

JOHN BOWEN'S RESPONSE  
(Continued from page 12)

ones: a stress on authority, institutionalism, and the transcendence of God.

Here, too, I have two responses: One is that I always want to see if there is a way that these things can be explained to people for whom they are at first sight alien. For example, when I am talking about the authority of Jesus, and our calling to obey him, I am unlikely to talk about Jesus as King or as Ultimate Ruler. But I may well speak of him as Teacher (an equally biblical image), because most of us have had the experience of obeying a wise, loving teacher who is teaching something we want to learn. Maybe “authority” (to take one of your examples) could be explained that way.

The other is almost the opposite, and a caution I have to give myself, that there are times when we may try our darnedest to explain certain things and still meet with blank looks – say, to take your example, that God is infinite, mysterious, and beyond our wildest imaginings. (I set aside for the moment the connecting point of the Incarnation and God's immanence: These, I suspect, may be easier for the post-modern mind to embrace.) Someone might protest, “I know that's not right: I have my personal god who isn't like that.” There may come a point where, humanly speaking, there is no more we can do. We can't withdraw or modify our convictions about the transcendence of God: That would be dishonest and unhelpful. But at this point in time, neither can we communicate it. For me at least, that's a hard lesson, and a humbling one.

**Peter Ball:** Peter, I am fascinated by your adaptation of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) for Anglican use. Thank you for explaining it for those of us who are unfamiliar with all but the name.

I confess I appreciate it particularly because it resonates with two of my strongest convictions about evangelism: That it is a process and that we must therefore offer to help people take small steps towards faith, and that coming to faith is not solely a personal thing but involves moving into the Christian community. That is precisely what you describe RCIA as doing. Much traditional evangelism has assumed that coming to faith will be a private, sudden, Damascus road-type experience. You (and RCIA) assume the more frequent experience of a communal, gradual, Emmaus road-type experience.

I would love to ask you, Peter, where these new people come from, and how they got involved in RCIA in the first place. After all, though you describe it as a beginning, the Service of Welcome sounds like a pretty big deal: It “celebrates a first commitment to the Church and to a journey of learning and growing in the faith of Jesus Christ.”

Clearly, much has already happened to bring these people to the place where they wish to grow in Christian faith. They do not seem to be starting at square one: They know

some things about faith, and have made some significant decisions about it already! So how did they get there?

Some of my own research shows that frequently it is the independent work of the Holy Spirit “untouched by human hands.” (One person wrote to me that they began to move towards faith simply because “I didn't like the person I was becoming.”) Or did they come because of a family member, or a friend, or a colleague, who said, “Hey, you should check out this course at my church”? And then, to push it back even further, how did that conversation come about? What made it OK for the invitation to be issued, and what made it OK for the invitation to be accepted? It would be very interesting to know. After all, it does not matter how user-friendly our liturgy, or how helpful our beginners' programs: There has to be some way for people to get to them, and willingly at that! Normally, that requires someone who is already a Christian to open their mouth and say something.

If your people are enthusiastic and articulate and unembarrassed about their faith and their church, as I suspect they must be, you have something that the rest of us could benefit from. In fact, if we all had that kind of congregation, evangelism would happen pretty spontaneously, and I would be happy to look for a new job. ☐

## Now it's your turn

If you have been touched, stimulated, informed, angered, inspired, confused or otherwise affected by John Bowen's take on Catholic evangelism and the response of a few others, let us hear about it.

If you or your parish have tried to be intentional about evangelism while remaining true to the Catholic vision of the faith, we would love to help you share your work with others.

Your responses are most welcome!

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# Evangelism in the catholic tradition

*Evangelism needs to take different forms in different cultures: “It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church, to have public Prayer in the Church, or to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people.”* by John P. Bowen

**I** am writing really on a hunch, and the hunch can be summarized like this: Catholic Christianity – by which I mean Anglican churches which value (among other things) ritual, mystery, tradition, and ceremony – ought to be evangelistically “successful” in a post-modern world.

- Is it?
- I don't think so.
- Why not?
- Because most church leaders (in this as in any stream of the church) do not think evangelistically.
- But they could.

I guess there are a number of buried assumptions and questions in my hunch, so let me try and bring them to the surface:

1. Evangelism is the responsibility of the whole church, not just of Evangelicals, and certainly not just of “evangelists,” thanks be to God. It is a ministry in which the whole Body of Christ participates, though in different ways. As Archbishop Michael Peers says, “Evangelism is too important to be left to the Evangelicals.”

2. There are many definitions of evangelism, the simplest of which, I suppose, is “preaching the Gospel.” However, maybe a less in-your-face and more Anglican-friendly definition would be this: Evangelism means living and speaking the Gospel in such a way that people are helped to take steps towards becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. Evangelism needs to take different forms in different cultures. In eighteenth-century England, George Whitefield may have been able to preach to thousands in the fields, but if you tried preaching in the fields today, the cows are the only ones likely to listen (and even that is not a certainty). If we were in a culture where important messages could be communicated only under the full moon, by a person wearing a green polyester suit, and standing on one leg on the back of a hippopotamus, would we do it, if that were the

only way to communicate the Gospel? I hope so (though the polyester suit might be tough).

As Article 24 in the Book of Common Prayer says, “It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church, to have public Prayer in the Church, or to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people.”

4. By pointing out that different cultures require different forms of evangelism, I do not mean that the church's ministry of evangelism (or of anything else) is at the mercy of every cultural wind or slipstream. We have our own distinctive story and way of doing things. But, at the same time, we seek, as good missionaries, to communicate in the language of the culture where God has put us.

5. Sometimes there is a serendipitous (OK, “providential” might be the more correct term) congruence between something in the culture of the Gospel and something in the existing culture. For example, the number four is sacred to the Navajo people, so, when the first Campus Crusade evangelists started distributing their booklet *The Four Spiritual Laws* among the Navajo, they found an unexpected and earnest response!

6. Could it be that such a convergence is happening in Western, post-modern culture right now? The culture of the Western World is in the process of making the transition from modernity to post-modernity, which means:

- We are less likely to be impressed by logical argument and more by rhetorical skill.
- We are sensuous people, delighting in the physical realities of sound and sight, or smell and touch.
- Spirituality is cool, especially if it comes with mystery and ritual and colour.
- We give as much credence to our intuitions and feelings as to our minds (consider how often an interviewer on radio or TV will ask

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**Editors (Executive Members)**  
N.S., P.E.I., N.B., Nfld and  
**Labrador**  
David Fletcher  
davidfletcher@priest.com

**Ontario, Quebec & Nunavut**  
David Harrison  
dmlh@sympatico.ca

**Alberta, Saskatchewan and  
Manitoba**  
Greg Kerr-Wilson  
frgreg@telusplanet.net

**British Columbia, Yukon and  
NWT**  
Kevin Dixon  
kdixon@stmaryskerrisdale.ca

**Review Editor**  
John Hodgins, *Review Editor*  
jhodgin@sympatico.ca

**This issue**  
John Hodgins, *Editor*  
jhodgins@sympatico.ca  
Willem Hart,  
*Design & Production*  
Jane Hodgins, *Copy Editor*

**Episcopal Advisor**  
Joachim Fricker

**Letters to the Editor,  
Correspondence &  
Membership**  
*Liturgy Canada*,  
77 Canterbury Place,  
North York, Ontario  
M2N 2N1  
litcan@liturgy.ca

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## EDITORIAL

**T**he format of this issue of *Liturgy Canada* is different from previous ones. It takes the form of a conversation.

It began, in fact, with another conversation – one that developed over the course of the many months in which I had the joy of working under John Bowen's leadership on a planning group for the May 2002 conference sponsored by the Primate's Evangelism Commission: Good News Can't Wait. It was a conversation – a challenge, actually – which John took up with me: Can Catholic Anglicanism (that is, the expression of Anglicanism which is liturgically-centred, sacramental, and rich in symbol, colour, gesture, and ritual) be an effective tool of evangelism? I knew instinctively that I wanted the answer to be a resounding "yes." And yet, over the course of our work together, and in an e-mail dialogue which followed, John's incisive and clear-headed thinking, matched with his inimitable grace and wit, challenged both my instinctive response to his question and my own practice of liturgical ministry.

Our discussion gave birth to the conversation contained in this issue. It begins with John's challenge – what he calls his "hunch" – that Catholic Anglicanism ought to be evangelistically "successful" in a post-modern world, but is failing to live up to its potential. This hypothesis is taken up by five different writers—Peter Ball, Paul Friesen, Judy Paulsen, Michael Thompson, and David Townsend – each of whom responds from their own diverse perspectives. And then – as would only be fair to someone who has agreed to surrender his hypothesis to the public scrutiny of five colleagues – John gets the last word. His afterword makes no pretense at being a conversation stopper, but invites those of us who value the Catholic expression of Anglicanism to continue to examine what we cherish in the light of the evangelical mission of the Church.

Rounding out this issue are two book reviews, one of which is John Bowen's own book, delightfully entitled *Evangelism for "Normal" People: Good News for Those Looking for a Fresh Approach* and the other, about evangelism in the pre-Christendom era. Also contained here are Paul Friesen's personal reflections on last spring's conference, Affirming Anglican Catholicism, which addressed this very topic of Catholic Evangelism.

It is our hope that this discussion does not end here, but rather may engender conversation among colleagues, among those who worship together and – dare we hope for it – in the pages of *Liturgy Canada*. Your responses are always welcome! ☒

The Reverend David Harrison is incumbent at St. Thomas' Anglican Church, Brooklin, Ontario and a member of the *Liturgy Canada* Editorial Board.

## EVANGELISM (Continued from page 1)

not "What do you think?" but "How do you feel?").

- Faith in progress has waned (as one person put it, "Progress was OK, but it went on too long"); Newer is not necessarily better, and we are less likely to believe that science and technology will solve all our problems.

- We are a culture without much sense of historical rootedness (remember "the NOW generation"?).

7. This means that Christian communities, therefore, which give priority to such things as beauty, mystery, the senses, tradition, and the non-rational might well have a particular fascination for post-modern people. In other words, churches in the Catholic tradition may be in a good position to reach out to and attract these individuals.

8. As far as I am aware, there is no research which suggests that churches in the Catholic tradition have been growing in recent years. Oh, certainly, there has been a continuing trickle of Evangelicals and other Protestants who have come to appreciate liturgy, tradition, and the Eucharist. Some are becoming high Anglicans, others Roman Catholics, and yet others Orthodox. (In some cases, I suspect, it is because Christians have been touched by the same post-modern influences as everybody else. Not that this is a criticism in the slightest. God has made us creatures of culture.)

9. The real test of whether a church is touching the unchurched population, however, is surely the number of adult baptisms, or at least reaffirmations of faith, taking place in a year. These public rituals are entered into by people for whom living Christian faith is a new experience. Individuals who transfer from one tradition to another don't really count in this equation because many may transfer to another church where no evangelism is happening. (This is what the sociologists of religion call "transfer growth.")

10. Why, then, is there this disconnect between the yearning for authentic spirituality in the culture at large, and the spiritual riches not being tapped in churches of the Catholic tradition? Where is the pontifex who can bridge the gap?

11. Many Catholic churches have not thought of themselves as "evangelizing communities" (an evangelical phrase, I grant you)—that is, communities one of whose functions is to reach out to the "unchurched" in order to bring them into the community where they can learn about Christ and begin to follow him.

12. What, then, would it take for churches in the Catholic tradition to fulfill their evangelistic potential? Here are some modest suggestions:

- Teach the congregation, through sermons and study groups, about the evangelizing ministry of the church, so that they realize this is an authentic part of historic Christian

abnormal (even for Christians) and therefore only for weird Christians, 'them' as opposed to 'us'" (p. 15). The simple, straightforward narrative style, short chapters, the questions for reflection make the book ideal for a parish study group—a group composed of people who feel they ought to be sharing the faith, but find the prospect distasteful. Moreover, the fact that the book is explicitly not a "how-to

## Alan Kreider: *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom*

(The Alcuin Club and the Group for Renewal of Worship: Grove Books Ltd., 1995)

Reviewed by *John W.B. Hill*

This little study puts a huge question mark beside some of the unexamined assumptions that have brought to birth this issue of *Liturgy Canada*. It is precisely the link between worship and evangelism that Kreider methodically tracks down, with some surprising revelations.

The period he chooses to examine is especially interesting not merely because of our current fascination with pre-Christendom, but because this was a period of rapid expansion of the Church in spite of some severe disincentives. He notes in various ways that conversion to Christ during this era was conversion to marginality. Nevertheless, the numbers of followers of the new way increased by perhaps half a million in each generation, so that by the time of Constantine, between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of the empire was already Christian (scholarly estimates vary).

And yet the Church of this era had no strategy for evangelism per se, and placed no apparent emphasis on spreading the good news. Of greatest relevance to the discussion in these pages, people were not being attracted by the beauty of the liturgy (or by any other quality of the liturgy) because they never saw it. No one was permitted to join the Christians in worship until they had begun the process of initiation, and even then they only got to witness the readings and the homily.

Nevertheless, Kreider argues, worship was crucial to evangelism simply because it was the liturgy which formed believers by forming distinctive communities. And it was the behaviour of those believers and of those communities outside of worship which was so attractive to people across the Roman world.

Kreider gives so many lovely examples of how this attraction worked, drawing on both ancient texts and contemporary scholarship, that this study will provide a primer in the basics of evangelism. And his rather fresh take on the process of catechetical formation (which he rather clumsily refers to as "catechism") offers an attractive introduction to the origins of that ministry.

It would probably be a mistake to read this

manual" will protect a parish study group from the impulse toward heroic futility. ☒

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Hopkins is Rector of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Hamilton, Ontario and Secretary of Synod for the Diocese of Niagara. Having worked with John Bowen on Niagara's Evangelism Committee for several years, Steve recently became the Rector of John's home parish.

as a vision for our time: Post-Christendom is very different from pre-Christendom. But the questions it poses about our desperate search for seeker-friendly liturgy have yet to be addressed; and for that reason alone this little study deserves close attention.

But the story it tells is so delightful, it is worth reading for encouragement alone. ☒

The Rev. Canon John W.B. Hill is incumbent of the Anglican parish of St. Augustine of Canterbury, Toronto and a member of the *Liturgy Canada* Executive and Editorial Boards.

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not advocate giving up the Eucharist. Rather, he asked us this: How, like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, can we come alongside those who don't recognize Jesus? He led us through his experiences and reflections as a missionary and canon theologian with a special commitment to Evangelism—i.e., with a special commitment to hearing the questions of those outside all communities of faith, before offering a response. He urged us to create spaces in our local communities and in our parish life to allow people to be who they really are, to experience God's love as they are, to come to faith through a quest that begins in their heart, not in someone else's programme. It will be God who opens their eyes at the right moment, Cottrell said, as Jesus opened the eyes of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And God has

opened eyes, and will continue to. He just loves us too much to snatch away our freedom.

So the conference ended with a refreshing recognition of the Church not established but in a sense back in dangerous and exciting apostolic days, with an affirmation of the faith once received, and with an urgency to always begin with our ears. This fall may indeed bring a few of us closer to the edge, to the roots of the Catholic tradition. And that can't be such a bad thing. ☒

**The Rev. Dr. Paul Friesen** is University Chaplain at King's College, Halifax, and priest-in-charge of the Chapel. He was formerly Assistant Professor of History at Tyndale College and (concurrently) Associate Priest, Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Toronto.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### John P. Bowen: *Evangelism for "Normal" People: Good News for Those Looking for a Fresh Approach*

(Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002)

Reviewed by *Stephen Hopkins*

It is one of the vexing perversities of life in the Church that sometimes the very thing we need is something we cannot attain or will not receive. For many congregations, this is the case with evangelism. The evidence of the Church's decline is everywhere to be seen and, in many congregations, is the single most powerful force shaping the discourse and action of the faith community. When we are not in denial, our anxiety about it causes either paralysis or heroic but futile striving. And when we do act, we tend to prefer clever marketing over the grunt work of disciple-making. At some level, we know we need to learn how to be an evangelizing church, but the models we have observed or experienced are distasteful, if not explicitly exploitative and manipulative.

Evangelism is obviously in need of redemption and, as the subtitle of this book suggests, that is what John Bowen is attempting to accomplish. Bowen is Assistant Professor of Evangelism at Wycliffe College in Toronto and the Director of the Wycliffe Institute of Evangelism, and comes to the writing of this work after more than 25 years with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. Before deciding on the current title he had actually considered naming his book *The Abolition of Evangelism*.

In the first chapter, he dismisses what often passes for faith sharing as "flasher evangelism"—the kind of evangelism that is inappropriate to the relationship, in which

something of value is cheapened, thus leaving the victim violated and dehumanized. From there, in chapters one to nine, Bowen reconstructs evangelism through a careful reading of Scripture. From the Hebrew Scriptures, he draws on the role of a holy people as a sign to the nations. In Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, he discerns a model that is relational, conversational, organic, and respectful. In Paul's preaching in Athens, he finds an example of effective cross-cultural communication. From the Book of Acts, he highlights the image of a risk-taking community with an alternative lifestyle to that of the surrounding culture.

In the second half of the book (chapters 10–16), Bowen takes these biblical insights and begins to give them legs for our mission field. He stresses the importance of understanding the Gospel both in its universal and normative sense and as we have experienced it in our own lives. He encourages us to see and embrace the challenge of cross-cultural communication, translating the message into the idiom of post-modern culture. He also addresses the stumbling blocks of hell and religious pluralism, the ethics of evangelism, the process of commitment, and giftedness for evangelism.

In the end, Bowen returns to his four major discoveries that:

1. Evangelism is God's idea, not ours.
2. Evangelism is about Jesus who embodies God's concern for the world.
3. Evangelism is a process.
4. Evangelism is the work of the whole Christian community.

The conversational tone of the book will not appeal to every reader – but it is appropriate to the audience Bowen is seeking to reach: "people who think to themselves, 'I'm normal, therefore I'm not much interested in evangelism,' those people who think evangelism is somehow

faith, not a nineteenth-century American Baptist aberration from the classical tradition. There is an Anglican way to "do" evangelism!

- Work on being a congregation that truly welcomes newcomers who don't know an angelus from an angel or a cope from a cop. Most congregations rate themselves as being friendly, but it often turns out that what they are is mainly friendly to other insiders. Often they do not know how to get beyond a friendly "Good morning" to a new person – especially one who lacks Anglican "manners."
- Preach the Gospel with visitors in mind who have never heard it before.

Don't assume that everyone in the congregation already understands what Christian faith and spirituality are all about. Visitors may well not. So don't embarrass them or make them feel stupid. (What if they don't recognize "this familiar story, so beloved of us all"?) Ideally, listeners will leave saying, "So that's what Christianity is all about. Wow! How come I didn't know that? I can't wait for next week to find out more!"

(Don't worry too much about long-time parishioners. They are more likely to thank you for helping them understand – finally – than to complain that it's all too simple.)

- Make the service user-friendly – without watering it down. This might be as simple as welcoming visitors at the start of the service, and saying something to reassure them as they enter what will likely be a rich but alien experience. It might mean printing a special form of the service for visitors, which explains what is going on (St. Mary Magdalene in Toronto has such a booklet). It might be as simple as encouraging the congregation to be sensitive to the potential confusion and embarrassment of first-time visitors.
- Offer instructional courses for newcomers

who want to know what faith is all about. I don't mean just what the Eucharist is all about, I mean basic doctrines like sin, repentance, faith, the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, personal commitment and baptism. (Of course, one can teach those things through teaching about the Eucharist, but I personally would argue that it is better for Christianity 101 to precede Anglicanism 101.)

It is not difficult to say during the announcements that "If you're here today and Christian faith is new to you, or if you'd like a refresher course in what it's all about, there is a group starting this Wednesday . . ."

One could do worse than using Alpha as that kind of "Introduction to Christianity" program, or Harold Percy's video series, "Christianity 101," or "Seasons of Celebration." (You may not like Alpha, but, as Bishop John Baycroft once said to his clergy, "You don't have to use Alpha but, if you don't, you have to use something better.")

Well, that's my hunch. I may be wrong, of course. That's the nature of hunches. Forgive me if I am missing the mark. Maybe Anglican churches of Catholic persuasion are quietly getting on with the job of evangelism without anybody knowing about it. Or maybe my suggestions for how churches in the Catholic stream of Anglican life might become evangelizing communities are quite inappropriate. (It's always dangerous to pontificate about someone else's life – almost as dangerous as it is easy.) I am being quite honest when I say I would be delighted to be corrected.

Whatever our tradition, I believe Christ offers to teach us how to "fish for people." My prayer is that I, and all of us, may be willing to learn. ☒

**John P. Bowen** is Assistant Professor of Evangelism and Director of the Institute of Evangelism at Wycliffe College in the University of Toronto. He is also the author of *Evangelism for "Normal" People: Good News for Those Looking for a Fresh Approach* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), reviewed in this issue by Stephen Hopkins.

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## On making space for God to fill

*On Trinity Sunday, my godson, Nate, and I attended Eucharist at Christ Church, an Anglican parish church in the Catholic tradition in downtown Rochester, N.Y. He has worshipped there since January, after an ecclesial hiatus of several years. He knew of the parish from my comments about the splendid Tiffany windows and chancel, and from my slipping off to the 8 a.m. service, the Sunday of a previous visit, before we went out to brunch.*

by David Townsend

*I remain deeply suspicious of quick answers. They're shallow soil, and seed that sprouts in them looks great in June but may well not last the growing season.*

**W**e had never worshipped together before. I've always been a long-distance godfather, and for a number of years I was a very poor one indeed, until Nate relocated me in cyberspace a couple of years back. We've rebuilt our relationship by e-mail and the odd visit across Lake Ontario. Hearing that he'd started going to church regularly was a source of great joy to me. Not because God loved him any less in the years he was un-churched, and certainly not because he'd somehow blown it by leaving, but because I wish Nate the fullness of life, which he's far more likely to find gathered with and sustained by the family of God.

I don't always get the Holy Spirit's timing, but it is clear to me that God gave me a second chance to be Nate's godfather and at a point when my life experience might prove useful to him. I'd returned to church myself—after a bailout of 15 years—about three years before Nate contacted me. We'd each in his own way been burnt badly by the respective faith communities we'd left—communities that had had no misgivings about their own capacity to articulate clearly both the basic teachings of Christianity and their right interpretation. Each of us had been profoundly alienated—in my own case, scarred is by no means too strong a word—by canned doctrine and narcissistic pronouncements masquerading as the proclamation of the Gospel. When we left, we left to survive.

Neither of us returned to congregational life because someone had spoken to us with uniquely persuasive eloquence or with particularly folksy allure about the doctrinal formulations of the Christian faith. We went back because each of us had been grasped by the Ultimate Concern of our lives, and grace brought us to a place where we could stand before the Mystery of the One who called, and calls, us. It happened for him, at least partially, in the empty Basilica of Ste.-Anne-du-Beaupré on a trip through Québec. It happened for me in my living room with two friends I'd known and loved most of my life, while we listened to Maddie Prior singing "O Worship the King." Each of us needed enough space for God to fill with words and actions that are at once ancient and new every time they're repeated, words and actions that belong to no one, and so to

everyone, and so also to us.

The last thing Nate needed from me in the 18 months before he found his new parish home was overt admonition or self-appointed witnessing. He'd already had enough of that to last a lifetime and to send him packing in the first place. He found his way home in spite of all the earnest, full-frontal proclamations of the Gospel with which he'd been bombarded. He needed someone to stand with him in the space where he found himself, and to respect the path that had brought him there. And to listen carefully and long, without someone pouncing at the first chance to impose facile spiritual answers.

I remain deeply suspicious of quick answers. They're shallow soil, and seed that sprouts in them looks great in June but may well not last the growing season. I wonder, for instance, whether, when Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) distributed their booklet, *The Four Spiritual Laws* (adduced by John Bowen as an exemplary concurrence of Gospel and ambient culture), the organization had actually bothered to absorb the belief system of the Dineh (which is what the Navajo call themselves), or whether CCC had simply seen a fast entrée into somebody else's complex spiritual heritage and gone for it.

Neither Nate nor I have made a formal reaffirmation of faith. Perhaps Nate will, though if so, he's said nothing of it to me. For my part, I feel no need to do so. God called me by my name in baptism 47 years ago. I chose as my own point of re-entry the Easter Vigil in 1998, at a parish in downtown Toronto where I had reason to believe I wouldn't be immediately harassed by the wellmeaning zeal of my fellow Christians. It took several months for anyone to notice, and that's the way I wanted it. I take issue with the statement that the real test of whether a church is touching the un-churched population is the number of adult baptisms, or at least reaffirmations of faith, taking place in a year. The real test, I'd counter, is not ours always even to see, much less to measure.

If there is a Catholic style of evangelism, I hope it involves living one's practice of the Christian faith openly—without apology, without mystification, without spiritual arrogance—in full view of one's neighbours. I hope it entails waiting to see what God will

## Conference on catholic evangelism: A personal reflection

*"Anglo-Catholics enjoy 'pickles, pop-tarts and cutting-edge Catholicism' at conference," at least so read the caption over the précis prepared by the Episcopal News Service and reprinted for the benefit of those who had recently attended the sixth biennial conference on "Catholic Evangelism" (May 19–22, 2003 in Montreal) sponsored by the movement Affirming Anglican Catholicism.*

by Paul Friesen

**T**his body, of course, corresponds to Affirming Catholicism in the United Kingdom, and includes Canada under the aegis of its North American Secretariat, now centered in New Haven, Connecticut. If by "cutting-edge Catholicism" the editor meant those in attendance, it was a movement with a very thin edge indeed as fewer than 70 mostly middle-aged priests, and a few lay people – about one-third being Canadian – were in attendance. If, however, the editor referred to the tone and substance of certain of the addresses, I suspect many of those who attended would agree with his description of the event.

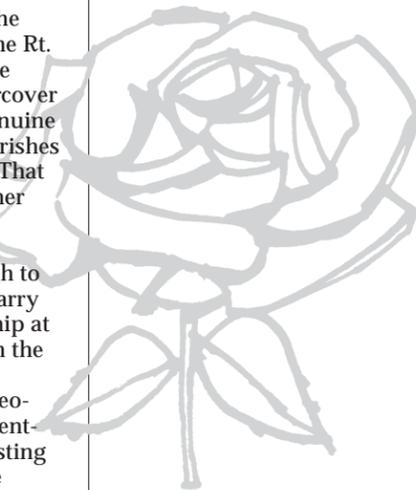
There were, in fact, many moments in which we were steered safely back from any edges, or simply encouraged to ignore any precipice near which we might be sitting. One pop-sociology session (replete with a power-point presentation) urged us to consider the now-well-worn-out stereotypes of Generation X (if one can actually say that all of a certain age belong to one group or if such a group can even be said to exist). It concluded with several observations concerning Evangelism, one of which was that as Gen Xers were computer savvy, church leaflets really ought to be attractive... But perhaps because all of us were Anglicans possessed of a sense of responsibility, of being pillars of society—or at least pillars of decorum and good taste—it was hard for all of us to grasp in public the nettle of the most dangerous truths about ourselves, and therefore about Evangelism. We are an elite, or at least a minority, who are finding it hard to communicate to others the reality of the Eucharist. There were a few signs we couldn't come to terms with this. After all, we were encouraged to (and so did) exit Christ Church Cathedral (where we worshipped) and enter the Diocesan Centre (where the conference sessions were held) via the passage by the vestry "without going out on to the street." It was an unintentional sign, perhaps, but a real marker of our general insularity, at least as far as a public expression of our Christian identity goes. Inside all was cool and dark and ordered: Outside festive throngs of Quebecois milled about the cathedral in the early summer sunshine.

Yet the conference had a shape that led us in a hopeful direction. Slowly the clericals were doffed for civilian clothes. We explored the environs of the cathedral. We began to take

stock of where we were, likely aided by the presentations of the "bag-lady bishop," the Rt. Rev. GERALYN WOLF of the Diocese of Rhode Island. On her sabbatical, she went undercover as a homeless woman and heard what genuine societal outsiders had to say about the parishes of her diocese, about all churches in fact. That she had an undercover journalist follow her around to record this for a documentary seemed a bit disappointing. But her own reflections on her adventures were enough to edge us toward an admission that Dr. Charry would soon have us make: that the worship at the heart of our faith is "out of sync" with the realities amongst which we worship.

Ellen Charry, an Anglo-Catholic lay theologian from Princeton, made a feisty presentation about our isolation. Far from suggesting to us that we give up on the liturgy of the Eucharist for something more "user-friendly," she urged us to take the Eucharist, the Sacraments, to our world. She urged us to consider the participatory, Trinitarian theology of Athanasius as the pattern for the communication of our faith. Our congregations are abysmally ignorant, she argued, and unable to connect worship and life: She suggested we think hard about teaching our communities the rudiments of theology, of developing liturgies to be used in the cut and thrust of family life, of inviting others into the transforming life of liturgies that should, with clear instruction, be enacted in meaningful ways. And she urged us to do it in Anglo-Catholic ways, by helping people fall in love with God through their bodies as well as their minds, not in a moment (like a pop-tart!) but in a life ever responsive to the workings of God's grace (like a cucumber getting pickled!).

It was Stephen Cottrell, an English priest, who completed the disarming of our reserve. The Church in England, he said, knows and admits it has been abandoned by the people. "It is us that must change," he began: "You can't give what you haven't got." He disarmed us all because he was so honest, so Monty Pythonesque and comically self-deprecating, and so very hopeful. It is patience that is necessary; Billy Graham's evangelistic organization knows that it takes several years from a person's expression of interest to a commitment to a life of faith. "We agree," he said. And it may take a lot of thoughtful work outside church walls to allow this to happen. Like Charry, Cottrell does



... it is so easy to kid ourselves that we are "doing evangelism" just because our congregation is growing, whereas what we are seeing may simply be "circulation of the saints".

baptisms are at least one measure, the tip of the iceberg of God's work, if you like. And, after all, isn't baptism the normative way that Christ commanded us to express newfound faith? (I can't help being aware of the irony that I, the Evangelical, am advocating public baptism rather than a private and personal embrace of faith. It is an interesting world we live in.)

**Paul Friesen:** Paul, you are right to question the relationship I imply between Eucharist and doctrine. (I guess my background is showing again!) How about this for a better attempt: Doctrine explains verbally (and often systematically) the central realities of Christian faith which are conveyed sacramentally in the Eucharist. Perhaps the relationship is like that of marriage counselling to marriage itself: We know which is more important, but the words help the appreciation and enjoyment of the reality. (Perhaps this image came to mind because Paul recently gave pre-marital counselling to my daughter and her fiancé!)

You point out, too, that many people these days still have some church experience in their background. True enough. As a result, when these people come to church, there may well be a sense that they are returning, not coming, for the first time. And I agree with you that there is much to rejoice over in such returning.

Yet I have a further response, and it is both rational and emotional. The rational response is this: The number of those who have any church background whatsoever is decreasing with every census; indeed, it is shrinking daily. So we cannot assume that there will always be a "Christian memory" which will help people to a renewed church experience, and which will make the ministry of evangelism easier. In fact, what we can assume is that the Christian memory will fade away – it is a temporary historical anomaly – and I want us to be prepared to speak to the new cultural reality.

My emotional response is, I suppose, that of an evangelist of sorts. Probably, like me, when you were learning to preach, you were advised to speak loudly enough for the person furthest away to hear. In just the same way, I want our evangelism to reach out to the person who is "furthest away." It is one thing to rejoice with someone who finds meaning for the first time in the words of the Lord's Prayer, which they have known since childhood. It is quite another to come alongside the person for whom the word "Lord" is weird, the word "prayer" is without content, and the phrase "the Lord's Prayer" is as meaningful as "the Baron's Contemplation." How on earth is that person to hear the Gospel (another funny word)? There's a big piece of my heart that wants to stand with that person.

Lastly, thank you for pointing out that evangelism in the Bible is "almost always" to those already within the community of faith. You are quite right that a church not deeply gripped by the Gospel will not be interested in sharing that Gospel with others. I recall one conversation about this where a lifelong parishioner said, "Well, after 50 years in the

pew, I can't say I've ever heard the Gospel!" A priest sitting next to him looked at him in horror and amazement and said, "But you hear it during every Eucharist!" And, of course, both were telling the truth. That's our challenge.

**Michael Thompson:** Thank you, Michael, for adding your own illustrations of missiological energy in the Catholic tradition. I appreciate the depth and breadth of your wisdom.

You are right that to become all that God longs for us to become will require hard work. (I suspect that applies to all segments of the Church, not just the Catholic community.) The dead weight of Christendom still holds us back. Our own perception of ourselves, and that of those outside the Church, has to change. We speak lightly of being "shaped by our liturgy." As someone said to me recently, "It sounds like a great idea, but I don't see it happening." If only we were truly shaped by our liturgy, in heart and head and hands, we would be streets ahead of where we are now.

I love your subversive "Blue Guitar" illustration. (I am glad that the Archbishop of Canterbury sees the Church that way – not to mention that he quotes Wallace Stevens!) The pathetic cry that "the Church shouldn't involve itself in politics" is really a cry for the Church to "play things as they are." But that is to misunderstand the blue guitar of the Gospel.

**Judy Paulsen:** Judy, thank you for your cautions about post-modernism. You are quite right: It is not a neat package, as perhaps I implied. Maybe I should have said that the slow disintegration of modernity has simply opened the door for a myriad of new possibilities. I agree too that post-modernity perpetuates some of the characteristics of modernity, and the examples you give – technology and individualism – are prime ones. As modernity seems to be falling apart, the fragments still bear the features of the whole. Because of this continuity, some prefer to call post-modernity hyper-modernity.

I appreciate too your insight that, while my comments on characteristics of Catholic Anglicanism might appeal to post-moderns, others will not. The examples you cite are good

(Continued on page 16)



make of that presence in the hearts of those whom God loves and has already redeemed, whether they're yet aware of it or not. I'd hope and pray that thus we might conform ourselves to the Word made flesh and dwelling among us.

The rector at Christ Church incorporated into his sermon for Trinity Sunday an anecdote from his recent experience. The neighbourhood street fair had taken place that weekend, and folks from Christ Church had provided water and cookies and offered tours of the church. On Friday afternoon, on the same stretch of sidewalk, another group's placards warned passers-by of the wrath that waits for those who have not repented and given their lives to Jesus Christ. The rector asked the sign-bearers to move a little further from the Christ Church

table, to avoid the impression that they were part of the same group. One of them demanded of the rector, "What's your Gospel?"

"That God loves the world," replied the rector.

"If you believe that," said his interlocutor, "then you're going to hell."

I don't really care who tallied up more converts at the end of the afternoon. Me, I'm with the people who pass out cookies and water and give tours of the church. ☒

David Townsend teaches medieval languages and literature at the University of Toronto and worships at the Church of the Redeemer with his partner, Rob.

## Evangelism, eucharist, and the Catholic tradition

*"Evangelism is too important to be left to the Evangelicals," is a quote by Anglican Archbishop Michael Peers which John Bowen reminds us of at the outset of his reflections in "Evangelism in the Catholic Tradition." I am sure he wouldn't object if I responded in turn that "Liturgy is too important to be left to the Catholics."*

by Paul Friesen

A pair of observations cannot fully characterize a genuine Evangelical-Catholic exchange. But it is to speak of a hopeful moment, when traditions within Anglicanism offer each other their riches and receive with two hands what is offered in return. And for him to offer observations with no sense of what he might be offered (in public!) in return demonstrates more than civility. It demonstrates genuine charity.

So what gifts does John Bowen offer Catholics with his reflections on the Catholic tradition? He offers Catholics his genuinely sympathetic imagination. Though he doesn't say it, he has both worshipped with Catholics and written on evangelism for some time. That is to say, he takes both evangelism and the Catholic tradition seriously. He also offers Catholics the potential of their own tradition. His comments on the character of today's adolescents and young adults in relation to the liturgy of the Catholic Eucharist deserve to be taken seriously. Yet he is too generous perhaps. How easy it has been, as Graham Ward says in *True Religion* (Blackwell, 2003), for traditional liturgy to decline from the Catholic rite into ritualism, to begin to serve up aesthetic consumer products for a niche market.

Finally, John Bowen offers Catholics his frank (and fair) assessment of their tendency to bewilder some (Christian) visitors with spectacle and to discourage some (uncommitted) 'seekers' looking for

explanations in the 'vulgar' (common) tongue so loved by the early Anglican reformers. Truly modern pagans—those not only lacking a Christian 'confession' but any Christian 'memory'—find Anglicanism and Christianity of most stripes equally baffling (no matter how 'seeker sensitive' those expressions of faith). Yet his comments here are quite likely most true of Catholics. In all, John Bowen's observations about Catholics and evangelism are not to be spurned, but seriously considered.

What might Catholics offer in return? There is no need to offer an assessment of evangelism as understood by the Evangelical tradition (broadly speaking) out of which John Bowen writes. It isn't called for in this exchange and in any case he does that very well himself in his *Evangelism for "Normal" People: Good News for Those Looking for a Fresh Approach* (Augsburg Fortress, 2002), a book well worth reading for Evangelicals, Catholics, and everyone else. But what might be offered in exchange are two observations about the heart of Catholic Anglicanism.

First, Catholics—at their best—distrust 'technique' no matter how sincere or how subtly it is characterized as sociological wisdom, and they love liturgy no matter how poorly done or how incomprehensible it might seem to the uninitiated. This is well illustrated by the obvious differences between the evangelical (and evangelistic) 'Marches for Jesus' of the 1990s and the outdoor processions (Eucharist entrance rites on certain 'feast days')

*[John Bowen's] comments on the character of today's adolescents and young adults in relation to the liturgy of the Catholic Eucharist deserve to be taken seriously.*

*The words of the Eucharistic rite invoke the whole history of theology and the life of faith.*

still embraced by some Catholic parishes. But this deserves a deeper explanation. "Offer instructional programmes... I don't just mean what the Eucharist is all about: I mean basic doctrines like sin, repentance, faith, the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ..." suggests John Bowen. These words won't likely offend Catholics, but may puzzle them. I don't mean his suggestion about the benefits of "instructional programmes." Open invitation study groups and formation programmes are a terrific idea. In some Catholic parishes they have superseded older (and sometimes daunting) catechetical classes, and given rise to an Emmaus set of parish resources (English, not Canadian, in inspiration, as is Alpha). There is a great future for such initiatives.

What would puzzle Catholics, rather, is the idea that the "basic doctrines" John Bowen rightly singles out could be equal in kind to the biblical, traditional, central act of any community of Christians, the celebration of the whole 'Christ event' in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is not one thing among many to be discussed for Catholics, but with the other Sacrament(s) the christocentric starting point for living and sharing the life of the community of faith. The words of the Eucharistic rites invoke the whole history of theology and the life of faith. Thus the Eucharist cannot even be an evangelistic technique for Catholics but rather must be a celebration of what matters most and so contains the 'essentials.' However, to invite others to accompany them to 'the feast,' if they dare do it, is indeed for Catholics to bring others to the light set on the hill. (To offer these seekers a safe place to talk and open, intelligent discussion after 'the feast' would be for Catholics to take John Bowen's words to heart!) And to live prophetic lives of creation and redemption is for Catholics to do nothing but to take 'the feast' into the streets. They are hesitant to separate any one of these from the other (in aid of a distinct activity called 'evangelism') by the intrusion of 'method' or 'technique' or 'sociological observations' into the genuinely Eucharistic life.

Second, who counts when it comes to evangelism? "The real test of whether a church is touching the un-churched population, however, is surely the number of adult baptisms, or at least reaffirmations of faith," says John Bowen. The truth is that few Canadians have any Christian 'memory' at all. And most converts have a spiritual past with which to connect their current experience, though those who are in fact reaching genuine 'pagans' deserve our praise and support. In any case, 'Every one counts,' say Catholics in response to the question. This is obviously not because Catholics are more charitable than evangelistic Evangelicals. Rather it is because Catholics see everyone to be equally in need of the same converting grace at all stages of their pilgrimage. Whether one is 'churched' or 'un-churched,' a preschooler in a devout family or an adolescent in a post-fundamentalist family, a lapsed Evangelical or a nominal Catholic, all are in need of the same evangelistic Gospel.

Adult 'converts' (and thank God for them!) in Catholic communities tend to see themselves as returning to faith. In other words, all are in motion when they meet the Gospel. As John Bowen notes in *Evangelism for Normal People*, we are all either moving away from God or towards God. Catholic evangelism sees all of us in need of the same converting power of grace throughout our lives.

We might add a supplemental question here: What ought our priority to be? It might seem strange, though it is true, that when the Bible speaks of evangelism it almost always speaks of the evangelism of those already initiated into the community of faith. The prophets almost always preached to circumcized Israelites, Jesus preached to Jewish crowds, Paul preached mostly in the synagogues to Jews and non-Jewish 'God-fearers.' By the mercy of God, the Gospel extended in time to the breadth of the created world.

But there is a reason the disciples were told to preach to Judea, then Samaria, and then to extend the message to the ends of the earth. It is because it is the Church itself that is in desperate need of the evangelistic power of the Gospel, which it must hear and heed if we hope to reach those with a Christian memory, and those with no Christian memory at all. This preaching the Gospel to ourselves is an inherited evangelistic reflex which it is dangerous to resist. Perhaps Anglican ranks are thin, in part, because the sons and daughters of Evangelicals and Catholics have not been granted the evangelistic nurture they so needed at five years old, and ten years, and fifteen years. By God's mercy the Gospel that begins here will reach out ever further.

Someone else deserves the last word when it comes to Catholics, Evangelicals and the subject of evangelism. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth," said St. Paul (I Corinthians 3:1-9). Let us pray and work together for much more of each. ☩

**The Reverend Dr. Paul Friesen** is University Chaplain at King's College, Halifax, and priest-in-charge of the Chapel. He was formerly Assistant Professor of History at Tyndale College and (concurrently) Associate Priest, Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Toronto.

*Celebrating the whole process*

The liturgy of the Catechumenate is not stretching out a rite that was always short. Rather, it is recovering an ancient, extended ritual that, over the years, has become compressed into one single service. It needs to be said quite firmly that what takes place in the different liturgies along the way is not an extended preparation for baptism. It is not as though the months spent learning and growing end with a first experience of the sacraments of initiation. Rather, the initiation is what is happening all through these months. What it celebrates is a person's conversion. In France they have no hesitation in calling the Catechumenate 'baptism by stages.'

Parish experience in many different cultures has shown the power of the rites celebrating the stages on the enquirer's journey. On the individual plane, they are an opportunity for enquirers to make a public statement about their growing Christian faith and what it means for them. For the congregation, it is an opportunity to realize the responsibility of the

Christians in the pew to welcome and support with prayer people who want to join their community. In the rites and forms of prayer surrounding the baptism, confirmation, or affirmation of baptismal faith of adults, the intention is to enable a congregation to share in the journey of faith of the individual candidates in the weeks before and after the baptism or its equivalent. As celebrations of the stages along the baptism journey, these liturgies have been shown to carry a blessing for those who take part. They are effective. Not surprising, then, that I recommend the Catechumenate as a tool which is "something better than Alpha" in the service of evangelism. ☩

**The Reverend Peter Ball** is a priest in the Church of England. He served parishes in the Diocese of London and as a Canon Residentiary and Chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral. He has written several books on the Catechumenate. His latest is *Faith on the Way*, authored jointly with Malcolm Grundy and published by Continuum. His *Introduction to Spiritual Direction* was published in September 2003 by SPCK.

## Afterword: John Bowen's response

*What wonderful conversational partners! I am deeply grateful to each of the five writers for their response. It seems to me that while each piece actually stands by itself in terms of content and style, they are actually complementary, like the facets of a diamond. I feel honoured to be a part of this six-way conversation.*

**O** cannot interact with each writer in detail, but here are a few responses to each one:

**David Townsend:** David, your story is a wonderful example of the fact that evangelism is God's leisurely but persistent pursuing of men and women to communicate God's love to them. And I love your attitude towards Nate's move towards faith: You were happy "because I wish Nate the fullness of life, which he's far more likely to find gathered with and sustained by the family of God." I don't know whether you want to be told this, but it seems to me you have the heart of an evangelist, in the best sense of that word.

Your definition of evangelism touches me too: "living one's practice of the Christian faith openly – without apology, without mystification, without spiritual arrogance – in full view of one's neighbours." I think it quite complementary to mine, though yours is more eloquent.

But I feel I must take issue somewhat with the omission of words from your definition. I think words have received a bad rap for 20 years or more: "our lives speak more loudly" etc. Nevertheless, although Jesus was the Word made flesh, and lived out the love of God "without apology, without mystification, without spiritual arrogance," he nevertheless

spent a great deal of time in preaching, discussing, answering and asking questions, and even in argument. I would like to learn from Jesus those things as part of my learning about evangelism. I would say that words have a legitimate part in evangelism – when spoken in a Jesus-like way, of course. Perhaps you would agree. I don't know.

When I talked about adult baptisms as the test of how we are touching the un-churched population, it was of course somewhat tongue in cheek. Like you, I believe with all my heart that moving into the community of faith is normally a quiet, personal, slow, and often tentative process, which a wise pastor will allow to happen without comment and certainly without pushing.

I suppose I wrote what I did because it is so easy to kid ourselves that we are "doing evangelism" just because our congregation is growing, whereas what we are seeing may simply be "the circulation of the saints" (Reginald Bibby's phrase, I think). In other words, people may be drifting from other churches to ours only because it has "better" preaching or liturgy or community.

Can we ever tell, then, whether people with no "Christian memory" are coming to faith in our churches? Yes, there is an element of mystery – I would be the first to acknowledge that – yet I would still maintain that adult



*[Liturgies] need to be true to the personal lives of the candidates, celebrating the events of their discovery of the Christian faith and their approach to the Church.*

## Catechumenate: effective evangelism

*Living and working in the Church of England, in a country where less than 10 per cent of the population is to be found in the churches on a Sunday, I am committed to the belief that liturgical worship can be effective in evangelism.*

by Peter Ball

*The witness of  
.....new people  
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lenge regular  
churchgoers to  
look again at the  
way they live out  
their own beliefs.*

**I** am responding to John Bowen's challenging article from the perspective of a parish priest with over 30 years' commitment to the Adult Catechumenate (RCIA: Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) as a way to accompany men and women in the early stages of faith.

### *Accommodating liturgy*

Worship in the parish church, sadly, does not often achieve excellence. But, as John Bowen emphasizes, it needs to be designed and presented with enquirers and visitors in mind. This is particularly evident on those occasions when, unlike Sundays, churches are full of non-members, such as at weddings, baptisms or funerals. In England, all residents within the boundary of a parish have the right to a marriage or a funeral in the Church, whether or not they are regular worshippers or even Christians. At a wedding or a funeral service, many in the congregation will be strangers to church life. It is vital, therefore, that the liturgies are shaped with two aims in mind: to meet these individuals where they are with an attempt to express what they are bringing to the event and to be channels of grace and blessing and, also, opportunities to appropriately bring the Gospel message to them.

This accommodation of liturgy to human realities, to people's spiritual needs in their actual circumstances, is ideally expressed in the rites which accompany the journey of the Catechumenate as men and women take their early steps into Christian faith and commitment. They meet regularly in small groups to learn and grow, and these special services grow out of and reflect what happens in their meetings.

### *The Service of Welcome*

The Service of Welcome celebrates a first commitment to the Church and to a journey of learning and growing in the faith of Jesus Christ. It is not yet a full membership, but it is a sign of belonging rather than of standing outside looking in. The enquirers are taking an important first step at the beginning of faith and commitment. They are turning towards God and the life of a Christian. They are asking something of the Christian community, their local church. It is also an occasion of celebration for the congregation as they come to realize what it means to be a Christian community ready to welcome new members and to accept responsibility for them. The enquirers' commitment is to a search, not yet to formal membership or to baptism or

confirmation. For most people it is more a matter of, "I want to go a bit further before I decide." It can be seen as the first formal step on the road to—or, perhaps more exactly, as the first step of the staged process of—baptism itself.

The witness of the new people who want to join their community can often challenge regular churchgoers to look again at the way they live out their own beliefs. This Service of Welcome gives formal expression to where they are in their journey of faith. It is also a time for prayer and for God's blessing expressed in giving the enquirers the sign of the cross. The sponsors who accompany them need to be seen to have a ministry within the church, so this could be the occasion for them to be commissioned.

From this welcoming rite, enquirers are led into the period during which they and the people who are accompanying them get down to hearing the story of the Christian Gospel and to relating to the realities of their own lives and their own situations.

### *God Who Calls*

The second main liturgy of the Catechumenate, the Rite of Election, celebrates God's call of each individual to be a candidate for baptism. Before a person is baptized or confirmed, choices have to be made. Both the candidate and the local church need to be sure that this is the right step for them to be taking at this particular time. The rite is a formal marking of the personal choices and discernment which will have taken place between enquirers, those accompanying them, and the clergy in the parish, leading into the Lenten period of 'Enlightenment,' the final preparation for the Easter event of baptism.

### *Liturgy as expression and blessing*

These liturgies and the minor rites, like the giving of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, together with the times for special prayer in the Scrutinies, express two sorts of truth. They need to be true to the personal lives of the candidates, celebrating the events of their discovery of Christian faith and their approach to the Church. They should reinforce their growing sense of commitment to the Christian way of life. They also need to be true to the wider tradition of the community the candidates are joining. In all this, it is really important to remember that just as the groups which accompany the enquirers are adapted to the needs of its members, so the liturgies need to be adapted to express and celebrate the realities of the local circumstances.

## The Blue Guitar: Things as they are

*Among the touchstones of Catholic Anglicanism is its sense of life broken open by grace to disclose the active, missional presence of God within it. At its most expansive, the Catholic tradition understands the world as sacrament—as in the Orthodox (Alexander Schmemmann) and Roman (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin) traditions, as well as in liberation theologies (Leonardo Boff) in which the world and its history are identified as the sacramental locus of God's transformative mission.*

by Michael Thompson

**A**s the Catholic liturgical tradition entered the mainstream of Anglicanism, that missional energy diminished in many places to whatever nominal Anglicanism could muster. The programmatic "success" of liturgical Anglicanism bears some responsibility for its evangelical failure, not because Catholic Anglicanism is flawed, but because many of its mainstream practitioners have lost their missional bearings.

The missionary energy of Tractarian Anglicanism established a profound connection between God and the hunger of the world. The Eucharist was understood as a sacrament by which God addresses human hunger out of the reality of God's own Trinitarian life. That witness was shaped by perceptions that the urban poor were a spiritual as well as a political and economic challenge, and that prevailing expressions of Christianity failed to take seriously God's care for the material reality and circumstances by which lives proceed. God's interest in the world, disclosed in Incarnation and Passion, and vindicated in Resurrection, invites the Church to participate in the God-initiated mission that David Bosch calls "God's turning to the world in love."

That sense of mission is evident, for example, in the "Prayer after Communion" in a number of the newer Anglican Eucharistic texts: "May we who share his body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so that we and all your children shall be free..."

"The hope you have set before us" is the presence of Christ to, for, and with us in the bread and wine of our offertory. Through the work of the Spirit, that bread and wine—however mouldy and sour, by whatever consequences of our moral and spiritual frailty—becomes for us the presence of God in history, and not just in past history, or history in general, but in the particular history in which we dwell and make decisions.

That history has a particular shape. The missional edge of Catholic Christianity in our time is defined by the abutting reality against which we live, a framework for seeing and

understanding our lives "as if" there were nothing beyond the capacity of human reason to observe, understand, and account for. That framework, what Walter Brueggemann calls "the powerful, long-sustained 'as' of the Enlightenment," has been in place so long that it is no longer simply a framework; we have come to believe that it is the way things are. As a consequence, we are starved in the part of our lives where we know ourselves as creatures and seek our place in something beyond what can be measured, counted, and weighed—even, perhaps in some One in whose image we are fashioned and whose Reality makes claims on us. The modern reality has created among many both confusion and longing—confusion about identity and longing for something deeper than what Arthur Frank, following Zygmunt Bauman, refers to as "momentary identities, identities for today, until further notice identities." The hypotheses of modernity—among them the triumph of universal reason and the promised sublimation of any problematic "otherness" under that triumph, the subject-object designation of "me" and "not me," and the promise of a collective economic good driven by personal economic selfishness—have failed to deliver anything but a provisional, fragile, and tragically self-centred framework for understanding what our lives mean.

At the same time, the pre-modern state of play, in which the stability and permanence of human identity was supplied by way of a single overarching Christian narrative, is unlikely to return. In our contemporary longing for depth and stability in our sense of self, we will not have access to a single universally agreed upon external source that can define that identity with authority and without ambiguity.

Catholic Anglicanism brings particular gifts to this period in history. Its liturgical tradition is more evocative than regulatory, more polyphonic than singular, and therefore more likely to be helpful in coaxing shared evangelical witness out of diverse responses to the kerygma. At the same time, it offers itself as what Brueggemann calls the "testimony to otherwise" to a world ruled increasingly by the inevitability of current arrangements.

Our tradition is, at its heart, a matter of life

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with God in history—the particular, confounding history in the midst of which we are called to find our part in God’s mission, and to invite others to find and realize their part. In a world increasingly convinced that nothing can resist the juggernaut of the marketplace, yet haunted by a lingering sense that the juggernaut does not serve our interests, Catholic liturgical life, especially in Baptism and Eucharist, discloses the cracks in the façade of “what must be” and invites us to attend to what God is doing with what is.

What God is doing with what is—how God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit, joins himself to the acknowledged incompleteness of our offertory, cutting gracefully across the compromises, frailty and sinfulness by which we have crafted “what is”—invites us to a self-understanding that is defined by the initiating sovereignty of self-giving love, rather than by the reactionary aggression of self-serving inevitability. As we receive bread and wine, become by the Spirit’s transforming power the very self of our Lord, it should be, at least for a moment, impossible to shrug.

Such a vision of evangelical Catholic Anglicanism will require hard work – in the first instance among those who already participate in its liturgical expression. To a certain extent in its own self-understanding, and almost universally in the perception of those who stand outside our tradition, Baptism and Eucharist are largely interpreted through a pre-modern lens as private remedies for individual moral failure and personal sinfulness. It will

take some time for communities of faith to take into their hearts, and to make transparent in their common life, that the sin of the world, taken away by the Lamb of God, is as much the aching sense of inevitability by which the horizons of our vision are shortened and our imaginations paralyzed as it is the ungoverned passions of our intimacies, or the failure of understanding and will by which we harm one another.

In a recent sermon in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Archbishop Rowan Williams quoted from Wallace Stevens’ poem, “The Man with the Blue Guitar”:

They said, “You have a blue guitar,  
You do not play things as they are.”  
The man replied, “Things as they are  
Are changed upon the blue guitar.”

At its best, the Catholic tradition of Anglicanism is a blue guitar in the hands of the living God, challenging “things as they are” and inviting us into the hard good news that our humanity is designed for something more beautiful and lasting than the stuff, status, and power we hope to gain by yielding to current arrangements. ☩

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**The Reverend Michael Thompson** is a priest of the Diocese of Toronto, currently serving as Principal Secretary to the Primate. He was ordained in the Diocese of Edmonton, and has served parishes in Edmonton and Wetaskiwin, Alberta and in Toronto, where he was Incumbent of St. Cuthbert’s Church.

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## How catholic is “Catholic”?

*John Bowen’s article is a prime example of what we’ve come to expect from him: insightful and witty analysis of both contemporary culture and the Church’s task to faithfully speak the Gospel in the midst of such culture.*

by Judy Paulsen

**T**he article contains three important reminders:

1. No matter what their ethos of worship, all streams and traditions of the Church, have been commissioned to engage with the people of our world and nurture them in the Christian faith.

2. There is a tendency inherent in all streams of the Church (and perhaps in human nature itself) to turn inward, focusing on our own comfort and care, as opposed to carefully thinking about how each stream may have particular strengths to reach those outside the Church with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. Christendom is dead (although the Kingdom of God is very much alive), and so the landscape in which the Church must minister has changed dramatically.

Bowen’s article is a sound summary of several ideas prolifically written about during the last decade. In our post-modern culture

there is decreased faith in science and technology to provide answers to the deepest problems of the human condition. Related to this, there is a new openness to all things spiritual, with an increased attraction to ritual, mystery, tradition, and ceremony. This article rightly suggests that these two characteristics of contemporary post-modern culture should be favourable to a Catholic ethos, and offers several practical suggestions for making this ethos more accessible to the un-churched.

My gut reaction to this article is that, while I agree wholeheartedly with most of its actual content (and have a growing appreciation for the worship it describes), I resist its use of the word ‘Catholic.’ I understand that it is being used to describe a particular ethos of worship that is rich in symbol and ritual, and is heavily Eucharistic. But at the same time, I resist such a restrictive use of this word. As someone raised in a ‘mid-church’ tradition (i.e., Eucharist most

Sundays but not all, chasubles present, incense absent), and as someone who has served in distinctly ‘low church’ parishes, I nevertheless think of myself as Catholic (i.e., sacramental, prayerful, and creedal). Maybe we need a new word to describe the ‘Catholic ethos’ of worship spoken of in this article. I’m sorry to say, though, I don’t have any brilliant suggestions.

My critique of this article involves two points. First, I would suggest that the description of post-modernity is a little too neat and tidy. When the article speaks of “making the transition from modernity to post-modernity” it could well give the impression that post-modernity is in some sense a point of arrival. In reality, I think post-modernity is a period of transition principally characterized by a breaking away from the basic tenets of modernity. This is what makes post-modern culture so ‘slippery’ and difficult to either read or define.

Some aspects of modernity are still very prevalent. For example, we are still highly reliant on technology and, to a lesser extent, still fierce defenders of individualism. For example, we are increasingly suspicious of the claim of the ‘pure’ sciences to be the source of an ‘objective’ truth. Post-modernity, then, is not so much defined by the place we’ve come to, as by the place from which we are leaving. Being in a culture defined by what we are letting go of (but still uncertain of what we are grasping) means we live in a time of widespread uncertainty and frequent conflict.

A second point of critique is really more of a request for the article to go a little deeper in its exploration of possible points of both connection and conflict between post-modern culture and a Catholic ethos. For example, strengths of this tradition in attracting post-modern people may include:

- an attraction to the multi-sensory aspects of its worship, which often include such things as incense, ornate vestments, sung responses, icons, and holy water: People today often enjoy having all of their senses engaged.
- an attraction to the mystical (as opposed to purely rational) experience of God offered through a strong focus on the sacraments: People today don’t necessarily want explanations regarding the Body and Blood of Christ; they’re just hungry and thirsty for it.
- an attraction to the deep historical roots of this tradition: People today are yearning for a sense of connectedness and belonging.

I believe there are, however, several aspects of Catholic tradition and ethos which may be in direct conflict with post-modern culture. It’s possible that these are at least partially to blame for the ‘hunch’ contained in John’s article which suggests that such parishes may, in spite of their best intentions, find growth an uphill battle in this culture.

We know, for instance, that people in this post-modern culture are highly individualistic

and highly suspicious of authority figures and institutions. This may mean they will resist the Catholic tradition, with its long-established focus on hierarchy, priesthood, and the corporate Church. Congregations today will likely benefit from an increased emphasis on a strong relational focus, ‘the priesthood of all believers’ and the local community of faith.

Another possible point of conflict has to do with basic perceptions of the nature of God and the post-modern thirst for direct personal experience. While this tradition has had a tendency to focus on the transcendence of God, emphasizing mystery and the ‘otherness’ of God, there is increasing evidence that people in a post-modern culture are seeking an imminent experience of God. (This desire for intimacy is reflected in a large body of contemporary worship music, which increasingly uses very personal and intimate language for our relationship with God.) Religion is out. Relationship is in. Perhaps one way to address this is for such parishes to re-emphasize what has traditionally been the Catholic counterbalance to the transcendence of God: the centrality of the Incarnation.

“Evangelism in the Catholic Tradition” provides us with important insights into contemporary culture and the repercussions of this culture on ministry today. It reflects the basic call for us to be the Church, connecting with and feeding spiritually hungry people with the Bread of Life. Now, may we continue to learn how this particular stream of the Church can best do that. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. ☩

**The Reverend Judy Paulsen** is Incumbent of Christ Church, Oshawa. She has also served in the parishes of St. Bride’s, Clarkson and Trinity, Streetsville.

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