152.

<sup>21</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 98.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to Catholic Educators*. See thesis ch. 7, fn. 196.

artistic and cultural heritage which provides points of reflection and contemplation. Church architecture also retains a civic value, particularly as providing focal points of public activity and identity. Art, music and liturgy continue to be an opening to the profound beauty and sacredness of life. Public service through chaplaincy, charitable works, health care, education, and public advocacy are means through which the Church shares in the collective journey of humanity.

Technology is rapidly breaking down the barriers of distance and creating new open spaces of communication. This is a time of “epochal change”, “an age of knowledge and information” and, in turn, of establishing “new and often anonymous kinds of power”.<sup>23</sup> However, too much can be made of the power of social media. Malcolm Gladwell points to the distinction between “strong tie” phenomena and “weak tie” movements.<sup>24</sup> Social change is unsustainable without strong, grass-roots movements shaped and maintained by communal commitment. Gladwell points out that the Civil Rights movement in the USA would never have been sustained by Twitter or Facebook; it was driven by the strategic organisation and passion of local church communities.<sup>25</sup> The power of “strong ties” provides an historical counter to any overstated “revolutionary” claims of social media. Social media may generate interest and awareness, but this does not maintain passion and motivation because of its “weak ties”. The radical, formative power of the Gospel requires communities motivated by an on-going, patient commitment to enter into the complexity of the open space and the long-term process of just, social transformation. The strong ties of community sustain the mystagogical imagination with a vision of the possible.

The social and communicative space serves to remind society of the renewal that is possible in an otherwise fatigued, disenchanted world. In this open space, the Church’s presence is not simply doctrinal, however much its outreach may rest on doctrinal principles.

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<sup>23</sup> *EG*, 52.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change”, *The New Yorker* 86, no. 30 (4<sup>th</sup> October, 2010): 44-5.

<sup>25</sup> Gladwell, “Small Change”, 46-7.

Lash's previously referenced description of religion as a life-long school of conversion provides some direction for participation in this space.<sup>26</sup> To repeat Lash's insight: "All human beings have their hearts set somewhere, hold something sacred, worship at some shrine."<sup>27</sup> To worship at some shrine "is to be a human being".<sup>28</sup> Religion serves to wean us "from our idolatry" and re-focus that which we desire.<sup>29</sup> A mystagogical witness in the open space must, therefore, begin as a conversation around our shrines.

Open space conversation-as-evangelisation also requires a certain "self-forgetfulness".<sup>30</sup> This demands, in de Lubac's words, a humble return "to school and staying there a long time"; a willingness, firstly, to participate in an "open" space of dialogue and learning.<sup>31</sup> Those who will best answer the needs of the time will be those "who will not have first sought to answer them".<sup>32</sup> The "answers" cannot be pre-determined in response to diagnoses of "cultural pathologies". Pastoral attentiveness requires more than mere problem-solving or corrective dogmatism. The formulaic expression, however precise, is no longer sufficient. New patterns of communication and engagement will emerge through the surprises and initiatives of grace, which prescriptive programs can fail to recognise.

A pneumatology of evangelisation accepts that "the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelisation".<sup>33</sup> The implication is that any "fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable".<sup>34</sup> The Holy Spirit is not restricted to human rhythms and planning, so that "we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results", knowing only that "our

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<sup>26</sup> Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 21. See also *Theology for Pilgrims*, 102.

<sup>27</sup> Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*.

<sup>28</sup> Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Paule Simon, Sadie Kreilkamp, and Ernest Beaumont (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 114: "The man who seeks sincerity instead of seeking truth in self-forgetting, is like the man who seeks to be detached instead of laying himself open to love: he can only embark on infinite and sterile complications, and the whole problem is posed afresh for him at each stage – or at each circuit of the cage."

<sup>31</sup> de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*.

<sup>33</sup> *EvN*, 75.

<sup>34</sup> *EG*, 279.

commitment is necessary”.<sup>35</sup> This requires faith and confidence, “renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail”, trusting that “Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place”.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Williams states that the “enemy of all proclamation of the Gospel is self-consciousness”.<sup>37</sup> Particularly in an Australian setting, being too “churchy” and “preachy” creates resistance. Fundamentally, the open communicative space is a pneumatological space of ordinary, human, mystagogical encounters, in which the Church learns and listens, so as to offer its own riches and wisdom. In this sense, the goal is to participate as fully as possible in the great human story, and in doing so, witness to the self-transcendent possibilities “always already” present in every individual story.

### 8.3 DIRECTIONS

To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis offered a vision of synodality as a “constitutive element” of the whole Church.<sup>38</sup> Synodality – the notion of “journeying together” – strengthens every dimension of the Church’s mission. Quoting John Chrysostom’s maxim that “Church and Synod are synonymous”, Pope Francis called for a collective “commitment to build a synodal Church” founded upon degrees of ecclesial “listening” in which “everyone has something to learn”. The Synod of Bishops is “the point of convergence” of this ecclesial mutuality:

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<sup>35</sup> *EG*, 279.

<sup>36</sup> *EG*, 280.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, “Address to Synod on New Evangelization”, 16. Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02\\_inglese/b09\\_02.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b09_02.html) on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (Rome: 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2015). Retrieved from: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html) on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2015. All quotes in this paragraph are taken from this address.

The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).

The rigid separation of *Ecclesia docens* (the teaching Church) and *Ecclesia discens* (the learning Church) is at odds with a proper understanding of the *sensus fidei* which underscores the concept of synodality. The whole Church, the faithful and pastors, together have an “instinctive ability to discern” the designs of the Holy Spirit and the necessary responses which this discernment demands. In the ecclesial vision of Pope Francis, synodality and mission are two permanent marks of Church life: synodality as a mark of the Church *ad intra*, and mission as a mark of the Church *ad extra*.<sup>39</sup> Even so, there is an *ad intra* and *ad extra* interplay between the two. Synodality also looks outwards towards the promotion of communion between all Christians and re-imagines the role of the Petrine Ministry. Mission also looks inward to the reform all Church activity, redirecting all energies to the proclamation of the Gospel.

Rahner’s call for a more mystagogical and missionary theology sought a greater unity between *fides qua* and *fides quae*. This, clearly, is also at the heart of Pope Francis’ synodal intentionality. A continual synodal dynamism between the “learning church” and the “teaching church” requires firstly a posture of a “listening church” which opens new ecclesial horizons and reformulates categorical dimensions of faith. This also necessitates a proper dialogical listening to the world and culture at large. This theological and ecclesial listening is a reception of the ways in which people make sense of the sacred in their lives, and challenges traditional patterns of theologising. A genuine though difficult newness is generated in the *salutis colloquium* (the conversation of salvation), moving this conversation beyond the subtleties of vocabulary and into the “dense constellation” of background

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<sup>39</sup> EG, 25. “Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’.”



meanings.<sup>40</sup> The “act” of believing (*fides qua*) and the “content” of faith (*fides quae*) are mutually enriched by these interactions of ecclesial listening, and through which a living and vital mystagogical communication with the world gradually emerges.<sup>41</sup>

A conceptual reframing and renewal of the categorical language of faith both interrupts and frees historically embedded religious conversation. This linguistic and conceptual transformation of the religious imagination in the modern age occurs beyond the authority and control of the Church. It is essential that the Church be a participant in this “new heavens and new earth” rather than to be isolated in a fixed universe which no longer exists. This requires a conceptual leap of faith which, far from abandoning the Tradition, becomes a fruit of living Tradition; an imaginative gift of *theópneustos* (breathed out by God).<sup>42</sup> Synodality, in the broadest sense, offers a conversational space in which the imaginative gift of *theópneustos* is received through processes of awareness, reflection, interpretation and responsiveness.

If synodality is to be a permanent dimension of ecclesial life, reformed ecclesial structures are required. Pope Francis envisions a three-fold ecclesial process of synodality at the level of local churches, regional churches and the universal Church.<sup>43</sup> Throughout this

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<sup>40</sup> *ES*, 70. See thesis ch. 5, fn. 81. See also thesis ch. 6, fn. 19-21.

<sup>41</sup> *50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*. See also *EG*, 186-192; and *LS*, 156-162. “As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.”

<sup>42</sup> See Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of NT*, 894. *Theópneustos* “is used for the wisdom or dreams that come from God. In the NT it occurs only in 2 Tim 3:16, where, along with ‘sacred’, it describes the OT writings that have divine authority. In the Hellenistic world the idea of inspiration is common but seldom refers to writings. In Judaism, however, God inscribes the commandments on tablets ( Ex. 24:12) and inspires the prophets (Num. 24:2ff) [...] 2 Tim 3:16 advances no particular theory of enthusiastic inspiration, uses no comparisons such as that of the flow of air through the flute, and offers no criteria such as the agreement of witnesses, the age of the writing, or the fulfilment of prophecies”. I use the term here in the sense of “wisdom or dreams that come from God”.

<sup>43</sup> *50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*. “In a synodal Church, the Synod of Bishops is only the most evident manifestation of a dynamism of communion which inspires all ecclesial decisions. The first level of the exercise of *synodality* is had in the particular Churches. [...] Only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the “base” and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape: these means, even when they prove wearisome, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing. The second level is that of Ecclesiastical Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions, Particular Councils and, in a special way, Conferences of Bishops. We need to reflect on how better to bring

thesis, the role of culture and context has been emphasised. A synodal Church begins at the “base”, listening to the agenda, questions and aspirations which arise within local settings. Such listening will also require a particular mystagogical intent and appreciation.

Patterns of mystagogical listening reveal the original “ontological posture” or orientation of the human person towards God. The mind and heart, the intellect and the will, must be open to listen in on history, to listen to ordinary experience, waiting patiently to discern a word of revelation.<sup>44</sup> Synodality is envisioned as the “ontological posture” of the whole Church, a permanent and continuous orientation in both its activities and its structures. To that degree, synodality is a mystagogical process by which the “always already” Divine presence is brought to ecclesial awareness, reflection, interpretation and responsiveness.

Long-term strategies will be necessary. In recent centuries, the Catholic Church has become more accustomed to centralised processes of governance and leadership. A pilgrim Church which seeks to “journey together” requires a dialogical disposition, open to a pneumatological newness. It is here that the Church enters the space of the new evangelisation; not merely new ways of speaking, but more importantly, new ways of listening.

The temptation is to limit mystagogy to the sphere of “the imaginative heart” and so promote evangelisation through generic forms of spirituality. Beyond “heart”, mystagogy also implies an evangelisation of the embodied mind. Mystagogy, in the broadest sense, is a holistic approach to the whole person and to the whole culture, as the mystagogical Word stirs the possibility of an ever-new evangelising moment. To redraw an earlier analogy,

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about, through these bodies, intermediary instances of *collegiality*, perhaps by integrating and updating certain aspects of the ancient ecclesiastical organization. The hope expressed by the Council that such bodies would help increase the spirit of episcopal *collegiality* has not yet been fully realized. We are still on the way, part-way there. [...] The last level is that of the universal Church. Here the Synod of Bishops, representing the Catholic episcopate, becomes an expression of *episcopal collegiality* within an entirely synodal Church. Two different phrases: “episcopal collegiality” and an “entirely synodal Church”. This level manifests the *collegialitas affectiva*, which can also become in certain circumstances “effective”, joining the Bishops among themselves and with the Pope in solicitude for the People of God.”

<sup>44</sup> Coolman, “Gestimmtheit”, 794. See thesis ch. 4, fn. 48.

mystagogy aims to bring to conscious awareness the instinctive “songlines” which mark the path of pilgrimage into Divine Mystery. A mystagogical form of evangelisation presumes that the pilgrimage of each and every person into Mystery has already begun. Hence, what is required first of all is to heighten the capacity of each person to respond to the promptings of grace.

This necessitates guiding principles of engagement. On-going formation plays a crucial role, particularly in the performative space. The task of forming good and imaginative preachers is an age-old ecclesial concern. Homiletics was a key focus of *EG*, placing it at the centre of all forms of evangelisation.<sup>45</sup> Homilies shape the “mythological worlds” of believers by shifting horizons of understanding, provoking responses, and establishing an on-going conversation with the Word proclaimed.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, formative connections demand a stronger link with deeper questions of everyday life, especially for those who reconnect with worshipping communities only at particular moments. To restate Gallagher’s argument quoted previously, many dismiss the Church more in disappointment than in anger because their spiritual hungers have been left unnourished.<sup>47</sup> Formation in new styles of missionary pedagogy is of great urgency.

A re-imagining of local church structures which willingly engage in the dialectic dialogical space is an essential evangelising task. Doctrinal or moral pronouncements from on-high find limited reception, except among those who already hold similar views. Places of prayer and contemplation, and agencies of missionary action, provide the beginnings of such reimagining. There is a genuine need to create “ecclesial meeting places of conversation”,

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<sup>45</sup> *EG*, 135-159. “The homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor’s closeness and ability to communicate to his people”, 13. “The challenge of an inculturated preaching consists in proclaiming a synthesis, not ideas or detached values. Where your synthesis is, there lies your heart [...] In the course of the homily, the hearts of believers keep silence and allow God to speak. The Lord and his people speak to one another in a thousand ways directly, without intermediaries. But in the homily they want someone to serve as an instrument and to express their feelings in such a way that afterwards, each one may choose how he or she will continue the conversation,” 143.

<sup>46</sup> Crowley, “Mystagogy and Mission”, 24. See thesis ch. 7, fn. 65.

<sup>47</sup> Gallagher, *Dive Deeper*, 122. See thesis ch. 2, fn. 167.

however they might be imagined, which establish local churches as key partners in the dialogue of the common good.

A greater mystagogical intentionality is required in the open communicative space. To return to the introduction of this thesis, a mystagogical intentionality is grounded in the realisation that evangelisation in the modern age entails “starting further back” as it were, at the non-doctrinal, pre-religious, imaginative level of human experience.<sup>48</sup> Mystagogical intentionality is marked by a spirit of accompaniment in the great human story, a sense of “synodality” with the whole human family, as the Church bears witness to the historical, unfolding patterns of Divine Mystery. In this pluralist and secular space, mystagogical intentionality is an invitation to reconsider the transcendent nature of the human person, and the role of community in promoting the betterment of human society, and to offer a Christic wisdom which guides the human person to a deeper and richer humanity. Mystagogical intentionality is a participation in the cultural realm through an imaginative witness of both partnership and resistance.

The complexities of the modern age may seem to dampen the prospects of any form of evangelisation, with cultural fragmentation reducing the collective story to subjective horizons. The Australian setting is no different from many European nations in this regard. Nevertheless, *NE* requires a cultural accent and attunement to the local. To offer the world a greater vision of the distinctly “human” is to engage in a mystagogical conversation of incarnational possibilities in an increasingly disenchanted world. Mystagogy is the creative space which seeks to disclose the Divine summons in grace and amplify the quiet Word of invitation into an articulate Word of revelation, cultivating the parabolic seed in each individual life.

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<sup>48</sup> Gallagher, *Dive Deeper*, 3. See thesis ch. 1, fn. 2.

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**Table 2: Ecclesiological Development of the concept of The New Evangelisation**

	<b>Paul VI/ <i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i></b>	<b>John Paul II</b>	<b>Benedict XVI/ Synod 2012</b>	<b>Francis/ <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i></b>
<b>New Context</b>	Identified the rupture between the Gospel and culture as the great drama of our time.	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> focused on a renewal of the missionary activity of the Church and formalised the concept of <i>NE</i> into ecclesial vocabulary.	“The real crisis facing the Church in the Western world is a crisis of faith.” (Benedict XVI)  Established a Vatican office for New Evangelisation (2010).	“In our time humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history... This epochal change has been set in motion by the enormous qualitative, quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances...” (52)
<b>New Impulse</b>	A new impulse is needed “today”. The first need is to evangelise the Church. “The Church exists in order to evangelise.”	A “new ardour” – a new impulse of the Holy Spirit. To proclaim Christ with new vigour.	The need to “re-propose” the Gospel. Christ is the first evangeliser. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of evangelisation	“I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything...” (27)
<b>New Methods</b>	Proclamation as the voice of the Living Tradition of the Gospel for today.	“New methods”. While the message of Christ is Universal, evangelisation occurs within particular cultural contexts.	To “speak of a ‘new evangelization’ does not in fact mean that a single formula should be developed that would hold the same for all circumstances.”	A missionary key abandons the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative... (33)
<b>New Witness</b>	Witnesses sent out as ministers and servants of the Gospel. People listen to witnesses rather than teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are also witnesses.	Need for “new expressions” of the Gospel as a living reality. This comes about through personal conversion to Christ through the Spirit. Reiterates that people listen to witnesses rather than teachers.	Focus on the missionary task of parishes as the basic unit of the Church and on the charisms of small ecclesial communities. Benedict XVI also entered to an apologetic conversation with Europe, urging it to remember its Christian roots. The lives of the saints are the best form of apologetic.	Today too, people prefer to listen to witnesses: they “thirst for authenticity” and “call for evangelizers to speak of a God whom they themselves know and are familiar with, as if they were seeing him”. (150)

