

New Evangelisation in Australia

Introduction

Today many Australians today would describe themselves as cultural rather than fervent or regular Catholics. They often wed in the church. Many have their children baptised and send them to a Catholic school and they are likely to be buried from the church but that may be it. So Australia qualifies well for the new evangelisation envisioned by John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* #33. We are a democratic, secular, plural and fairly materialistic country where the Church's influence is waning. In this context we have been called to evangelise with new ardour, methods and expression.

This paper has three sections: I The Australian Context; II The Australian Catholic Church: Some Relevant Trends; and III Reflections on New Evangelisation in Australia Today. Central to my reflections will be some of the basic themes of modern missiology: God's mission; the Kingdom of God; the importance of remembering that the Church is sign, sacrament and servant of the Kingdom, which is larger than the Church; and the need for a broad approach to evangelisation, one that stresses not only proclamation but the other aspects of mission such as work for justice, inculturation, dialogue and so forth. These themes should influence evangelisation anywhere but they are particularly relevant for the Australian context. In fact without work for justice etc. we will not be credible to most Australians.

I The Australian Context

It is impossible in this paper to give a complete introduction to Australia, its history and culture so I will restrict myself to the two major themes most important for new evangelisation: Australia as a secular and pluralistic society.

Secular Australia

Australia is a postmodern, secular and multicultural country. (D'Orsa 2010, 104-117) But secular does not necessarily mean anti-religious or lacking in spirituality. There is still interest in religion and spirituality but the churches have lost their monopoly. Australia has been said to be the most secular country in the world but that is debatable. We have our Australian way of being religious. It was described by one of our major historians, Manning Clark as "A whisper in the mind and a shy hope in the heart." There is a great reluctance in Australians to talk about religion and spirituality and a distaste for extravagant display. Interestingly John Thornhill in his book *Making Australia* (1992) entitled his chapter on religion *The Embarrassing Subject*.

However, that does not mean we are irreligious. Theologians like John Thornhill, Tony Kelly and Ross Langmead believe this suggests not a lack of spiritual depth but a silence that reveals wisdom. We don't have the tools to express what we have experienced because of our isolation, our brutal early history, our guilt before the aborigines and our struggles with a harsh, raw land and climate. Many Australians are still searching for the transcendent and we need to learn to tell the Jesus story in an understandable and attractive Australian way. (Thornhill 1992) (Kelly 1990) (Langmead 2007)

To do that effectively we must understand the history of religion in white Australia. The foundational time for establishing Australian religious institutions was 1788-1840. Many of our founders were children of the Enlightenment and antagonistic to religion. In England the Church had lost touch with the urban poor so the convicts were rebellious and inarticulate religiously and for the first fifty years there were few clergy so they were left to their own devices. To make matters worse religion was used as part of the system for enforcing order. Ministers often acted as magistrates. Religion was seen as a civilising force so for many religion was fun-denying Wowserism. Australians were easy going larrikins, egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, self-reliant. They were also practical and pragmatic. The religion Australians admire is “religion with its sleeves rolled up”. They admire religious people who live their religion in practical caring ways like the “good old Salvos” or Vinnies.

Given our history we have developed a particular approach to religion. Bouma (2006, 45-47) describes our approach as among other things:

- having a light touch in dealing with religion - laid back;
- wary of enthusiasm - shy and withdrawn;
- distant from authority figures;
- committed to the here and now and enjoying life;
- against religion that is imposed;
- quiet reverence or deliberate silence;
- intolerance of God’s police;
- infrequent and occasional attendance;
- and individuals tend to be religious early and late in life.

The strong tendency in religion today is towards spirituality and towards what Charles Taylor would call “expressive individualism”, towards religion that feels good. There is also a tendency towards non-institutional or “do it yourself” access to the transcendent, and to newer rather than print media. All this poses special difficulties for the Church and its pastoral leaders who have not been trained in this way.

It may be no surprise then that the fastest growing “religion” in the 2011 Australian Census is “no religion”. They have risen from 18.7% in 2006 to 22.3% in 2011. A further 8.6% did not state their religion in the census.

Pluralist Australia

Besides the normal pressures towards pluralism that you would find in a “postmodern” society like Australia, migration has ensured a special pluralism here.

Australia is the most multicultural country in the western world. 47% of Australians were either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas. More than 7 million people have migrated to Australia since 1945. Up till 1960 the majority of immigrants were from Europe but between 1960 and 1990 non-western migration grew from 12% to 52% of all migrants. (Hanciles 2008) 44% of recent arrivals are Asian and the average age of Asians is 37 versus 56 for European migrants.

“Since World War II, immigration has played a huge role in the development of religious faith in Australia. That role has been evident in the place that many of the world’s religions now have in Australia. Since 1971, the number of Australians associated with a religion other than Christianity has risen from just 0.1 million to 1.5 million. However, many millions of the immigrants have been Christian and some denominations would hardly exist today without the enormous influx of members that immigration has brought.” (Hughes 2012b, 1)

The Anglican and Uniting Church numbers have dropped significantly but Catholicism has been a major beneficiary. For example, between the 2006 and 2011 Australian censuses 1.2 million migrants arrived in Australia. 500,000 of these were Christians and 200,000 were Catholics. Because of migration Catholics have only slipped from 25.8% to 25.3% of the population between 2006 and 2011. [Catholics number 5,439,269 out of a total population of 21,507,719. More people identify with Catholicism than any other religious tradition in Australia.] But migration has been both a gift and a challenge. It has obviously enriched the Catholic Church both in numbers and cultures. Through migration we have also become a multi-faith society. Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus are increasing in numbers and are playing an increasingly important role in Australian society.

II Catholic Church: Some Relevant Trends

In the 2011 Census of all identifying as Catholics: 25.3% were migrants; 21.6% were the children of migrants and 52.2% were born in Australia. According to the 2006 Census four dioceses: Sydney, Perth, Parramatta and Melbourne had around 30% of their Catholics born overseas. (ACBC Bishops’ Committee for Migrants and Refugees 2007) The top ten countries of birth among Catholics born overseas are: Italy, the Philippines, England, New Zealand, Ireland, India, Vietnam, Malta, Croatia and Poland in descending order. (Hughes 2012a)

Immigrants are significantly better at attending Church, although that falls off with succeeding generations. And while the majority of Australian born attendees are older, the immigrants make up 40% of those under 65 attending religious services. They are more accepting of authority and more traditional in their devotions. So they provide both an increase in numbers and devotion and some interesting challenges. They are attracted to devotions that Australian-born Catholics have recently given up. Some of the things which attract migrants are the very things that alienate many Australian born. “It is hard to provide religious nurture for both groups of people within the same context.” (Hughes 2012b, 8)

Meanwhile there is an increasing shortage of priests in Australia. Peter Wilkinson in his *Catholic Parish Ministry in Australia: Facing Disaster?* (2011) quotes the following conclusions from an examination of parishes in Australia:

- one in four Australian parishes is without a full-time resident priest
- very few new parishes are being established, despite a rapidly increasing Catholic population
- 184 existing parishes have been merged since 1994, with more likely to follow
- since 1995 local home-grown vocations to the priesthood have been few
- since 1997 parish ministry has become increasingly reliant on priests sourced from overseas
- parishes are generally having to care for an increasing number of Catholics; from an average of 3481 Catholics per parish in 2000 to an average 4368 in 2010 (+25%)

Because of the shortage of priests almost all dioceses in Australia have invited overseas born priests to join them and staff parishes. Religious congregations have also invited many overseas members to join them.

Accurate information on how many overseas priests and religious have entered Australia is unavailable. "In 2010, my best estimate is that 300-340 overseas-sourced priests, diocesan and religious, now minister in territorial parishes, and constitute 20-22 percent of all priests active in parish ministry." (Wilkinson 2011, 17)

These priests are both gift and challenge. They are mostly younger and they see themselves as missionaries to the Australian Church. They are zealous and spiritual. Because of their experience of crossing cultural boundaries they may have special sensitivities and insights needed for building a truly multicultural church. But they have similar attitudes to the lay migrants. They are often traditional and sometimes authoritarian, finding it difficult to work with parish councils and women lay pastoral associates. Because of their accent many parishioners find it hard to understand their homilies. A great deal of effort and planning needs to be put into programmes to welcome, enable and integrate overseas priests and religious. Some dioceses are good at this, others are not. More consultation and preparation of the local priests and future parishioners is essential.

Religious Life in Australia

In 2009 the National Council of Catholic Religious Australia commissioned the ACBC Pastoral Projects Office [now called the Pastoral Research Office] to survey the various Australian religious institutes (Reid 2010). There were 8,422 religious [5,927 sisters; 884 religious brothers; and 1,611 clerical religious] in Australia in 2009, down from the peak of 19,413 religious in 1966. Their median age was 73 and only 8.2% were under 50. Religious now cover a wide range of apostolates. The largest numbers are in social services and pastoral care. Only 12% work in education compared to 48% in 1976. Just over 400 people made first profession between 1997 and 2008 and 74.1% were still religious in 2009. There is no clear increase in the number of vocations but a significant number of vocations come from migrant communities. Australian religious have made a major contribution to Australian society through their schools, hospitals etc. In 2009 they still owned 563 institutions and jointly owned, sponsored or operated another 84 but they had closed over 50 in the past ten years. Most institutes believe that their best future lies in partnerships with laity and other institutes.

Mass Attendance in Australia

In 2007 (updated 2009) the Pastoral Projects Office of the Australian Bishops Conference produced their Final Report on *Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass*. Their research used a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology. They identified the following major reasons why Catholics had stopped attending Mass were:

Church-centred reasons: 1. The irrelevance of the Church to life today; 2. The misuse of power and authority in the Church; 3. Problems with the priest in the parish; 4. Lack of intellectual stimulation; 5. Concerns related to the Church as a community; 6. A sense of being excluded by Church laws; 7. Structural factors

Participant-centred reasons: 1. Family or household-related reasons; 2. Crisis of faith; 3. Going to Mass simply not a priority

These results were consistent with other research projects and were affirmed by the Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry Council (2008).

The Larger Australian Christian Context - National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey is second in size only to the National Census, as a social survey, and is taken every five years around the same time as the Census.¹

The survey measures nine "core qualities" of internal church life, nearly all of which continued a strong pattern of improvement over the past decade. These include "an alive and growing faith", with 86 per cent of people saying their faith has grown; "vital and nurturing worship", with 76 per cent finding the preaching at church helpful; and "strong and growing belonging"; with 82 per cent of those who attend church going weekly and 95 per cent at least monthly. The only two core qualities that have fallen are Leadership (encouraging individual's gifts) and Faith Sharing (inviting someone to church). With Faith Sharing the percentage has dropped from 37% in 2006 to 35% in 2011. And Catholics are one of the most reluctant groups in sharing their faith at around 27%. Catholic laity traditionally leave faith sharing to clergy and religious. Faith Sharing is the core value that has greatest positive influence on all the other core values and therefore the health of the church. (NCLS, 2012b)

The results of the 2006 NCLS survey showed that the key factors in attracting newcomers were: a strong sense of belonging among attendees; attendees inviting others to church; an empowering leader; a sense of vision and direction; growth in faith and commitment; joyful inspiring services; contemporary worship; informal acts of helping; looking after the young; a focus on people outside the church; and a willingness to try new things. (NCLS, 2012a, 108-109)

There are a few specific details about Catholics in *First Impressions* but the ACBC Pastoral Research Office has released two E-News Bulletins on the 2011 NCLS (Issues 18 & 19 December 2012). They reveal: 50% of Mass attenders are over 60; around 60% are women; 40% were born overseas; 85% of Mass attenders said they attend Mass usually every week or more often. (Pastoral Research Office 2012)

III Reflections on New Evangelisation in Australia Today

One of the things that concerns me about the present crisis facing the Australian Church is that the falling away from the Church seems to be indiscriminate. Children of committed Catholic families have also given up on the Church, despite the witness of their parents and receiving a good Catholic education.

¹ Twenty three denominations, including the Catholic Church, sponsor and participate. So far only a short *First Impressions* (NCLS 2012b) of trends in all the Christian Churches is available. It has some limited information specific to the Catholic Church. We also have the second edition of the report on the 2006 survey *Enriching Church Life* (NCLS, 2012a).

Effective evangelisation seems to demand more than putting in a greater effort and developing better programmes. Clearly something bigger is at stake. We are in the midst of a major cultural move. We are living at the end of “Christendom”. It may seem strange to talk of Christendom in Australia a country so far from Europe and whose white history begins only in the late 1800s but its influence did persist. Even though we have never had a State Religion, our Churches have had a Christendom mindset aspiring to influence and control especially over the moral debates of the country. However, history has taken away the supportive culture and plausibility structures we have been used to. The institutions, customs and beliefs that gave us security and credibility are now ineffective. Christianity has moved “from the centre to the margins, from majority to minority, from being at home in our culture to being aliens in it, from privilege to plurality, from control to witness, from maintenance to mission, and from institution to movement”. (Langmead 2007, ix)

We need more than a better presentation of doctrine or catechetical renewal. We are dealing with a radically new situation in which Christendom or a Christian culture no longer supports evangelisation. We are no longer being socialised into our Christian values.

Without the help of a supportive culture faith has become a choice against the tide and many Catholics have “fallen away”. The Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry (2009) and Carroll (2009) both point out that most of the reasons why people don’t attend Mass in Australia today were present in the 1950s but they still went. Now they don’t have to go. Now the Mass must be personally life-giving or they are unlikely to participate.

There will be no new age of privileged faith and culture, at least not in the “West”, so we need a radical rethink more than a greater effort at evangelisation.

Missiological Foundations

God’s mission, The Kingdom and the Church as Servant of the Kingdom

Fundamental to any rethinking of evangelisation are the basic themes of modern missiology.

A major rediscovery at Vatican II was that mission is founded in the life of the Trinity. Mission begins in the Father’s boundless love, creating and sustaining the world. The three persons of the Trinity love the universe and are constantly creating, healing, reconciling, transforming and uniting the world. Jesus was consumed with a sense of mission. Although he was intensely conscious of the power of evil, he could also see goodness breaking through and preached that the Kingdom of God was near at hand [Mk. 1:15].

The Church has inherited his mission and its role is to be a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom. She is a servant of the Kingdom which embraces all creation but is especially embodied in the Church, “its initial budding forth”. The Church exists for the sake of God’s Kingdom which is breaking into our world in many places including far beyond the boundaries of the institutional church. God is active wherever people strive for justice, peace, freedom and reconciliation between peoples, religions and with the environment. Our task is not only to proclaim but to seek out, discover, encourage, celebrate and build on the Spirit’s activity in the world.

We are “compelled” to preach Jesus. We must also build Christian communities to keep alive the memory of Jesus and reveal God’s coming reign. However, the primary aim of evangelisation is not the extension of the Church, important as that is, but the revelation of God’s love and the realisation of God’s plan for the world.

A More Positive Attitude to “the world”

If God is working in the world outside the Church then we must necessarily have a more positive attitude to the world than we had in the old missiology. The Church has normally been defensive and negative towards the modern world. We tend to long for the good old Christian days. Yet as O’Loughlin (2012) points out, Christendom was not God-given. It was the product of particular historical, social and cultural pressures and had its limitations as well as its strengths. There has never been and will never be a perfect form of Christianity.

There are three missiological principles that can help us. 1] All cultures, even ours, are places for transcendence and encounter with God. The Holy Spirit is active in our modern world. It is our job to discover, celebrate and build on this presence. 2] All cultures are also human constructs and are therefore ambiguous, containing “seeds and weeds” which need to be rejoiced in or condemned or evangelised. 3] The Gospel can only be received, appreciated and lived within a people’s culture. We have to speak to them in their terms, to find the evil and transcendence in their lives, to speak to their fears and hopes. Only an inculturated Gospel will call to deep and lasting conversion.

So there are three possible reactions to our “postmodern” world: hostility, innocent acceptance or discernment. And discernment must always be done out of consolation or appreciation not fear or anger. We will be much more convincing evangelisers if people feel we know, respect and enjoy them. This is especially true with Australians who have always suspected religious people as being negative and having all the answers.

“New evangelisation” will be strengthened by a broad approach to mission

Straight after this SEDOS Conference I am returning to Sydney for a Conference called, *Mission: One heart many voices*. The conference is being called by Catholic Religious Australia in conjunction with Catholic Mission and will complement the “new evangelisation”.

The conference is for people committed to and involved in mission, working for the Kingdom/Reign of God in Australia. People teaching in Catholic Education, caring for people in Catholic Health, Aboriginal Ministry, Saint Vincent de Paul, Catholic Social Services, Catholic Earth Care, Migrant Chaplaincy, Mercy Works, MacKillop Family Services, work with refugees or battered women, building Christian communities in their parish and other ministries. I fear that their work and commitment may seem tangential to the Australian Church’s efforts to promote new evangelisation, which some restrict to explicit proclamation.

But new evangelisation will be less effective if it is limited to a narrow definition of evangelisation. John Paul II (1991) in his encyclical letter, *Centesimus Annus*, taught “the new evangelisation, which the modern world urgently needs and which I have emphasised many times, must include among its essential elements a proclamation of the Church’s social doctrine.” (# 5) In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI had earlier linked liberation,

evangelisation and integral development. “As the kernel and centre of His Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God” #9. “But evangelisation would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man’s concrete life, both personal and social.” #29

Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* [#15] develops Paul VI’s teaching on the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and “man’s concrete life”, reaffirming the profound links between evangelisation and human development and development and liberation.

Proclamation is the “permanent priority” (RM #44) but “Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways. Among these ways, some have particular importance in the present situation of the Church and the world.” (RM #41) Proclamation must be done along with work for the Kingdom such as justice, peace and the integrity of creation; interreligious dialogue; and reconciliation. At the Synod of Bishops on *Justice in the World* [1971] they described “action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world” as a “constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel”. Dialogue and the other aspects of mission are also constitutive of mission and so in practice mission cannot be restricted to only one aspect.

Proclamation without work for justice will be empty and possibly ineffectual. It will probably be seen as self-serving. In Australia it will lack credibility. Australians admire religion “with its sleeves rolled up”, religion that practices what it preaches. They respect practical, involved Christian groups like the “good old Salvos” and “Vinnies”. It was possibly part of the enormous appeal of St Mary MacKillop shown during her canonisation.

The broader approach to mission may also have the added advantage of speaking to and involving the very people new evangelisation is primarily addressed to, namely disaffected Catholics. Many of these, whatever they feel about the Church, still have a strong commitment to justice, dialogue, ecology, reconciliation etc.

We hope that the conference will give a vision that will affirm, encourage and inspire all those working for the Reign of God and that this will build on other attempts at furthering new evangelisation.

A Deeper Personal Conversion to Christ

In Australia today we have to learn to preach and evangelise without the backing of power and prestige to an audience that is indifferent and even distrustful of us and our message. We must present a deeply personal and beautiful message. People are not interested in doctrine. Some years ago I was impressed by an article in the *SEDOS Bulletin* by Maria Ha-Fong Ko (2007) on *Mission in an Asian Context*. She asked a Taoist holy man what he thought of Christianity and he replied, “You Christians know too much about God”. We have so much doctrine but do we know God as mystery? We place such importance on pedagogy but too little on mystagogy. We have to learn to know the mystery of God in our hearts and be ready to share that and the reasons for our hope whenever we are asked for it but “gently and respectfully”. (1 Pet. 3:15) In a pluralist society we need to be able to talk to all

authentic experience and show how faith can enrich and enliven it. Our task is not to “pump religion into people” but to draw it out. To do that we need to know the mystery and the hunger in our own hearts, and respect it in others. Disarming the Church of much of its power has the potential to throw it back on its real foundations the beauty of Christ that we find in the New Testament, “that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life.” (1 Jn. 1:1) (Sellick 2013)

David Smith (2003) suggests that in this post-Christendom time it might be best if we were to return to before Christendom when the apostles and early Christians could not appeal to anything but the Gospel. In those days they expected that Christianity meant a radical conversion and that the moral demands would be high. They also had to understand and explain a dead Messiah. The Messiah was supposed to save us from death, not join us in it.

Timothy Radcliffe (2005) also suggests that the best role for Christians today is that of seeker or pilgrim, travelling with others as they search for the good, the true and the beautiful and towards happiness and God. We need to recover the “pilgrim spirit” of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

Responses in the Australian Context

Evangelising in a Secular Australia

There are secularists who are strongly anti-religion in Australia but on the whole Australia is not a strongly ideological country. Australian secularism is pragmatic, soft rather than hard. D’Orsa (2010, 109-110) Still religion is being increasingly marginalised in Australia. As in the rest of the West, Australian Churches aspired to wide influence and expected to provide much of the moral framework on which society was organised but now they are just one voice. Australian society relies on reason and science to make the decisions that shape public policy not religious authority. Secularisation has meant the undermining of religious meaning and the loss of increasing areas of life to religious control.

But as Ronald Rolheiser (2006) points out it will not be helpful if we regard modern secular society as the enemy, anti-church, amoral and the root of all our problems. Secularity is Christianity’s adolescent child, not bad but unfinished and difficult. Many of its values are clearly Christian and some of its excesses may be the result of our excesses. For too long the Church has tended to see the modern world as “pagan” or “Godless” and that has undermined our credibility even further. We need to be more positive as well as critical and to discover how God is experienced in this culture and how to live lives that make Gospel sense in a secular world.

We also need to remember that secularity is deeply part of us, part of our way of thinking. This is both opportunity and challenge. There are many aspects of secularity that we would not want to live without: democracy, human dignity; freedom of religion from state control; freedom of inquiry; advances in science and even our modern way of thinking. (Downey 2006) There are also destructive aspects: lack of respect for human life; consumerism; subject-centeredness, fragmentation, weak social involvement, privatisation of religion etc. We must approach secular society with a listening and discerning heart, with respect, confidence and humility, (Downey 2006) or in the spirit of prophetic dialogue championed

by Bevans and Schroeder (2011), an approach of respectful dialogue but also prophetic evangelisation and criticism. “The Gospel challenges cultures, and the Good News is a sharp-edged sword as well. The prophetic dimension is crucial. Australia needs a church that stands out as a clear sign of the reign of God.”(Langmead 2007, xxviii) To be prophetic we will need to integrate word and deed, costly discipleship, identification with the poor and challenging the powers.

Jim & Therese D’Orsa in a soon to be published book, *Leading for Mission: Integrating Life, Culture and Faith in Catholic Schools*, point out that because secularisation has the effect of muting religious messages in schools, it must be counterbalanced by strong and planned efforts at evangelisation. Otherwise the secular bias in modern western culture will prevail. Culture by nature is powerful and resistant to change and will win unless we take it into account.

In the past six months, while working at the Broken Bay Institute, I have been involved in courses on Mission and Religious Education and I have learnt a number of lessons related to new evangelisation. Firstly, religious education in many Australian Catholic schools is more evangelisation than catechesis. Catholic teachers can presume little Christian background in many of their students. Often the school is the only place where the children learn of Jesus and have any contact with the official Church and its liturgies. It is a frightening prospect for developing a deeply Catholic culture and tradition in the coming decades.

Fortunately great efforts are being put into educating teachers, especially religious education teachers, for our Catholic school system. And some of the most impressive thinking on evangelisation is being done by educationalists like Jim and Therese D’Orsa, who are at present finishing the third book of a trilogy on Mission and Education. A central theme of their work is the need we have to “befriend” culture, human experience and our living Catholic tradition to help staff and students find meaning and purpose in the midst of globalisation, secularisation and pluralism. They are convinced that we need to link faith and evangelisation to the student’s life, culture, sense of the world and the meaning of life or it will be shallow, ineffective and eventually overwhelmed by the force of culture. For more information on what is happening in Catholic schools see McGrath (2012).

One of the major weaknesses in much writing on new evangelisation is that it seems to ignore the importance of local culture as if we were all cultureless people.

Proclaiming Jesus in a Pluralist Australia

At a time when many in the Church are concerned with uniformity and orthodoxy and worried about a pluralist world, it is helpful to remember that our God is plural and the foundational book of our faith, the Bible, is a book full of pluralism. There is no one cohesive theology but a series of traditions that don’t always fit neatly together. There is a legitimate diversity within a fundamental unity. There are poets, prophets, historians, evangelists, pastors and apostles. All of them have a different understanding of the mystery that is God and Jesus because they were different people, writing with different questions for different audiences with different needs.

Even the Gospels present different images of Jesus depending on whether the authors are writing for Jewish or Gentile or mixed Christian communities; for people who are being driven out of the synagogues; or for Christians who need encouragement and a sense of identity and mission. Because of the different pastoral needs we have a rich variety of images of Jesus.

Theology is “faith seeking understanding”. When searching or in moments of unbelief we turn to Jesus to help us understand, to think in a Christian way and to make Christian choices. Our questions are shaped by our experiences, our culture, and our needs. All these factors colour and filter our understanding of Jesus.

Andrew Walls (2002) points out that when preaching to the Greeks Paul referred to Jesus as *Kyrios* or Lord rather than Messiah because Messiah was not a meaningful term to the Greeks. And the title “Lord” brought new theological questions about how Jesus related to the Father. Are there two “Lords”? And these questions lead to the Greek enrichment of Christianity through doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, hypostatic union and so forth. Greek questions expanded our understanding of Christ and the Trinity. These were implicit in the Scriptures but would never have been seen by Jewish minds that were much more capable of living with the ambiguity of two possible “Lords”.

If Greek minds asking Greek questions could lead to such powerful new insights, we can only wonder at the richness we will gain when Asian, African and Aboriginal minds ask their questions and share their answers and insights. They have questions which Western theology has no relevant experience to understand or appreciate. Their questions will reveal much that still lies hidden from our eyes.

Christ is the fullness of revelation but no human has completely understood the full dimensions of his revelation. That will only emerge as people of every culture in every age seek in Jesus and the scriptures the answers to their questions and needs.

Actually for new evangelisation to be telling, attractive and deep we need to ask Australian and especially aboriginal questions. We may still be a largely European population but our experience of land, climate and history is far from European.

We should not be frightened of pluralism. The Church was at its best when it had to explain itself to a pluralistic world. It was the early Christians efforts to preach Jesus in a Greek and Roman world that made mission the mother of the Church and theology. (Bevans 2004)

The type of community we will have to be in the future

A learning community.

Many people who talk about new evangelisation talk almost exclusively about what the Church has to give and rarely about what it might have to learn. We hear little that is positive about “the world”. We seem to be back to pre-Vatican II missiology when we were “battling paganism” or preaching to people ignorant of God.

As a young seminarian each St Columban’s Day I sang with enthusiasm our Columban song,

“Who has a blade for a splendid cause,
a cause that is good and true?
To live and to die for the grandest thing,
that man could say or singer sing,
or ever soldier knew....”

I was committed and prepared to give my life to such a crusade. With the grace of God, I have given my life to mission but I have given up the crusading image. I find it dangerous. As Cardinal Hume said after the Synod on the Family, “I saw in a dream a vision. It was a vision of the Church. I saw a fortress, strong and upstanding. Every stranger approaching seemed to those who defended it to be an enemy to be repelled; from that fortress the voices of those outside could not be heard.” [Catholic Herald 24.10.1980] Crusaders are not good listeners and necessarily have a negative opinion of the “enemy”.

A humble, respectful and sometimes silent community.

The title of the Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod on New Evangelisation stressed the “transmission of the Christian faith”. But there is a danger of evangelisation becoming too one-sided unless it is placed in the context of dialogue as it is in other Church documents (e.g. *Gaudium et Spes, Evangelii Nuntiandi, Redemptoris Missio, Dialogue and Proclamation*). And unless we recognise as Paul VI did that we also need to be evangelised. EN #15

The church has to be especially sensitive and respectful in searching out the “lapsed” and calling them back to the Church. As an editorial in *The Tablet* (20.10.2012) pointed out, many lapsed Catholics “lead lives of exemplary and sometimes self-sacrificing devotion to those in need; many others live conscientious and upright lives in their chosen trades and professions. To dismiss them simply as ‘lapsed’ is hardly fair. Indeed, many of them would give highly moral reasons why they reject an explicit place for the Catholic Church in their lives..... As Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham told the synod this week, the first step has to be an act of ‘profound listening’. There can be no effective proclamation of faith, he said, ‘without an attempt to understand how the message is likely to be heard, how it sounds to others’. Similarly an editorial in the *National Catholic Reporter* (27.10.2012) highlighted the need for the bishops at the Synod to be humble listeners. Most former Catholics are just not interested, especially if we come to them with all the answers. “Is it possible that ‘nones’ can teach us something about God? Or at least can we learn something from listening to their questions? The church's challenge is not to supply answers but to accompany people on their spiritual quests.”

And John Allen reported in his *All Things Catholic* (12.10.2012), “Tuesday morning, Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila..... said for the church to be a place where people meet God, it needs to learn three things from the example of Jesus: humility, respect for others, and silence.”

‘The church must discover the power of silence,’ Tagle said. ‘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. It is the way to truth.’

This is especially true in Australia, where people have an aversion to “Bible-bashers” or “God-botherers” and are suspicious of religious people who have all the answers and know the “road map to paradise”. There was clear evidence in the survey of those who had stopped attending Mass that they wanted to say something to the Bishops and all of us and perhaps the best answer might be to listen humbly and without quick answers.

Key agents of New Evangelisation

The laity

The Tablet (20.10.2012) reported, “If the re-evangelisation of Europe is to mean anything, it is the laity the bishops need to listen to rather than each other”. We need to involve lay people in the leadership of the Church. Many, especially women, feel alienated and excluded. It is fine to recommend a humbler, listening Church but that will not be possible without formal structures for listening such as synods. If we are to engage in new evangelisation effectively, the Church needs to empower the laity and formally commission them to missionary ministries with their families, their professions and in the secular world where they have a natural role. (Young 2006) New evangelisation is more properly the ministry of the laity than the clergy or the bishops.

Migrants

Migration is still changing the face of Australia. We are in the midst of what the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (2004) calls the “birth-pangs of a new humanity”. A new Church is emerging locally and globally.

Migrants are a gift. There is a lot of hope and energy for evangelisation among the migrant communities. There are also serious challenges. Migration is a risk and there is normally pain and possibilities for both the migrants and the host community. Despite programmes in some dioceses migrants, both lay and clerical, are rarely properly welcomed, enabled, integrated and fully availed of.

Andrew Walls (2008) regards the recent growth of migration from the “South” as the result of the reversal of the great European migration that lasted from the beginning of the 16th until the middle of the 20th Century. The North’s economy and hegemony was built on this European migration. And mission followed these patterns of migration so now Christianity is becoming a “Third World” and principally an African, Latin American and Asian Church. (Jenkins 2002).

Because of their experience of crossing cultural boundaries, our migrants and overseas born priests and religious may be a significant resource for evangelisation, for building a truly multicultural Australian Church and as an important link to the universal Church.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses Child Sexual Abuse in Australia

Because of the number of sexual abuse cases and the alleged inability of Church authorities to handle these cases, the Federal Government has set up a *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses Child Sexual Abuse in Australia*. The Bishops have expressed their willingness to cooperate and have in turn set up a *Truth, Justice and Healing Council* to lead

the Church's response to the crisis. This council is largely made up of lay people. We need them and especially women to help our Bishops and Superiors handle allegations and minister to the victims.

Ultimately the Royal Commission may be good for the Church but there will be severe criticism and probably legal actions against Church personnel over the next few years. We will be seriously embarrassed and ashamed as victims tell their tragic stories.

It is an irony that we are being encouraged to call people back to the Church, at a time when the Australian Church has never been more distrusted. Now, because of our sins of deed and omission in the area of child sexual abuse and the care of victims, we are becoming a vulnerable and much less powerful and respected Church. It is paradoxical that this may be a better starting point for evangelisation.

David Bosch in *Transforming Mission* reminds us that crisis is the more natural state of the Church. We have often needed failure and suffering to become aware of our real nature and mission. (1991, 2) We too easily become triumphant in our successes, thinking that they are a sign of God's blessing and that failure means we have been deserted by God. But Jesus had to find God's saving love in rejection, failure, darkness and death. God's love is vulnerable and contrary to all human ideas of power. God enters into, has compassion for and embraces the suffering of the world. The Cross is not the abandonment of divinity but the revelation of true divinity.

This crisis may force us to be more humble and respectful. We have been taken down from the pedestal and freed from perfection and power, to know shame, to feel powerlessness. We are called to the same vocation as Jesus, "to empty ourselves" [Phil. 2:1-11], to live in humble solidarity with those to who are victims. As with Jesus, sharing the life of the community and especially the victims, is the core of mission not just a tactic or strategy.

Our witness and proclamation from the position of our new found humility and our embarrassed shame but genuine compassion may be more telling and more Christian than our previously unquestioned "sanctity", perfection and power.

Conclusion

A new surge of Gospel energy can come only from a new encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. (Collins 2012) We need to experience and know the mystery that is Jesus and learn the language to speak of him with humility and respect to Australians. We need to learn how to witness and preach confidently without the backing of prestige and power, and in an Australia with many competing messages. We are challenged to believe that the Gospel can save. We remember that our mission is primarily to be a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God which is larger than the Church and often breaks through in the least expected places. Our job is not only to proclaim but to work for and seek out the Kingdom and to celebrate and build on it wherever we find it. Our mission is not primarily about the extension of the Church but the revelation of the Trinity's love for the world and the realisation of God's plan and mission.

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