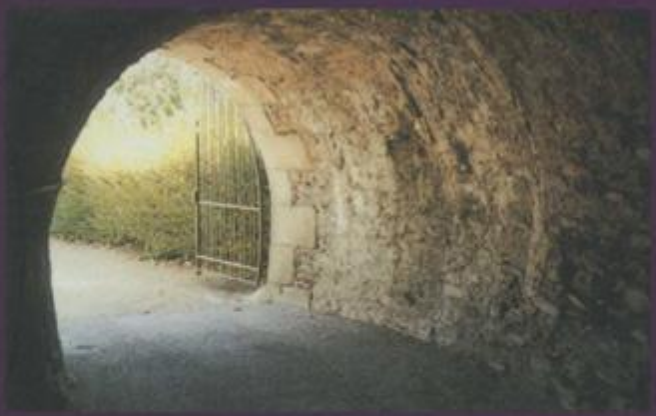
we are caught into this mystery



EXCERPTS FROM
THE WRITINGS AND REFLECTIONS OF
BARBARA DAVIS, RGS

we are caught into this mystery

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What I offer is the fruit of my own learning,
reflection and living.
It is not something that I present and you receive.
Rather, I hope that it can be an invitation
for you to get in touch
with your own wisdom and insights.

- Sr. Barbara Davis, RGS

Contents

Editors' note: The interleaved images, suggested exercises, poem by John Kibira and story by Lilian Jackson Kisanga are not from Barbara's notes, but are included here in juxtaposition to her writings. They invite reflection and may provide ways of enabling readers to move differently with their own experience.

Foreword

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
Rome, 15 December 2001

> *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;*
> *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*
>
> Ps. 23:1-2

This book is a precious legacy left to us by Barbara Davis. With her passion for the Good Shepherd and for shepherdesses especially, she resounded anew the message of the Word of God.

Her reading of the texts was like a spark stimulating our zeal and commitment to the poor and the marginalized. Her reflections shared in sessions, retreats or informal encounters integrated also what she learned from others. She knew well how to inspire us to bring forth new understandings. Always a true educator, she helped us discover that we are at the same time both sheep and shepherdesses. Many women in the Bible became more alive for us. They became models of tenderness and compassion, daring to give life in order to preserve it.

Weaving the biblical stories of shepherds and shepherdesses, Barbara has given us a new tapestry. She has brought to our times ancient beauty that is ever fresh and ever new. Her research represents a seed of life for our Congregation, our associates and collaborators, as well as all the readers. Our gratitude is expressed in hope for a better world. Together we commit ourselves to build a world where justice, peace and love reign, **so there shall be one flock, one shepherd** (Jn. 10:16).

The members of the General Council who have journeyed with Barbara thank the Province of Australia/Aotearoa/New Zealand for this initiative.

Journeying with the Shepherd,

Liliane Tauvette
Superior General

List of images

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

IN THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

[Barbara created much of the material in this section as a resource for a seven-day retreat.]

The Biblical Call To Shepherding

Prelude: About knowing ...

A story is told about a soiree given in London.

Present were diplomats, members of government, directors of banks and business, various artists and some others who were friends of the more "famous" people present.

From time to time one of the artists would perform - an aria, a violin solo, a piano recital - and there was an opportunity to make a request.

Present in the company was an elderly parish priest invited as a friend and he asked a very well known Shakespearean actor to recite Psalm 23.

The actor agreed, provided the priest would say it after him. As you can imagine, the priest felt rather embarrassed, but could only agree.

The actor recited the Psalm with wonderful resonance and clarity and at the end there was a spontaneous ovation. The priest felt even more reluctant as the actor indicated it was his turn. He said Psalm 23, one of his favourites and when he concluded there was silence ...

The actor then said, *You see, I know the words,*
he knows the Shepherd!

Knowing and making new

I | "To know something" - what does this actually mean?

In the Bible knowing means much more than cognitive knowing. Very often biblical knowing amounts to what we would be likely to regard as experiencing personally and relationally. In this sense, knowledge is not some activity of the mind that is separated from the heart.

Knowledge can result from and within many things, such as a particular experience, a tradition, a time of dissatisfaction, a stirring of imagination, the tug of a felt need, or the intrusion of the unexpected. Such knowledge can be expanded, framed or limited by its contexts -historical, social, religious, cultural, personal. Knowledge and the struggle to know are often linked with human efforts to orient oneself to the world.

II | Living our knowledge

We are a gathering of women who strive to know the Shepherd, and to live and love in this knowledge. Our task is to journey with the Shepherd in prayerful but eminently practical ways. We are women who have been attracted by the Shepherd to commit ourselves to our mission with all the faithed strength, passion, compassion, beauty, wisdom, and ability to stand with and to suffer with, that this call contains.

It is from this experience and all that it contains that we might now reflect on our lives. We might ponder what is involved in our call as Sisters of the Good Shepherd, consider the Biblical image of shepherd and discover more of the foundation and inspiration that could inform our lives and charism (our method of holiness, our gift of God's Spirit in ministry). Rather than miring us in this past, the memories such reflection brings might also show us how every authentic encounter with the creative God is new.

Our spirituality, mission and experience of God are never meant to be a mere repetition of what has gone before. Each of us brings to the world, to the Congregation, and to this group something never seen before. This is one of the things that makes the Bible quite different from all the other writings and traditions of the ancient world - this emphasis on newness and the need for a whole new world.

III | The call to make all things new

The word new appears again and again to describe what God wants and what God does: a new song, a new heart, a new spirit, a new person, a new life, a new creature, a new covenant, new wine in new wineskins, a new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem.

The truth of the matter is that the God of the Bible is a God of newness and change (cf. is. 43:18-19). What God stands for is a whole new world; it is God who wants to mAke all things new (Rev. 21:5).

God is not saying to us: Remember the former retreats and consider the retreats of old. Behold I am doing the same old thing for you. Rather, God is saying to us: Behold I am doing a new thing in this time of discernment. God promises to make all things new for everyone. The temptation against which the Is 40:66 text (cf. Rev. 21:1-5) cautions is that of drifting into thinking yesterday, today and the same forever. For the community at large and for us as individuals the divine guarantee comes through clearly: I am doing a new thing, I am making all things new.

However, the new Exodus or new heaven and new earth make no sense unless we recall the first Exodus and the old heaven and the old earth. God was faithful in the past and will be lovingly faithful in the future. God was inventive in the past and God will prove even more lovingly inventive and innovative in the future.

The problem is that most of us do not want to change our personal lives. We can want many changes - political, social, economic, religious or congregational - but we do not want to introduce anything new into our personal lives. The world, Church and congregation cannot change very much more until people begin to change. To go further into the kind of newness that God wants, each one of us must look more deeply into our own need for change.

Nothing blocks God's plan for a new world more effectively than complacent, self-righteous people who cannot see that something totally and radically new is needed in their personal lives and their attitudes to others. Yes, others do need to change, but you and I also need to change.

IV | Knowing the newness of the living Word

The Bible is a book to be prayed; it forces you to your knees. The Word of God is not the printed text on the page.

God's Word is always an address to life in the present moment. It occurs when people are engaged in a lively and disciplined conversation with their sacred texts and find themselves accosted, seized.

Each time we read our texts we do so with our own vested interests, our own historical prejudices, our own emotions. We always add some of us into our interpretation. No text will be understood in exactly the same way time after time - my present horizon of understanding should always be provoked, challenged, transformed.

We are seeking to ask and to live out an honest response to the questions: What are the values, the relationships, the ways of acting in biblical writings that relate to and challenge us today? Here, where we touch the very heart of our lives, we can be somewhat overwhelmed by the ideals we discover. There is a gap between the reality of our lives and the imperatives we hear.

Nevertheless, we must not hesitate to find, in the light of God's Word, the ideal model that challenges us to examine our commitment. If I am to be formed and reformed in the depths of my being by God's Word, then Scripture must speak to my experience and my experience to it. It's a rhythm, a dialogue, such that, for instance, accounts of Jacob and Miriam are not merely stories from an alien past or a rich source of quotable quotes. Our experiences run parallel at the level of their deep significance.

The Word of God will never be accommodating. None of this *is* particularly comfortable.

It is precisely because our reflections are biblical that they are necessarily idealistic, touching us at our deepest level and questioning us where we would prefer not to be questioned. The Word of God never apologises for its idealism. Paul did not write: *It would be nice if love were patient and kind, if love were not jealous or boastful.* On the contrary he boldly proclaimed: *Love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful* (I Cor. 13:4). We ought not to be afraid of seeking *him whom my heart loves.* This questing causes us to go out of ourselves, to catch a glimmer of that One, and to be able to say, *I have seen the Lord.*

The God of the Bible is the strangest thing about the whole Bible. God's strangeness is this God is with and for God's people. God is not by Godself; God is for others.

The Good Shepherd - metaphor and image

I | The power of metaphor and image

Obviously, the Shepherd theme is one that means a great deal to us. No one image, of course, fully contains the richness of our call and mission but this theme is a central one for us.
The image of Shepherd runs through the whole of Scripture from Genesis to the Revelation of St. John. It is one of the most precious images in biblical spirituality, attractive and warm. It describes the behaviour of God in taking care of humanity.

A favourite image, for many of us, is that of Jesus, the Good Shepherd with a lamb over his shoulders. To the Shepherd's great delight, the one sheep that was lost is now found. This depiction suggests much to us: the love of God for each person; God's willingness to seek and pursue; and the worthwhileness of spending a great deal of time and energy on any one person. Like Jesus, we see ourselves called to seek out the lost and by the way we relate to people to give witness to that one person; any one person is worth more than a world.

Images can also show us the unknown faces of our own souls and generate the energy needed for change. Our ego can use the images and ask them questions, engage them in dialogue, learn from their meaning, and create strategies for incorporating newly found energies into conscious life. Image making is not a difficult undertaking, restricted to those of us whom we see as artistic. It is simply allowing the inner knowledge of who we are and how we feel to appear before us in self-expression. The point is not to portray or create anything so much as simply to let responses arise in and through our hands.

We are caught into this mystery ...

- Do you have a favourite image or metaphor that speaks deeply into your life?
- What is it?
- Do you remember when or how it first came to matter to you?
- Can you show or name it?

II | Extending the exploration of the image and myth of the Good Shepherd

Spirituality is not something that is prior to and separate from activity. Spirituality is theology walking. Spirituality is what we do because of what we believe. Hence to speak of spirituality is not to speak of one aspect of life but rather of one's entire life.

Biblical spirituality views the human person as one who lives under the constant action of a God present and near; as one whom God calls upon and questions in every circumstance. The Scriptures reveal how different circumstances call for particular emphases and incarnations. Spirituality is not lived on the margins of history but within it.

Today we are aware that we have no identity either at individual, group, community or collective level unless we have memory and story. That is why history is fundamental - not just as information that shows what has happened, been done, but even more importantly, as an experience of what has been lived, as a treasury of identity through the centuries.1 When Israel (or any group) wants to recover, affirm or reaffirm its identity it systematically goes back to its origins.

The context for imagining new things is in the memory of who we are and how to be who we are which grows out of a foundational event constantly reinterpreted. We must strive to know our story as woman who is both universal and particular.

Myths and images can help us to perceive inner spiritual realities, by speaking to truth that is greater than facts. Myths are deep stories, describing the passion and vision men and women have experienced at different moments in history. Often they are stories of great love and energy, of practical compassion and faithful commitment. Such myth represents all those most deeply held experiences, beliefs and values that are at the heart of our stories and have the power to continue to fire and fuel our lives. Indeed, myth is so deep a dynamic, creative force that you can only tell stories about it.

The image of Shepherd predates biblical times. Many ancient civilisations of the Near East used Shepherd or good shepherd as a term for their kings (e.g., in Mesopotamia and Egypt). The metaphor is found in Arcadian royal inscriptions. Hammurabi describes himself as the shepherd

1 | Dr M. Theresa Porcile Santiso, Uruguayan theologian and scholar

who brings salvation and whose staff is righteous. The shepherd title is also found among Assyrians and Babylonians. Gods, such as Marduk, wore this title. In ancient Egypt, in the Pyramid texts (the most ancient - 2500-2250 BCE) the blind sky god is described as shepherd. The shepherd is one who gives and preserves life in time and in eternity (Pharaoh became immortal). Rulers considered themselves shepherd, to whom the divinity had entrusted the duty of gathering together and caring for the flock. Their role was to be leaders and companions with responsibility for life here and now.

In later Near Eastern hymns to the Sun-God, the theology of the shepherd in the ancient non-biblical Near East reaches the peak of its development. The religion of the Sun-God is imbued with universality; the sun is there for all, it exists for the peoples of all nations. The Sun-God, with his multiple gifts represented by hands gives life, light and warmth but also he leads, guides, directs, accompanies ... like a real Good Shepherd.

This reminds us of Matthew's Gospel. He *gives pasture to all beings gifted with a living spirit* wherever they are to be found. The Son is acclaimed as the good shepherd of humanity; a shepherd who loves the flock, who exercises compassion and who knows how to be a shepherd. He opens the way to life and traces the path.

It is clear that the Bible is not the first to refer to God as Shepherd, but in the Bible the image is imbued with the particular relationship which binds Yahweh and the people.

III | Shepherd metaphor and image in the Old Testament

A myth is
the music we dance to
even when we cannot name the tune.[2]

For thousands of years people have told stories and used images to interpret the mysteries of life, the principles common to the human spirit. Myths speak because they express what we know inside to be true.

The Old Testament stands within this tradition.

The patriarchs, Jacob, Moses and David, were shepherds. This helped to make the common oriental imagery more appropriate for the role of the monarchy in Judah.

2 | Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* [New York: Doubleday, 1988)

The Patriarchs are types for Israel in search of God, for the individual who seeks God, for a multitude consisting of all who look for God; and for each one of us who is on the way to God by being conformed to God's living Word.

IV | The *how* of God

There is an ideal of kingship, which is vital for an understanding of how Israel recognised God's working in the world. Israel was influenced in her understanding of Yahweh by the experience of reality expressed in the ancient Near-Eastern world.

A basic notion in the ancient world was that when the earth was made and set in order, the king reigned and was established upon his throne (cf. Psalms). Kingship (Shepherding) and Creation are linked ideas. In both instances, the desired goal is life. God's creative activity means that God is not just concerned with human salvation but with the person in the full richness of potential.

One of the basic functions of the king in ancient Israel was the administration of justice. This was essential for cosmic harmony as Justice and Righteousness were the foundations of the universe: Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of his throne (Ps. 97:2, rsv).

Righteousness means being in right relationship. Peace and Justice are always about well-being within the context of people in community. The King was to be mediator between God and the people. When the King ruled justly, Shalom, life flourished. Justice shall flower in his days and profound peace (Ps. 72:7).

We are caught into this mystery ...

- What is your most cherished myth? Can you tell it? Does it, in some way, tell you?
- Is myth of metaphor that originates in a very different time, society and culture too remote to mean much to you now? What was life like then for people? Does theirs seem like another world?
- Is it possible to connect the *how* of your experience with any of this earlier myth? What do you see as some of the difficulties and possibilities of such as task?

The pilgrimage of Jacob and Rachel

I | Jacob

God has been my shepherd all of my life to this day (Gen. 48:15). What led Jacob to speak as he did when he was about to die? To retrace Jacob's story is to see how, in his day-to-day existence, he grew to perceive God as shepherd.

It's not so much the title that matters but rather its significance in the historical context of the nomadic Jacob - a son of shepherds and himself a shepherd all of his life. For here the Shepherd is a companion on the journey. Journey, provides one of the great symbols of human experience - of a process, an adventure, a constant leaving and arriving in which the outcome is never certain.

Gen. 28: 10-22 shows Jacob (called the *Supplanter* because throughout his life he has engaged in trickery to get what he wants] in flight, threatened by Esau whose blessing he took. He is heading towards Mesopotamia, actually travelling the same route as Abraham (Gen. 28:10 and 12:4-9). Jacob has to go a thousand miles on foot, a fearsome enough journey!

Little imagination is needed about how he is feeling. He is fearful of Esau (Gen. 27:4) who wants to kill him, uncertain, and is insecure and anxious about the dangers of the journey. But he also has much hope because the blessing of his father is with him. The story of Jacob and Esau is very much concerned with the meaning of blessing.

Blessing is a creative act - it expresses relationship and is always expected to make the one who receives it the source of blessing for others. One is not blessed at the expense of others but for the good of others. But Jacob has it wrong. He obtained Isaac's blessing by deceit. The blessing is power of life handed on from father to son; it affects the one blessed and his possessions (here flocks). According to earlier understandings, the father has only one blessing. This blessing cannot be recalled and it works unconditionally.

Jacob falls asleep, exhausted and not really knowing where he is (Gen. 27: ll). Writing of this, Martini suggests that we consider where Jacob thinks he is and where he really is. Geographically, he is about three days' journey from his home and family. He feels lost and abandoned. We can see the connection between geography and sociology: none of us can be

at home in a physical place without the personal relationships that make it meaningful. Jacob has usurped his brother, Esau. This sin troubles him.

In this situation of fear and hope, God meets him at night in a dream. Jacob is offered a possibility that comes as gift (Gen. 28:12-14), in a time of anguish and fatigue. Like Jacob we are not always capable of recognising the value of where we find ourselves in life. God is interested in him and is revealed as a friend who knows the human heart. With the promise of land, descendants and nations, God bestows on Jacob the blessing given to Abraham, a blessing that is meant to flow from Jacob to others.

The blessing that expresses God's providence and presence is to be heard again the New Testament concerning Jesus (Acts 3:25-26). It gives comfort to Jacob, assuring that God is with him on the journey. *Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go ... I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you* (Gen. 28:15).

Jacob is blessed not solely for his own sake but in view of the whole world. The blessing enlarges horizons. In Abraham, in Jacob and in Jesus all humanity is blessed. Now full of wonder and awe, Jacob builds a sanctuary. His purpose is not to ask God to come down to help him in his need but to give witness to the free and gracious coming of God. Jacob understands that no one is the same after seeing the Lord. He needs to respond to this experience of blessing.

He uses a number of signs in his response.

One of these is stone: Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head, set it up as a memorial stone (vs. 18). This is a simple gesture of great meaning. The stone indicates that Jacob will never forget what has happened; it stands as a testimony for the relationship between himself and God. Ancient civilisations often erected rocks as a sign of veneration. *The act of placing a stone also symbolises laying down burdens and relieving the hardships and adversities.*3

A second sign is the oil: *Jacob took the stone, set it up as a memorial stone and poured oil on top of it*. The oil signals God's Spirit taking hold of the person. It expresses the sacredness of the person, his belonging to the Lord.

The third sign is Jacob's vow: He makes a vow in the hope of bringing out the meaning and reality of his memorial act (vs. 20).

3 | Bolivian Apacheta

What, I wonder, might this say to us? Perhaps that, often in our lives, there are moments of grace and of a true awareness of God. But they fade or are forgotten, not because they were unimportant but because we did not fix them in our memory. Visible signs are necessary and express what is interior, invisible and mysterious.

The story of Jacob provides a beautiful example in that, for the first time in Scripture, God is called *my shepherd from my birth until this day* (Gen. 48:15). The old patriarch formulates this expression in the land of Egypt, thinking back to the journey and the time of his dwelling in Mesopotamia.

The theological use of the term shepherd already had a long history, but Jacob adds to it something new and personal. His shepherd is not like the Sun-God who remained on high; Jacob's shepherd is a God who descends towards humans and becomes a companion on the journey.

It is interesting to note that God commits by promise. Jacob, however, commits with an *if*. *God goes along with him: Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God* (Gen. 28:20-21).

God addresses Jacob as who Jacob is - a fugitive who encounters God in Bethel and Penuel. *The face of God* is a presence which blesses and which wounds with the power of divine love, when he is fleeing. Jacob is full of fear yet heir of the blessing, the promise. He experiences divine shepherding when he is away from his tent.

The tent is also significant. It is the place where the bonding of family and the welcoming of guests happen. A tent is not pitched for stability but for flexibility, so it permits enlargement of its dimensions and movement according to need. While to achieve openness and hospitality it is necessary to advance, to embark on a journey (from acquired positions), the tent offers ease and comfort in the resting place.

Together, the shepherd's staff and the tent express the dynamic dimension and the Utopian nature of biblical pastoral symbolism. It is necessary to move the tent forward from the [topos] place where it is, to where it has not yet reached (u-topos). All People of God are called to do the same with regard to the nations - ever-widening their horizons for people.

Jacob sought in the midst of his journey to understand where he was. God had truly been on Jacob's side giving him more than he ever asked

for. The biblical passage, Gen. 28:10-22, is a symbol of our own endeavour to comprehend where we are.

Jacob teaches us continuance of spirit in a time of change. He shows us that reversals of our life-plans are not nearly the obstacles to life we think they are. He shares, as do so many others - from Moses and David to Jesus Himself - what is involved in the religious struggle, in struggling with God.

Gen. 32:24-31 is a story of conflict and intimacy. Intimacy is portrayed through the metaphor of Jacob's wrestling in the dark with God. The ancient account captures all the anxiety of such an encounter. *Jacob is alone in the Dark* (vs. 24). Something grabs him. Jacob cannot escape this embrace nor can he control this nocturnal assailant. The heart of the story seems to reside in the ambiguity of this wrestling match. Jacob is threatened, not destroyed. He is injured in the struggle but he also strengthens his resilience and comes to a new sense of himself.

Jacob is asked and asks, *What is your name?* (Gen. 32:27, 29). It becomes clear that it is only by naming our hungers and passions that we can face the challenge of taming them. We know the truth of this in our own lives. Deepening friendship can bring apprehension: What will be its demands? Suppose someone wants to work with us: what if her presence crowds me? What will happen to my idea? At times such as this, some neglected part of ourselves may claim attention.

II | Jacob's meeting with Rachel at the well

The name, *Rachel,* means ewe. Rachel, explicitly referred to as shepherdess, is the only woman in the Bible to receive this title. She is audacious, courageous and creative. She is also naturally beautiful (Gen. 29:17), divinely guided, and deeply loved (Gen. 29:18, 20, 30). It is through her first-born, Joseph, and his descendants that the symbolism of God as shepherd is transmitted. Jacob and Rachel together provide the foundation of spiritual leadership in the Jewish tradition.

Jacob meets Rachel at a well (the fountain of wisdom for shepherding - Gen. 29:1-10). Here is the fruitful fountain of life: water springing up links with the movements of the salvation story, its encounters and rebirths. Shepherdesses were always attentive to the needs of the flock, to the presence of water, to its import for life and birth.

Within the tradition, the well represents the gifts of the Torah, the life-giving water of the law, wisdom and divine revelation (cf. Abraham in Gen. 21:22-31).

All the geographies of wells, from Genesis to John lead us to scenes of meetings that will make us be born and reborn to other levels of existence.

It is Rachel, who calls forth the strength and generosity of Jacob: *Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban* (Gen. 29:10).

Appropriately linked to this meeting between Jacob and Rachel at the well is the service given to her father's sheep. The task of removing the stone from the well and providing water for the sheep needs Jacob and Rachel together.

The richness of the symbols of water and well is evident throughout the Scriptures. In John's Gospel, each time the evangelist speaks of women, there is noteworthy symbolism. The centrality of the body in the experience of women is striking. The body of woman is revealed as a place of birth or as a flowing place, and as capable of giving room. In the encounters between Jesus and women there is a common element, a liquid - water, wine, tears, perfume, water and blood, oil - all liquids that flow, change and are transformed. They are dynamic. These liquids are full of symbolic significance; for example, oil is needed to point out the King and the Anointed one.

Liquids evoke something that overflows, that, like the Spirit, is poured out. This is the language of extravagance, of giving without counting the cost, of love. In John's Gospel - full of symbols - everything is expressed in a dynamic of love. Each time the Gospel presents a woman in relation to Jesus, there is a liquid as if to indicate a woman's way of being present: dynamism, transformation, fluidity. It would seem as if her being is poured out in the presence of the Lord. In two of the episodes there are vessels -Cana with its jars and Samaria with Jacob's Well. In Samaria, anyone could have gone to seek water from the well; however, it was the woman who made the move and to whom was promised the living water.

After the meeting at the well, Rachel's story continues. Jacob loves her, but is deceived into marrying Leah, her sister. Having set out to achieve one thing, Jacob finds himself faced with a new and different task. When he is given the right to marry Rachel he also meets with contention and challenge. Rachel is childless, like Sarah and Rebekah. The life that

eventually comes from her womb is preceded by expectation and grace. Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my reproach' (Gen. 30:22-23).

Genesis tells of Rachel's wisdom and insight. In a startling act, she takes her father's idols and sits on them (Gen. 31:19, 32-35). Jewish commentators and the Fathers of the Church interpret this stealing of the idols as a profession of faith in the one true God, the God of Jacob. This interpretation is supported by what follows (w. 34-35). According to Midrash Rabbah, Rachel intended to free her father from his idols. What she did was born of concern and affection. *What!,* she said, *Are you going away and leaving the old man (Laban) in his error?* It is as remedy, Scripture tells us, that *Rachel stole the idols from her father* (Gen. R. 74:5). If she had taken them for protection, would she dare to sit on them? To sit thus is an expression of dominion. Fittingly, the action is completed when Jacob reaches Bethel and buries these idols under the oak at Shechem.

Genesis 32 traces the continuance of Jacob and Rachel's journey. Once again, God is revealed as Jacob's shepherd, freeing him from fear of Esau. During this time, Jacob's struggle with a mysterious person results in his unconditional surrender to God. He receives a new identity (Gen. 32:28), Israel, which means the one who wrestles with God.

Rachel is the mother who dies giving life (Gen. 35:16-18). At the close of his life Jacob again speaks of *The God who has led me all my life long to this day* (Gen. 48:15). God, the companion on an adventurous journey, ever supportive and fully involved in all the adversities and risks, has given more than Jacob ever dared to ask for.

We are caught into this mystery…

Think about –

- In what way you, like Jacob and Rachel, experience yourself as stranger, and what you know of comparable demands, dangers, pitching of tents, insecurity and change.
- In your mind’s eye, explore your experience of wilderness or desert; where was/is it, what des it look like (rural or urban or suburban; its shape, contours and horizon), where is the cactus and where are the

life sustaining *waterholes;* what lives and/or lurks in this wilderness; what, for you, have been/are the essentials for the journey?

Mapping -

- Map this wilderness as you see it.
- Do this in whatever way you wish. Your map might be with or without words, in black and white or in colour, figurative or abstract or a combination of both, marking or hiding your own place or tracks within it, adopting a perspective that could be appropriate to time or feeling or ... whatever gives truest expression to how you see it.

Alternatively -

- In a small group, create a communal dance that moves into and through this wilderness.

THE DAY I RAN

It was sudden, like lightning in the sky.
The sky changed, the sun was like a moon.
The day became dark under the sun.
Water tasted bitter as if mixed with ash.
Forests became desert, nowhere to hide.
Man was wild like a wild monster.
Mothers forgot children, scattered like the ice of the rain.
Wombs burst due to the fear of the firing.
Roads became narrow, like a cotton thread.
Tears flew, like the waters of the Nile.
The world changed as if it was the end.

-John Kibira
Rwanda[4]

4 | Naomi Flutter and Carl Solomon, eds., *Tilting cages: an anthology of refugee writings,* (Pyrmont, PO Box 223, NSW 2009, Australia: Naomi Flutter and Carl Solomon, 1995), 39.

Shepherding and the Exodus

I | Introduction

The Book of Exodus is about Moses and Pharaoh, and about a stubborn people, a collection of tribes learning, in the journeying and desert, to be a nation. Exodus 1:6-14 supplies a background that reveals what gave birth to the cry that Yahweh heard rising from a land of desolation and slavery. The description it provides is disheartening and almost contemporary in relation to much that is familiar in present-day governments and countries around the world. The countries, names and forms of dictatorship change, but there remains the reality of what one people does to another for political and economic self-advantage. But this same Old Testament book speaks of hope and of the need for promise and for escape from inhumanity.

To explore how this hope emerges is to ask: Who set the Exodus story in motion? Who or what made Moses the leader of a people - that same Moses who knew Egypt and Pharaoh as an adoptive father? Who was the seed of justice and hope? It is also to consider who the oppressed people are, and to recognize that then, as now, some of the hostility directed towards them was based on fear. The problem for Pharaoh is people, overpopulation of a certain people other than Egyptians. The problem is race and the chosen solution is genocide; it's called stopping their increase. The steps taken to achieve this are subtle: forced labour, slavery, and reduction of the male population of non-Egyptians.

Exodus 1:15-17 makes early reference to the Hebrew midwives who disobey the king of Egypt's command to kill all male newborn children. Pleased with these women who subvert the intentions of the king and

keep children alive, God rewards them with children. The midwives are present at birth to liberate, mediate and comfort. They stand for life, deliverance, freedom and truth. Confronted by the king, by evil and power, they make stout reply and continue in living out their convictions. Thus the Exodus starts with women who are prepared to take the initiative, agree on a strategy and carry it out. (We can ask, where are the men and what are they doing? The text doesn't say.)

The story then shifts to a particular family. However this story is not so much about individuals as about people and the way they relate within groups in the light of external forces. It is about families, husbands, wives, men and women and children in oppression. It is not just about religion or worship. It is, however, a vital response to the questions: Whose side is God on, and why? It is also about history, not solely the history of Egypt and Israel, but all history - of Europe, of Africa, of Kenya, of South America ... Contemporary power, similarly, recognises and declares evil and problematic anything and anyone that threatens it.

There are three things to remember in dealing with such fundamental stories from Scripture as the Exodus, the source of Israel's identity and our liturgy (of Passover from life and death to resurrection). Firstly, there is the communal nature of these stories. They give people an identity, a corporate identity, symbol, structure, a vision and a horizon, as well as a past. These are stories about oppressed people and what the experience did and still does to them. A second feature is their focus on relationships within family and about family in relation to the state. We read about grandparents, parents and children, sons and daughter, siblings, aunts and uncles, in-laws, extended families, ancestors. Thirdly, the stories address aspects of human history - specifically war, religion and economics; the relation among these realities; and their impact on families.

II | **Shepherding and Liberation**

The shepherd of Israel is the God who liberates; he hears the moans of the oppressed and leads them to safety. He sends Moses to move the people out of Egypt - *So come, I will send you to Pharaoh so bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt* (Ex. 3:10) - and to lead them to the holy mountain, the place of revelation and covenant. Since the Exodus is also a story about God and us, it invites us to ask: To what am I in bondage and to what are we in bondage? Perhaps we are in bondage to cultural messages about

what we should be like and should pursue: messages about success, attractiveness, gender roles, the good life. Another form of bondage is to be held captive to voices from our own past (parents/novice Mistress). Then there are the addictions to the seemingly worthy, such as specific kinds of work. The Pharaoh who holds people in bondage is within people as well as outside of them. I ask myself: Who is the Pharaoh within me? What instruments of fear and oppression does this Pharaoh use?

The Exodus is a story of a journey of liberation from what is burdensome and oppressive. What it describes is a journey toward God and a journey with God.

Moses' holiness depends on finding wholeness where he stands and taking that energy to others for liberation. Moses is perhaps the man who, more than any other, assumes within himself the duties of the shepherd. He is the leader of the people, the prophet and legislator, the one who educates Israel and nurtures them. Of course, the one who really brings Israel out of Egypt is God, the true Shepherd of the Exodus. But this does not happen without human collaboration: *Thou didst lead thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron* (Ps. 77:22).

We are caught into this mystery…

Included in Martin Buber's Tales of the Hasidim is this comment on bondage: *The real exile in Egypt was that they had learned to endure it*

- In your ministry have you met people trapped like this?
- What about possible means of resistance or release?
- Did anything liberating happen?
- If so, how did this come to be?

Moses and Miriam

In the tradition of the Exodus the names of Moses and Aaron are constantly mentioned together. The prophet Micah surprises with his boldness when he adds the name of Miriam: *... for I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam* (Mic. 6:3-4).

These are the three leaders in Israel's liberation. Micah is the prophet who used the pastoral image to illustrate hope for Israel and blamed the sages and elders because they did not take leadership on behalf of the poor. They prophesied, he said, for profit and not for truth. They talked religion but did not live it. They led people astray by their very distance from the questions of the world around them. They failed to keep walking amidst the reality.

Miriam's function as leader is singled out. She is the woman who precedes, who walks ahead. God created woman to be God's image and likeness. God desired to place her at the most important moments of history. She is at the origins of humanity (Gen. 2:3), the origins of Moses and the Chosen People (Ex. 1:1-15). From earliest memory, in rabbinic commentary, the figure of Miriam is inseparable from that of Moses: *She watches and keeps vigil over her brother* from the banks of the Nile where he floats between life and death while she negotiates the terms of his survival (Ex. 2:1-10).

The history of salvation passes through the co-operation of three women: the mother of the baby, his sister and the daughter of Pharaoh. Moses' mother, Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter all have something to lose from seeing life differently from the people around them and from refusing to accept the situation.

In the beginning of her story Miriam has no name. Despite this, from the outset her initiative and courage are evident. As the sister who keeps watch, she remains some distance away where she can see, hear and help. She knows how to wait; how to prepare and be prepared; how to anticipate.

As soon as she is aware of favourable circumstances, Miriam dares to come out of hiding and put a proposal to Pharaoh's daughter. The saving intervention of the Lord is realised through the action of Miriam - her vigilance, patient waiting and bold initiative. She asks a question at the right time: *Shall I go and find you a nurse among the Hebrew women to suckle the child for you?* (Ex.l:7) The vigilance she displays is characteristic of the shepherd who guards and takes care.

After killing an Egyptian whom he caught striking a Hebrew countryman, Moses has to flee to save his life. *When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled down in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well* (Ex. 2:15). He knows what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land.

Like Rachel, Moses' wife, Zipporah, is a shepherdess. Moses, like Jacob, meets the woman of his destiny at a well (Ex. 2:16-22). Moses also becomes a shepherd; he performs the daily tasks in the service of his father-in-law until he arrives at the mountain of God (Ex. 3:1-6) and to do this he goes into the wilderness. What happens to Moses - as to us in the wilderness of our lives - somehow determines what happens everywhere else. God then sends Moses back to Egypt to do in God's name what he had desired to do earlier in his own right.

After meeting the God of his ancestors, Moses is sent to bring the people out and lead them to the mountain, there to render homage. He is able to lead them to the mountain of God because, having himself been there, he can lead others. This dimension of personal experience, of knowing by personal effort, is evident in the Judaic tradition.

The humanness and tenderness of Moses, *more humble than any man on the face of the earth* (Num. 12:3), come from his daily living. Teachers of Israel claim that God calls Moses to take responsibility for his people because he is meek and gentle with Jethro's sheep:

> *When Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was tending the flock of Jethro in the wilderness, a little kid escaped from him. He ran after it until it reached a shady place. When it reached the shady place, there appeared to view a pool of water and the kid stopped to drink. When Moses approached it, he said, 'I did not know that you ran away because of thirst; you must be weary.' So he placed the kid on his shoulder and walked away. Thereupon God said, 'Because thou hast mercy in leading the flock of a mortal, thou wilt assuredly tend my flock Israel.' (Ex. R.2.2; Teachers of Israel)*

When Moses and Miriam appear together on the shores of the Red Sea, both lead the people in song to honour Yahweh: *Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing* (Ex. 15:20). Miriam now has a name and a title - Prophet.

Miriam is the first female prophet to appear in Hebrew Scripture. The hymn placed on her lips is only nine words long in the original Hebrew. However, these nine words give the impression of extraordinary rejoicing. In a great act of liberation, the women are led by Miriam, the prophetess, who lives the freedom of the dance in her body. This woman who sings

and dances so enthusiastically must be about 90 years old (Ex. 7:7). Yet her enthusiasm at this great age is contagious. It draws all the women to sing and dance.

I | The years in the desert

The miracle of the Exodus is not that God parted the waters of the Red Sea. The miracle is that the people had fidelity enough to walk trustingly through the mountainsides of water. They had to move beyond fear of the present.

The crossing of the Red Sea does not immediately result in the ability to enjoy freedom. This needs time and must be learned. The people have to learn the freedom to trust in God. Areas of unfreedom remain. The theology of the Moses school of thinking is always sharply aware of the spiritual temptations of settling down and becoming too fixed in one's ways. he experience of wandering, of desiring but never totally arriving, of complete trust in God, is central.

In the wanderings in the desert, God in the first place, and then Moses and Miriam, show themselves good shepherds assuring protection and vigilance and never allowing the people to lack what is necessary: *And the people complained against Moses, saying 'What shall we drink?' He cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet* (Ex. 15:24; 16:3; 17:3).

Israel has to learn to trust in God, day by day.

In a later incident (Numbers: 12), we meet Miriam again in what seems to be a negative context. She and Aaron criticise their brother's leadership style. They challenge his authority by rebuking him for marrying a Cushite woman. It is only Miriam who is then called before the Tent of Meeting. She becomes like a leper and is exiled from the camp for seven days. God's punishment is compared to a father's spitting in his daughter's face. The importance of Miriam is such, however, that everybody waits; the march is not resumed until she returns. This everybody ranges from the priests, her brothers and the people, to the cloud (that is, to God): *So Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days; and the people did not set out on the march until Miriam had been brought in again* (Num. 12:15).

The criticisms directed to Moses seem justified. He has taken a wife from another country. Yet the Lord defends him. His response to Miriam is significant. As Martini notes, Moses is described *as very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth*, yet he is in fact a strong, rough

man, capable of shouting and yelling at the people in order to shake and stimulate them. Why then is he called very humble? Perhaps it is because in the context of this passage he does not react to the criticisms he receives although they are unexpected and hurt him deeply.

Once again, water and well become key symbols. They are closely linked with Miriam (Num. 20:1-2): *The Israelites ... came into the wilderness of Zin ... and the people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and was buried there. Now there was no water for the congregation so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.* Miriam is the woman whose faith allows water to rise up, the water of the Word that gives life to Israel in the desert. When she dies in the wilderness and is buried, there is no water for the people.

II | A prophetic, pastoral ministry

What was so compelling about Miriam that the congregation would not go on without her? How did her living example slake their physical and spiritual thirst? Was there something distinctive about her leadership as a woman? Consider how Miriam addressed Pharaoh's daughter, murmured against Moses, and sang at the Sea.

Both Moses and Miriam are an inspiration for those who are called to collaborate for human, social and religious formation of people. They participate in a process of liberation and they persevere in their tasks within this process. A first task is to awaken in the oppressed the belief that God is capable of changing even hopeless situations. This means struggle and commitment. To lead people to freedom is burdensome: it requires patience, determination and courage - an overcoming of the temptations of the desert. Liberty involves risk and adventure.

We are caught into this mystery…

From within a small group, choose a person to be a Miriam of today.

Form a circle around her. Her initial purpose is to accept and own her right to speak and to exercise her power as a woman.

- What does she say?

As she talks, those who surround her begin to whisper contrary statements – words designed to discourage, mock, panic, introduce

doubt, belittle, or propose difficulties. They whisper, in turn. Then their voices grow louder, one atop the other, until the individual voices are indistinguishable. They and Miriam continue for as long as they can.

- Afterwards, discuss what happened, and what this awakened in participants. How did this Miriam decide her role (did she depict herself as young, old, at a specific point in life, voicing a particular attitude?)

If you want to pursue this further, repeat this enactment with others who wish replacing the person who first took on the role of Miriam.

- What changes?

Ruth and David

I | Introduction

Ruth, Esther and Judith, the three women in the Bible who have left books (historical novels) behind them that bear a woman's name, use their bodies as an instrument of relationship. They put them at risk. They make them seductive. They adorn them. And all this they do in order to place them at the service of God's people and of the vocation to dignity and freedom that God has given them.

Only eighty-five verses tell Ruth and Naomi's story. Ruth is David's great grandmother and is mentioned in Matthew as being an ancestress of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Ruth was not placed among the historical books but was one of the five scrolls, the *Megillot,* which were read on principal feast days. The Book of Ruth served for the feast of Pentecost, since its heroine was greatly revered by the people of Israel. It is evident that a very good story-teller is at work. The conclusion of the Book is a genealogy which at first seems boring but is really the climax. Here is a play in four acts:

Principal characters: Naomi / Ruth / Orpah / Boaz / Kinsman
Stage Director: God.

Ruth is a Moabitess, the daughter of an incestuous people (Gen. 19:30-38) which was to lead Israel into idolatry. Moab is the enemy,

determined to destroy Jacob forever. As Balaam was to say: From *Aram Balak has brought me, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains: 'Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel.'* (Num. 23:7) God's people were aware of this; they knew Moab as a terrible adversary: No *Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation.* (Cf. Deut. 23:1-7, Neh. 13:1-3; Neh. 13:23-27, 31)

The Hebrew people's hostility to Moab is also found in the Psalms - in Ps. 108:9, for instance, where disdain is underlined with some elegance: *Moab is my washbasin!* It is the context of this stance that the delightful Book of Ruth is to be read, as a kind of prophecy, which makes a Moabitess the great-grandmother of King David and ancestress of the Messiah.

The story is set in the time of the Judges. This period of Israel's history is marked by barbaric oppression and bloodshed. Misery is compounded by famine.

II | Movements in the story-drama

The first scene takes place in the countryside of Moab. Moab is not much more than 30 miles east of Bethlehem, but it is distant from God and family. Because of the famine in Judaea, Elimelech, a man of Bethlehem, has been forced to emigrate with his wife, Naomi, and his two sons. He has had to leave the familiar for the unfamiliar, the known for the unknown. When he dies, his two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After a few years the sons also die and the three women are left without a future. Having heard that the Lord has given the people food once more, Naomi decides to go home. She sets out with her two daughters-in-law on the return journey to Judaea.

Prompted by love for Orpah and Ruth she offers release: *Go, return each of you to her mother's house* (Ruth 1:8-17). Naomi knows these Moabite women face a bleak and uncertain future if they return to Bethlehem with her. Naomi speaks of God's direct involvement in her life and God's accountability: *for the hand of Yahiveh has been raised against me* (Ruth 1:13). To stay with her, she says, is to court disaster.

Ruth's love leads her to a difficult choice: she chooses Naomi's people and Naomi's God. Probably she doesn't realise what such a choice will involve, although she is aware of not being able to belong to Israel, and of not being able to marry again and have children. Hers is a totally

unconditional love, open to faith. This is not an explicit faith in God but a certain awareness, a response to the love that God has put in her heart.

Ruth's choice is followed by great devotion and service. She submits to the laws of Israel (cf. Deut. 24:19). On their return, the two women have nothing to eat for they are very poor. Ruth doesn't lean on her mother-in-law. She goes out to work. It is in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest that Ruth the Moabitess says to Naomi, *Let me go to the field* (Ruth 2:2,17).

Ruth's goodness and humility find their counterpart in the kindness and courtesy of Boaz, a man of faith and heart - of faith, because he gives the blessing prescribed in the Psalms: *And behold Boaz* ... (2:4; cf. ps. 129:7-8). Catching sight of Ruth, Boaz asks who this young woman is. He learns that she is a Moabitess, destined to remain on the fringes of society. He approaches her: *Listen, my daughter* ... (vs.8). The conversation between Boaz and Ruth is rich in human feeling and evokes attitudes which are the *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. 5:22).

The fourth scene centres on the love that dawns between Boaz and Ruth with the help of wise Naomi. It begins with a gamble on the character of Boaz. Ruth makes herself look her best, perfumes herself, wraps herself in a cloak and, after dark, goes and lies down at Boaz's feet, where he sleeps among the heaps of barley. Then come encounter and recognition (3:10-11).

The marriage contract is drawn up. Boaz discharges the duty of meeting a male relative of Naomi's (4:l-ll). This chapter traces the public working out of a family matter. Verse 11 is all-important since it speaks of the wife of Jacob. (Significantly, Rachel was buried at Bethlehem.) As subsequent verses show, Ruth begins to be part of that people whom she, prompted by a sense of faith, has chosen for love of Naomi, and she is blessed by the God whom she did not know. The women of the neighbourhood call the son she bears *Obed* whose name means *servant.* It is Obed who *became the father of Jesse the father of David* (4:17). This linkage is vital. Jesse means God is present; and David means beloved.

The book ends with a double emphasis on Ruth's descendant, David. Ruth the Moabitess who should have been shut out for ever from the Chosen People - *none of their descendants even to the tenth generation* (Deut. 23:3) - becomes a participant in the assembly of the Lord, of the royal, messianic, Davidic line of Judah. The old woman and the foreign Moabitess are part of Israel's national history.

III | Reflections on Ruth

Ruth represents the beginning of David's faith and has her place in a mysterious way of faith, described in the letter to the Hebrews, which was completed in Jesus. Ruth is like the Canaanite woman, poor and a member of a despised, heathen race - a race, however, to be acknowledged and praised by Jesus in his yielding to the faith of the Canaanites (Matt. 15:27-28).

Ruth also represents the opening of the heathen to the knowledge of the true God. The New Testament image (Matt. 8:8,10-12) of such opening is the centurion. The figure of Ruth proclaims the universalism of salvation, which was to be foretold by the prophets; Ruth introduces this into the people of God, into the Davidic line that Jesus was to bring to fullness. So it is that the stupendous promise of messianic blessing and of reunion of all peoples in the love of the Lord has one of its peak-moments of Israelite history in the Book of Ruth.

God uses the faithfulness of ordinary people to accomplish great things. The brave and bold decisions of women embody and bring to pass the blessings of God. Ruth makes a choice on a dusty road between Moab and Bethlehem. However insignificant that choice may have seemed, it changed history. When we choose God there may not be bells ringing but that does not mean that the choice is not life-changing. There are no ordinary days or ordinary choices.

The Book of Ruth illustrates two great Advent prophecies: *Those who walk in darkness have seen a great light* (is. 9:1 & Matt. 4:16), and *A root of Jesse that remains standing will be a sign to peoples* (is. 11:10 & Romans 15:12).

We are caught into this mystery…

Among other themes in the story of Ruth is the influence of borders and boundaries that define specific principles and practices of inclusion and exclusion

- What do you think are some important contemporary enclosures and barriers – in society, Church, religious community, the nation, interest groups, minds? Should any of these be respected, allowed to stay, be protected?

Another individual or a group mode of reflecting on the theme:

- Identify one unjust boundary. Try tracing its origins, how it has gained power, who is served by it and who suffers deprivation because of it. What is one ordinary action step you and others could take in response to it?
- Think of an experience of inclusion/exclusion you've met in your ministry. Take up the role of a winner or loser in this experience. Without naming the barrier, describe how it affects you. When everyone in the group has had a turn, talk about what you noticed that is distinctive or common to what has been said. Can you identify the barriers – what clues were there to this?

David and Abigail

I | David-The Shepherd King

In the Book of Samuel there is a recurring biblical theme, the raising up of the lowly. One instance of this is how a young shepherd of Bethlehem becomes the consecrated leader of Israel.

David comes from the working class. His rise to power is seen as a blessing from God, who does not stop at appearances but sees the heart. Psalm 78:70-72 tells of David's origins and his call to shepherd and guide Israel. Psalm 63 shows David, weak and sinful, yearning for God above all.

The anointing of David by Samuel originates in the gracious choice of Yahweh:

> *Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears of it he will kill me'. And the Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.'* (I Sam. 16:2-3)

The initiative is God's. */ took you from the pasture, from following the sheep (2* Sam. 7:8-9). This choice contradicts traditional human standards.

Even Samuel is surprised. But divine election is made clear:

> *He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' Then Samuel took the horn of*

oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. (1 Sam. 16:12-13)

In subsequent verses there begins a narrative which probably belongs to a more ancient tradition: *Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him* (l Sam. 16:14).

David goes to the court of Saul because of his powers of speech and his talents as a musician. David, a poet and a warrior, can play and speak well. He is young and handsome. His many gifts are a sign of divine blessing. God is with him.

David is the strong and brave shepherd who overcomes the lion, Goliath, defeating him with his shepherd's sling (1 Sam. 17:40-51). To do this, David counts on what he has - his staff, pebbles from the brook, a sling and the word of God. He takes a risk in the name of the Lord acknowledging that God has always been with him. The risk is real. It involves death.

When the Elders accept David as King they connect royalty with the experience of the patriarchs and the nomadic tradition of the people: *For some time while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel* (2 Sam. 5:2).

Political prudence leads us to be very sensitive to circumstances, to situations, to what other people may say, to what construction may be put on our words and actions. Reflecting on David's actions, Martini suggests we put this question to ourselves: Is what we are doing the fruit of courage with spiritual prudence or is it in fact the fruit of a political prudence unwilling to take a risk? If David hadn't intervened, Saul's men would have stayed motionless with enemy forces confronting them. It is David who makes the breakthrough by ignoring human considerations and knowing God can do all. There are no ways of guaranteeing success. We face risks day by day, the risks of faith and choices in life.

II | **Enter Abigail**

Abigail, whose name means *whose father is joy or cause of joy*, is the most important of David's wives. In her are found beauty, wisdom and gifts of prophecy.

1 Sam. 25 reveals a David who is exasperated by his unsettled life on the fringe of society and constantly on the defensive against Saul.

Abigail is a woman who dares to take risks. In 1 Sam. 25:23-35, we find the longest discourse from a woman in Scripture. God allows David to *meet a wise woman* (Prov. 31:10). Her plea to him discloses her understanding of the events of her own world. It is Abigail who saves David from himself and from the consequences of his action. She teaches the lesson that a leader should never forget: that of placing one's cause in God's hands rather than acting as judge in the situation. Saul has not learned this and David is about to make the same mistake. He is saved by this poised woman *who opens her mouth with wisdom* (Prov. 31).

Abigail is the wife of Nabal, *a man of means who owned three thousand sheep and a thousand goats* (I Sam. 25:2). Nabal is not just rude and unresponsive when David sends messengers to request food and drink for his men; he breaks the code of hospitality that is fundamental to peoples of the desert. The law requires him to give to those who beg from him. Furthermore, it is festival time - a religious and social occasion and a respite from fighting. Nabal's refusal is a deliberate transgression that is equivalent to a slap in the face, a provocation to battle. And battle it is going to be. A furious David intends to respond with violence.

Abigail's servants rely on her to prevent this. They fear that Nabal's behaviour will get them killed or sold into slavery. Abigail must move quickly. Risking her husband's wrath, she intervenes.

Abigail knows how to turn the heart of David so that he will re-evaluate the situation with the force of her wisdom. She averts his anger, speaking at the opportune moment with tact, common sense and vision. (A Hebrew woman was restricted by the customs of her time to give counsel only in an emergency and in time of greatest need.) She draws God into the conversation, connecting what is happening with David's relationship with God. She prays for him, and blesses him and his future dynasty, and assumes responsibility for the breach of hospitality and justice. Recognizing that Abigail has seen the situation more clearly than he, David acknowledges that God has sent her to him. Thanks to Abigail, David is learning how to govern in God's name and not to use his power for personal vendettas. He is to shepherd his people. Now Abigail and her household can go in peace, as can David and his men. This woman has injected peace-making into a blood history.

Abigail returns home. Later, after her husband, Nabal, has died, she receives a proposal from the fugitive David. To accept means leaving the

security of her property to share a life of wandering and constant peril. She responds with courage and determination. This part of the story ends with Abigail's joining David's harem: *She rose and bowed down her face to the ground. 'Consider your servant a slave' she said 'to wash the feet of my lord's servants'* (1 Sam. 25:41).

Foot-washing, so important in Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, is a gesture of hospitality and service that is not required of a wife to a husband. Abigail, who acts and saves lives as quickly as any general, knows the true significance of service. Service is not servility. Though she describes herself as David's servant and handmaid, Abigail is his equal. She is mentioned twice more in the books of Samuel (I Sam. 30:5,18), she is taken captive by the Amelikites and rescued with another of David's wives, Abinoam, and then, at Hebron, she bears David's son, Chileab and lives with David at Gath (2 Sam. 3:3).

The times Abigail lives in are harsh. Scripture proffers God's description of the people; they are stubborn, hard-hearted and fickle. Small wonder that Abigail experiences insecurity, instability, violence and personal suffering. She is a wife and mother within a communal marriage. In the midst of bleak times she is a symbol of hope and an alternative to rage and rash reactions. She knows war and strives for peace. Wiser than the one who will be king she offers another reality, one true to a God who is the God of life and not death.

III | Present day significance of Abigail

In more recent times Abigail has been honoured as the patron of women who find themselves in violent situations - women who are battered, raped, caught in war zones, counted among those killed, maimed or refugees. She is a model for all who negotiate for reconciliation, deal in nonviolent action and foster resistance to evil structures. Her actions pattern behaviour that those who advocate peace would do well to emulate. She exemplifies quickwittedness, courage on behalf of others and often-unacknowledged possibilities for justice and peace.

IV | David and Abigail as leaders

In the Judaic tradition, the figure of David occupies a prime position along with Moses. He is a king, a warrior and leader, one who is first in everything - in war and in love, in revenge and in magnanimity, in sin and

repentance. He loves the people, he loves his friends, he loves women, he loves war and he loves God more than all the rest.

David personifies particular qualities of leadership. He receives his power as a gift, but prepares for it by a humble apprenticeship that refines his natural talents. He reveals sensitivity in his use of military power, in caring for the people, in his administration of justice, and in his composition of song and poetry. By word and action, he reveals a strong bond with the tradition of faith. His religious expression is spontaneous and direct (he has the courage to be a bit mad). Power does not make him rigid. His many faults are forgiven because of his humanity. David recognises his own weakness and fragility. Drawing a lived humility from the pain that he experiences in his life, David undergoes formation as a true shepherd. At times, such as at the death of Absalom, he becomes transparent to the passionate care of God for humankind.

This is the shepherd David that Scripture presents as a model for the leader of the people. Not a superman, no. Rather, a blend of greatness and fragility, held together by what the Bible defines as a heart of integrity that is passionate towards Yahweh and his people. David is the shepherd with the undivided heart; he loves God and his people with the same heart.

Abigail contributes to the model of leader in her role as wise woman, companion and counsellor. From her David learns an important lesson: to commit all judgements to God. She reminds that power should always go hand in hand with moderation and magnanimity. What she also demonstrates is that those who have wisdom to impart, faith to share and help to offer, ought not hesitate to take the risks that may be involved in speaking and acting.

The story of David and Abigail is also a caution against forms of leadership that put the emphasis on power and forget pastoral care.

We are caught into this mystery…

- If you could have a conversation with Abigail about the place and struggles of women today, what would you tell her? What questions might you ask? What account would you give of contemporary society and culture?
- What elements of female leadership, evident in the story of David and Abigail, remain significant for today?

The Prophets – Pastoral Imagery

What is it - to be a prophet?

The prophets' use of the metaphor of the shepherd is rich and stimulating. This metaphor proclaims the personal involvement of God in the liberation and leadership of the people.

A prophet is sent to re-awaken the people and speak on behalf of God. A prophet is concerned with announcing a message to his own generation about the present, in the light of the past and with a sense of possibilities for the future. Thus the prophet is directly concerned with what is happening in society around him. Prophets usually emerge at a time of crisis, confusion and uncertainty. The prophetic is rooted in reality.

Prophecy is about telling what time it is and what it is time for. As Rabbi Abraham Heschel put it, *The prophet's essential task is to declare the word of God in the here and now.* In the Old Testament, while the prophet is fully aware of what is happening, at the same time he or she is fully aware of God's dream for the people.

The prophet is a realist and a contemplative. That is, the prophetic message is born in contemplation and grounded in reality.

As the New Testament also shows, the following of Jesus Christ has both a mystical dimension and a political dimension. It never takes place in a vacuum, in isolation from society or from a particular cultural, economic and political situation. To exercise prophetic ministry is to strive to dream the dream of God, and to see the world through God's eyes.

To their contemporaries the prophets seemed mad:

> *We all call people 'mad' when the see things from a perspective different from our own. We have a vested interest in doing so, for if they are right, we are wrong. Since we do not gladly entertain the notion that we are wrong, we are more than ready to denounce such people as crazy, mad fools .... But what if the ones we call 'mad' are really sane?*[5]

What the prophets brought to their times was courageous normalcy, a sense of justice tempered with compassion, endurance, a centredness on God, and a capacity for courage in the face of rejection. They offered a fresh way for people to make sense of their lives and to perceive reality.

Prophecy requires three things: clarity of vision and acuteness of hearing that enter into God's view of history; the ability to announce that vision effectively to the powers which oppose God's Reign and to the people oppressed by those powers; and the willingness to pay, even with one's life, for the triumph of the Reign of God.

As Heschel says, *The fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos.* The prophet must carry the Word of God in a heart full of compassion and speak it loudly and clearly for everybody to hear, even when nobody likes it.

Amos

Shepherd and Prophet

Amos is an ordinary man. Self-employed, he looks after his own sycamore trees and tends his own sheep. He is financially secure, politically independent and very aware of what is going on around him. He is like everybody else. Except that he isn't. Because Amos thinks differently from others and says so. He prophesies to a world that is totally satisfied with itself.

Amos comes from Tekoa, a little village in Judaea, 17km south of Jerusalem. Called against his will from the life of a shepherd to prophesy in the Kingdom of the North, Amos feels (as Jeremiah did later) powerless to hold out against the word of the Lord.

5 | Robert McAfee Brown, *Theology in a New Key* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978)

At this time Israel, prosperous and corrupt, is flourishing. It seems to have been at its peak since the time of David. The national boundaries extend farther than ever before. Life is good, production and profits are up, and as far as the merchants and military and the monarch are concerned, Yahweh is blessing Israel.

Yet in speaking to this self-satisfied society Amos employs no half measures or accommodating tones. He has the effrontery to ask where Israel's power and prosperity have come from. He sees the wealth, and questions what the Israelites have done to gain it. He cites war crimes and tax foreclosures and *failures at the gate* where the elders of the city assemble to mete out justice but all too often decide against the poor.

Amos indicts a falsely pious society. While the poor are being overlooked and overwhelmed by corruption and dishonesty, worship continues at the great shrines. He warns the pilgrims and the pious, but their theology tells them they are special to God. Their worship assures them that they are faithful. They understand their wealth to be a sign of God's pleasure.

God announces the arrival of an enemy who will plunder Israel (Amos 3:10-11). It is as though God first assents to the destruction and then, suddenly remembering his role as shepherd, intervenes to save a remnant: *Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and a part of a bed* (Amos 3:12).

These words tap into an experience in the life of the shepherd with which Amos is probably familiar (Amos 5:19). In the same social context, different usages are made of pastoral symbolism. To find the promise of salvation in the message of this caustic prophet, one has to look to the end pledge: *In that day I will raise the booth of David that is fallen ...* (9:11-12).

The booth (sukkah) was originally the place where livestock was gathered. During the 40 years of nomadic living in the desert this was also the habitation for Israel. In this sense the booth is equivalent to a tent. Yahweh had promised to construct a house for David and his descendants (2 Sam. 7:ll). In the biblical tradition, the house of David designates the dynasty of Judah (1 Kings 12:19, 20, 26). What Amos is announcing is the destruction that will reduce the great house to a booth. The expression, therefore, is evocative on many levels. When he speaks of the hut of David instead of the house, the prophet refers to the decimation of the ruling classes.

Through the prophetic word comes assurance of a new stability after the restoration. Such restoration is connected to the ideal for a nomadic and precarious lifestyle incarnate in the pastoral life. That which the Lord will raise up will not be a palace but a *sukkah,* a tent, a site which does not accentuate social differences or humiliate the poor. Within this there is no false security. On the contrary, the tent evokes that precariousness which has enabled Israel to place their trust in God. Thanks to such trust, when the people of God dwelt in tents they lacked nothing.

Ezechiel

Ezechiel (God is strong), The Shepherd God, and the New David

For the prophets the focal point of Scripture, the Exodus, is a yardstick. They interpret situations in the light of the fundamental experience of God as a Shepherd who saves and sets free. The God whom they proclaim is personally involved in the liberation and leadership of the people. The prophets apply to the divine shepherd about twenty verbs which neighbouring cultures never used in this manner. These include *search for, liberate, and take a firm stand against.* Verbs point to action, to the ceaseless activity of a God whose patience and kindness knows no limits.

The prophets have an important function in ensuring that the rights of the king do not impinge on those of the people and the Lord. Ezechiel, in particular, is concerned about the exploitation threatened by the king. The poor and the marginal feel themselves unable to appeal to God, because God appears to be controlled by the King and supportive of the royal order. Ezechiel wants to redirect the king's power by offering a renewal of the pastoral vision that accompanies the right use of such power.

Ezechiel lives at the time of Nabuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who controls large areas from Africa to Asia. It is the time of the Exile. The story of the Exile is grounded in an historical experience which began in 587 BCE when Jerusalem fell and some of the Jews were marched into exile in Babylon some 800 miles away. There they lived as refugees, under conditions of oppression and separated from their homeland. It is the remnant of Babylonian exiles who later return to Jerusalem and who, with the help of Ezechiel's oracles and the preservation of the Torah, renew their covenant with Yahweh. The painful experience of exile leads to a

breakthrough in Judah's perception of Yahweh and of her own vocation. The great prophets proclaimed that Yahweh was not bound to the Jerusalem temple. Jeremiah's letters insist that the banished Israelites can access Yahweh through prayer. Ezechiel even has a vision of Yahweh's glory going to the people in exile.

Ezechiel also bears witness not only to promise but also to the downfall of Jerusalem and the bitterness of exile. Jehoiachim, of the line of David, is deported along with others of political and economic importance. This creates trauma for the Israelites; it marks the end of the rule of the Davidic dynasty. It causes one of their most serious faith crises. In exile,

Israel sees itself driven out of its own land; God seems to have lost control of the world. When Ezechiel speaks of the shepherds of Israel he does this in the context of the shattered history of a people.

Israel comes back from the Babylonian exile not as a nation but as a community. Next to the Exodus, this experience of exile and subsequent return is the most important historical event shaping the life and religious imagination of the Jewish people.

After the deportation, Nabuchadnezzar appoints Zedekiah as king. The people are deeply divided - one group believes they should enter into the new situation as being within Yahweh's providence. They see a death/resurrection possibility in the Exile and accept that God is proposing a new reality. Both Jeremiah and Ezechiel support this view. Others are committed to restoring Jehoiachim's kingship and turn to Egypt for help. Although anti-Babylonian, Egypt has no real power and Jerusalem is ravaged by siege and famine. By 597 BCE, more people are deported and the city and temple destroyed.

The message of Ezechiel in Chapter 34, (a message which Jeremiah prepared for) deals with the plight of the people under good and bad shepherding and speaks to us about being sheep in God's flock. For Ezechiel, the placing of personal interests before those of the flock is a perversion of pastoral ministry. It can result in neglect and omission - in not doing what should be done.

In their prophecies, both Jeremiah and Ezechiel unmask the ever-recurring temptations of history. One of these is the thirst for power - the shepherds have succumbed to the intoxication of power and have carved out their own positions, seizing opportunities for themselves. Another is the forming of self-interested interpersonal relationships for the sake of

economic gain, cultural advantage, status or other mercenary motives. Complicit in this is failure to relate to others who are viewed as of no interest or value.

In Chapter 34 a trial is taking place. The accused are wicked shepherds.
There are dumb witnesses of their injustices (the sheep). Yahweh is the accuser and judge.

Yahweh plans to intervene to accomplish what the shepherds have failed to do: *I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and strong, I will destroy. I will feed them with justice* (34:16).

Prophecy never fails to shake up and stimulate. In the next scene we might imagine that, having heard the sentence against the shepherds, the sheep could breathe a sigh of relief: it is not their fault. But God says, *the fat and strong I will destroy.*6

Ezechiel confronts everyone involved for all are held responsible. None is to live for herself/himself alone, neglecting the needs and rights of others (Ez. 34:18-21). Even in the midst of the flock, says the judge, there are instances of arrogance and abuse of power; there is domination of the strong over the weak and evidence of disdain for others. There is heedlessness from below. Among those who are ruled, the lust for power demonstrated by those above reappears in miniature.

Through the prophet, Yahweh proclaims deliverance for those who have been oppressed. In Arabic, To deliver is to be roomy, to make room. Deliverance is living space in which those who hunger and thirst are satisfied and every constraint and shame is removed:

> *As for you, my sheep, the Lord Yahweh says this: I will judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and he-goats. Not content to graze in good pastures, you trample down the rest; not content to drink clear water, you muddy the rest with your feet. And my sheep must graze on what your feet have trampled, drink what your feet have muddied. Very well then, the Lord Yahweh says this: I myself am now about to judge between fat sheep and lean sheep. Since you have butted all the weak sheep with your rump and shoulders and horns, until*

6 | Some versions of the text adopt the reading of the Septuagint, *I will watch over* rather than *I will destroy.*

you have chased them away, I am going to come and rescue my sheep from being cheated; I will judge between sheep and Sheep. (34:17-22)

The image of the flock in Ezechiel's time, far from having a disparaging connotation as it might have today, is a compelling representation of a chosen people. This is so for at least two reasons: firstly, because it is rooted in the lived experience of ancient Israel when the flock was the only property and therefore the most important possession of a nomadic people; and secondly, because between flock and shepherd there exists a special relationship of closeness and intimacy. When the people of Israel sang, *We, the people and the flock of your pasture,* they were expressing a strong sense of belonging that came from having been personally chosen by the Lord and the affective dimension of such bonding.

In Ezechiel, Yahweh uses the formula for a divine saying: *See I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out* (34:11). *I AM* is often repeated in the Old Testament and the fourth Gospel, and each time it is a fresh introduction of Yahweh, as the people are encountered in their present situation. *I AM* is always connected with an action of Yahweh; even when the action is mediated, it is God Who is acting, present in the activity. So, in Ezechiel, what is being said is that the One who is to come will be *in their midst*- a shepherd who will gather the flock and cause justice to be respected (34:15-16). This is the *new thing* that Yahweh will do.

Shepherding: power as a form of caring

Ezechiel reminds that belonging carries rights and responsibility. For Ezechiel, placing personal interests before those of the flock is a perversion of pastoral ministry.

Acceptance of such responsibility brings challenges. Another Old Testament image of shepherd focuses on this.

In 1 Sam. 17:33-37, the shepherd, David, is the one who fights off the wolf and the lion, thus protecting the lives of his flock: *Your servant used to look after the sheep of his father and whenever a lion or a bear came out and took a sheep from the flock, I used to follow him up and strike him down and rescue it from his mouth.* In the same spirit, he takes on the oppressive giant, Goliath, who threatens the well-being of God's flock, Israel. Goliath has many modern counterparts.

The Shepherd as the one who fights off the ravaging attack of the wolf, even at the cost of his life, is a far more daunting, perhaps less attractive image than that of the Shepherd looking for the lost sheep or lamb and carrying it on his shoulders. But it represents one of the very necessary tasks of anyone who calls herself a good shepherd.

To fight off a wolf, one cannot possibly at the same time cuddle the lamb. To perform the function of nurturing and caring is very important, but there are times when it is necessary to turn attention and give one's energy to the struggle against what oppresses and threatens. It is because of the value of the sheep, because the shepherd prizes them so highly, that he enters into this struggle.

This image is a powerful indication of the way in which participation in the struggle for justice flows from the very heart of our Good Shepherd mission, our care for the Sheep of the Lord. And it is precisely the weakest sheep, the ones on the fringe of the flock, the ones who stray, who are most vulnerable to the attack of outside forces.

Psalm 23 speaks of the Shepherd with his rod and staff, as does Ps. 34:4. *Beside me your rod and your staff are there, to hearten me*. The staff is for the guidance of the flock, but the rod is a weapon to protect the flock against the enemy. The presence of both in his hands is a source of comfort to the Psalmist and to us. It is not enough to cherish, comfort, lead and seek out - there are powerful forces in the world which make the lives of the sheep intolerable. Who, I wonder, do we now identify as enemies of life? What wolf awaits, ready to devour?

To the Jews, the two images of gentle shepherd and powerful protector and king were almost synonymous.

The role of the Shepherd has political connotations. Political, not in the sense of party politics but in the sense that the shepherd is concerned about the environment of the flock, about the conditions which favour the flock's growth and peace and about those forces and behaviours within and without the flock which disturb, oppress and threaten the life of the flock. Not only is the Shepherd concerned, he also takes active steps to change anything in the environment that is negative for the life of the flock.

The metaphor of the shepherd and flock is not sentimental. It holds together the idea of justice, guaranteeing the right to life of the flock, with the idea of grace and goodness. There is much here that is congruent with

contemporary shifts in the Christian understanding of sin. Our concept of sin has expanded to include social sin and oppressive structures which are in direct conflict with the gospel and which deprive people of their right to live fully human lives.

Ezechiel 34 speaks of the sheep who were chased away from the flock by the oppressive behaviour of the others - and in their case, God says they are going to be rescued from being cheated*: I am going to come and rescue my sheep from being cheated; I will judge between sheep and sheep* (vs.22). While there is need for personal change, equally importantly there is need for changes in the flock as a whole - in the way that the members relate to one another, and in the way that life amongst them is patterned and structured.

We are caught into this mystery…

- Consider the prophets, who they are, into what situations they speak, and how they do this.
- Are there situations today that are in need of prophecy?
- How do you recognize a prophet?
- Name 5 persons whom you have met in your life who fit your description of a prophet.
- Talk secretly to one of them.

Account of a present-day exile:

MY LIFE

I am Lilian Jackson Kisanga. I am 35 years old, born in Loko West, in the Yei District of The Sudan. My Mama and Daddy are from the same district. My father was a farmer. He had eight children. I am the second child.

I was still young in 1965 when The Sudan fell into conflict. We went to Uganda and took refuge in Ajumani Camp. I started my primary education there in 1 966. It was a very good camp. We could cultivate all different kinds of crops: simsim, groundnuts, cassava, cotton, potatoes, and many others.

In 1973, The Sudan became independent, so we decided to return. We went back to Juba, to our former flat, but the house had been destroyed. So my father had to build a new home for us. My brothers and sisters and I joined the school in Juba.

In 1978 I sat for my Sudan School Certificate. In June, my husband decided we should get married. My husband was a policeman and a trader. We had our own car and my father gave us one of his coffee plantations in Yei. Besides that, we had about 30 head of cattle and 50 goats in Bor.

In 1979, I gave birth to my first born daughter. In 1982, my second daughter was born. During the third pregnancy, in 1984, the politics began. My husband decided we should leave town. We went to a village called Paleau to join my husband's parents. It was the first time I had stayed in a village. I didn't know how to milk the cows and ail the foods were new to me.

In 1985, April the 5th, my husband decided to leave me. He wanted to defend his country, The Sudan. I had a hard time when he told me. I didn't know what to do or say for three days. Later, I agreed with him. I thought to myself: who is going to defend our country and who will secure freedom for our country? On April the 9th I gave birth to my only son, Stephan.

In June 1986, my husband was killed. Then, when I looked at my children, I wondered how I could care for them. I lost hope in life. I wondered where to go. I asked myself lots of questions without answers. I didn't sleep at night.

In the same year there was a famine. The only food was the meat and blood of the cows. Those with no cows had to go to the River Nile, to look for fish or for the seeds of lily flowers.

One night in 1988, there was a flood. My whole house was full of water. Outside, the whole world was like a sea, nothing could be seen, only the trees. I went back to my home and picked up my son and daughters. We had to stand in the water: the water was up to 39 inches high, and we had nowhere to go. We just stood there, because it was still raining outside and I didn't know what to do ... we stood there for ten hours.

At 3.00 pm, my brother-in-law came from the cattle camp. He said there was a dry place, and he would take us there. Everybody was at this dry place. There were no houses. At night, the people held a meeting to work out what was to be done to the cattle, to the old people who were weak, and to the small children. We decided that the strong people would go and find a place where there was no flood, and then come back for those who were unable to move.

We stayed there for four months, waiting for those who went for the cattle. But nobody came back to report. Then, in December, news came that the people were coming back. But by this time, most of my group had died because there was insufficient food, no mosquito nets and no houses.

I decided to go to where there was food, but my husband's family refused to allow me to stay with them. At this time, there was an attack: shootings and the burning of houses. People scattered everywhere. I ran with my three children on my own, without any relatives.

On the way, I met another group of people, wandering around and wondering what to do and where to go. After a month, we found ourselves on the border with Ethiopia. We deserted The Sudan and went into Ethiopia, to Panyudu Refugee Camp. In Panyudu we also had problems. There was no food, no housing, no clothing, no cooking materials. There were diseases and most of the children died.

After some time, the UN came and we received assistance. In 1988 Panyudu became famous to the world. There was a lot of assistance: Save the Children took responsibility for the children, widows and orphans; UNHCR for education. Everybody was free and happy in the camp. There was a river in which we could go swimming and fish happily. There I was a teacher and my children went to school. I felt as if there was hope. We stayed there until June 1991.

In this year Ethiopia went bad. We began running without thinking, no food or anything. I just took what I could carry. I was pregnant, so I couldn't carry much, and my children had to carry things. We were heading back to The Sudan. We had to go, whether it was good or bad. In the rain, I gave birth. I delivered twins and then continued on the way, while I was still bleeding. There was no time to wait. If you did, you would die. The following night, one of the twins died. He was a baby son.

We went to the River Gillo and on to Pachalla in The Sudan, where we settled. But there was no food. In September, the Red Cross came to our assistance.

In December, conditions changed again. People scattered in all directions. I ran with my children towards Narus. We stayed there for some time, but in June 1992, we moved towards Kenya.

Now I am in Kenya, in Kakuma Refugee Camp ... Now I am a refugee, and so are my children. 1 hate being a refugee. As a refugee, your life makes no progress. You don't have any freedom. You are kept as a prisoner.

I think about my children. What will happen to them, and what is their future? And not only for my children, but for all the children of The Sudan, and for my foster children who now have no parents.

I wish for freedom in my land, because in your homeland you are trusted and honoured. You are polite and respected. You have duties which are important. You are useful to your people. You are loyal and you preserve and love everything around you. You are a friend to everyone. In your homeland, you are free.

- Lilian Jackson Kisanga[7]

The Sudan

7 | Excerpts from Lilian Jackson Kisanga's "My Life", in Flutter and Solomon, eds., op. cit., 22-29.

The New Testament and the call to shepherding

Walk in the reality, ponder, and treasure

A *good* shepherd?

Now there's a contradiction in terms! Whoever heard of such a thing?

By the time of Jesus, shepherds had been classified by the rabbis as thieves, cheats and murderers. Their roving life enabled them to steal from the flocks and it was forbidden to buy wool, milk, or lambs from them. They had no civil rights and were unable to practice their religion. The Talmud is an expanded commentary on Jewish Law. It gives practical examples of how the law is to be applied and goes into details, including notes on who can and cannot be called as competent witnesses in a court of law. Women, dice throwers, pigeon fanciers and shepherds are mentioned among those considered too dishonest or unscrupulous to act as reliable witnesses.

Women are excluded because, along with children, they are not regarded as legal citizens in their own right. The dice players and pigeon fanciers presumably earn exclusion because of their frequent involvement in dodgy gambling deals. Shepherds also merit distrust because they graze their sheep on other people's property and have a reputation for being so

destitute as to be always on the point of stealing. According to this view, shepherds are people who are outside the system and outside its law; they are associated with bandits, nonconformists, and boorish, dirty people. And yet, in spite of this, God is still called Israel's Shepherd, the One who has led the flock out of Egypt, guides it in the present and will one day gather it again.

The words, actions and identity of Jesus as the Good Shepherd have a very real meaning in the social, economic, political and religious world of his day. Deeply Jewish by birth and socialisation, he speaks as a Jew to other Jews. He addresses his message to the needs and the people of his time - that is, to a particular time in a specific human society. The message is contextualized.

The good news must be spoken anew so as to be heard in each age and situation, if its meaning is to unfold, critiquing, energizing and liberating. What stands in opposition to the reign of God in India will be different from what needs to be denounced in US / Ireland / Australia - yet it will be the same vision, inspired by the same God and same tradition.

We are caught into this mystery…

Good Shepherd can be translated as *Noble Shepherd* ... the truly honourable or highly esteemed one, who behaves nobly. In this sense it includes action as well as particular qualities. Explore some of the understandings of good in the Old and New Testament. What do you think good means in and for the present day? Within your life and mission, who represents goodness for you?

The Gospel of Luke

Luke is more conscious than other evangelists of the greater world of Rome. He identifies many events by date.

Imperial Rome's propaganda emphasized the power and majesty of Rome. Luke, however, declares that the good news of the restoration of wholeness of life as a result of Jesus' birth is *for all the people* (Lk. 2: 10), for the outcast as well as for the in-group. The scene of the shepherds

coming to visit the infant Jesus is saying something quite radical. If in Luke's time ordinary shepherds were unable to act as witnesses, then the fact that shepherds are the first witnesses to Christ and that it is to such as these that the angel announces the good news of the Saviour's birth (2:8-11), is remarkable. Luke tells his readers that it was the people of no regard, who were not part of the system, to whom the good news was first announced. It is shepherds, societal outcasts, who recognise what is happening and go running to Bethlehem.

Martini notes:

> *When the shepherds visit Mary, Joseph and the Child there is no record of any word they exchanged, or any expression of emotion, of any verbal participation, of what they feel within themselves. It is a scene unfolding in silence but which, however, is three times called 'word' in the excerpt from Luke. Indeed, this Greek expression in the original is so difficult to render that our version has given it three times with three different translations.*
>
> *The text tells us that the shepherds said among themselves 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.' But the original Greek text says, 'And see this WORD'. We are told that the shepherds, returning, 'related the word that they had been told about Him.' It is interesting to note that the shepherds do not speak about what they have seen but about 'the WORD'.*
>
> *It is also said that Mary 'treasured all these things in her heart' but the Greek text says 'Mary treasured all these WORDS'. So this event is presented to us as a word to see, a word to proclaim or speak about, and a word to meditate on and keep close to our hearts.*

In the Infancy narrative, soter (saviour], peace, and I will announce [good news] are three highly political terms in the language of Rome. Soter, inscribed on Roman coins, identified the Emperor as Saviour-of-the-Empire. From the beginning of his Gospel, then, Luke launches a subtle attack on' the values of the Empire. While we have been brought up with the idea that the good news is for the poor, everywhere the Roman Empire was good news for some and very bad news for others. The imperial values were imposed by force and power.

In his time, Luke writes for the wealthy (Christians were among these) but is talking for the poor to the rich. From the outset he is telling the story of Jesus to challenge values now operating in the affluent Christian community. This foreshadows the theme in Luke of God's grace shown to sinners. The messianic Lord is the friend of sinners. It is to these that Jesus proclaims the good news. God gives a voice to the voiceless and a message to those who are not supposed to speak.

A question endures: Today, in this, our time and place and world, who is not supposed to speak?

There are two points that are central to Luke's theology. The first is that the more people are marginalized, and the more oppressed and alienated their lives, the more positively they respond to the liberating power of the Gospel. This is apparent in the accounts of the Samaritan leper (17:11-19) and the sinful woman (7:36-50). The second point of note is that what is made clear throughout Luke's Gospel and Acts is that authentic encounter with Jesus leads to praise and thanksgiving. So it is that the tenth leper experiences the joyful presence of God's Kingdom in his own life.

For many of us, the most familiar parts of Scripture are the parables that Jesus used in his teaching. There is an intrinsic bond between Jesus' experience and Jesus' parables. That Jesus spoke in metaphorical parables is important for an understanding of his experience of intimate closeness to God. What does such a mode of expression tell us? The experience and its expression in parable have a profound intrinsic unity. Jesus' parables are stories about himself as the revelation of God; they are also stories of all who are like him.

These meaning-filled and provocative stories are multi-layered. For all our familiarity with them, each time they speak to us we hear them as we have never really heard them before, understand them afresh, come to know them in our hearts. The parables begin with commonplace experiences and locations and then challenge the hearers' basic assumptions about themselves, their neighbours, their world and their God. The parables were easy for Jesus' listeners to relate to, because they weren't abstract but dealt with practical, down-to-earth matters. There is a here-and-nowness about the language of Jesus, a vital engagement with the scene right in front of him.

When Luke begins a new theme in Chapter 15, he gathers a series of images and stories related to it, all of which disclose God's mercy. There

are three parables in Chapter 15 which are linked together by the key words joy (w. 6-7; 9-10; 23-24; 32), *because the lost is found* (w. 6; 9; 24; 32) and *repentance* (w. 7; 10; 18). The occasion is the Pharisaic criticism of Jesus' association with outcasts ("sinner" has a connotation of disreputable social status). Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him to Law.8 Verse 2 contains words that St. Augustine said should be written over every altar: This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.

Jesus eats and drinks with outcasts and enters their houses. Why does he mix with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners? Why does he show compassion in a heartless society? He has a different awareness of who God is and of what God wants of people. Compassion possesses and fills him. The verb *prosdechomai* (receives) in 15:2 perhaps indicates that Jesus is hosting sinners - an even more serious offence to a Pharisee. Like all prophets, Jesus is a realist. He knows what is going on in the world around him. He shares the mind and heart of God through his *Abba* experience. His criticism of the existing order is to be found in his decisive solidarity with the victims and, especially, in his table fellowship with the outcast.

Jesus speaks a parable that consists of three stories. The first is the parable of the lost sheep (cf. Ez. 34; ps. 119:176), paralleled in Matthew (Matt. 18:12-14). Here Luke gathers together three stories of loss: lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. Two of these parables deal with people who search for something they have lost - they are not concerned with the fact that the woman still has 90% of her cash and the shepherd still has 99% of his flock. The stories seek to evoke a sense of the loss itself. Why is this?

Jesus is providing insight into God's mercy. God is glad to welcome back the godless, the irreligious and the sinner. The lost sheep cannot find its own way back to the flock - it does not return of its own accord. The shepherd must go after it. We prodigals cannot find our way home to God alone - we return home because Jesus has first found us. Jesus never tires of going in search of us, he does not want to lose any of us, and rejoices infinitely at finding us and bringing us home. Jesus does not like losing any of us, any more than a woman likes losing 10% of her savings or a shepherd even one of his sheep.

One of the commonest and most frightening human experiences is the experience of loss - loss of friends, loss of opportunities, loss of livelihood,

8 | Midrash Kabbah

loss of time, loss of health, loss of a sense of direction. Choice usually means loss of one thing in favour of something else. No one can finds the way home to God alone. Jesus comes in search of his sheep; they return home because he has first found them.

The rejoicing of the shepherd over his having found the lost sheep is matched by the rejoicing of friends and neighbours over this event. If associates join the shepherd in his rejoicing, how much more should the Pharisees join heaven in its joy over the repentance of a sinner? Can you join me, says Jesus to his critics, in my rejoicing over the reclamation of any of the outcasts with whom I eat and drink? The shepherd in Luke's parable understands that God loves each person. When he has found it (the lost sheep) he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing (Lk. 15:5). Each member of God's flock can know: God rejoices in me, I am important to God.

The second story telling of the lost coin is an alternative way of saying the same thing. The repetition is for emphasis. Taken together, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin justify Jesus' association with outcasts by appeal to the joy in heaven over the repentance of even one sinner. The two stories invite imagining that links with personal experience: You know how you would feel if you were a herdsman and found a lost sheep or a housewife who recovers a lost coin; that is how God feels when a sinner repents. You know how your friends and neighbours join in rejoicing over such a find; that same kind of communal rejoicing is heaven's response to a sinner's being reclaimed. Implicit in the stories is questioning that is powerful for and perhaps threatening to some of Jesus' hearers: Can you share that joy; will you join with God in rejoicing? The listeners must decide their response.

The Gospel of Matthew

What does it mean to be a Christian community? Matthew's Gospel is addressed to a Jewish/Christian community around 85 CE, when the Jerusalem temple and city were destroyed and the Jews themselves were in exile. The Pharisees set up a new centre of worship in Jamnia, a city on the Mediterranean coast. There they waited for the Messiah and the crumbling of foreign domination.

The Jewish Christians could not accept these messianic expectations. There was also a great influx of Gentile believers, transforming the

tradition of a chosen people set apart. Roman and Jewish authorities were constantly harassing the Jewish community. All these factors caused tension and division both within and without.

Matthew's Jesus speaks of faith as a radically new existence.

Members of Matthew's church are caught up in the Gentile mission. Matthew and his fellow Christians come from a largely Jewish background - the crisis that produces the Gospel of Matthew could be called an identity crisis. It costs the earliest Christians, mostly Jesus people, to walk away from their traditional faith and practice and enter a Christian community. It is a most difficult journey for believing Jews to make, even though they have come to believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Their faith causes them great suffering. Their long-time friends from the synagogue in the town can no longer abide the presence of these renegades in their community. In fact, we know that their former friends prayed every morning: *For apostates may there be no hope and may the Nazarenes and the heretics suddenly perish*.9

> *To be thrown out of the synagogue meant that almost every aspect of their day-to-day life was changed. They were snubbed by their former friends from 'the synagogue across the road'. They could no longer marry their sons and daughters within a community whose faith they shared and whose way of life they had always respected and also attempted to live. In a non-Jewish city, they were not even able to go into the confusion of the market place and buy their meat and bread from places where they had always been welcome and where they knew that it had been prepared in the time-honoured and sacred ways... They were now separated from what was the heart of the life of a good Jew in the time when Matthew was writing his Gospel. Cut off from the world that they knew and loved so much they had to find a new teacher and a new authority.10*

Matthew was very aware of the fragility of his own community yet certain in his faith that God had broken into history.

Matthew's Jesus summarised the content of this Gospel's message in the gift word of peace. Peace is to be shared with all houses which hear

9 | 12th Blessing of the important synagogue prayer, the Shemonch Esreh
10 | F. Maloney

the gospel and from which the gospel is preached. This *peace,* however, is not a passive peace accepting of disorder. Rather it results from reordering relationships and resources in a way that reflects the eschatological conditions where justice and peace meet. Because Jesus' message of peace is the expression of justice in unjust situations, it brings both reconciliation (18:1-35) and division (10:34) in households.

Peace-makers not only proclaim peace with their lips; they put Jesus' teachings into practice. Chapter 18, which has been called *Matthew's advice to his divided community*, is the fourth of five teaching sections and is concerned with the relationships of disciples to one another in the church.

It indicates causes and manifestations of irreconciliation. Greed and power are at play (w. 1-4), poor example is given to converts, while others are misled (vv.5-9) and some are lost to the church like straying sheep (18:10-14). This going astray is not limited to individuals. Entire congregations can also stray. The point is twofold: firstly, do not cause a *little one*, a rank and file Christian, to sin (w. 6; 7-9); and, secondly, if one goes astray, go after him or her (w. 5; 10-14).

In Matthew 18:12-24 the punch line addressed to ministers is about preaching to the church. Matthew is saying*, It is never the will of the Father that even one of these little ones should be lost* (Matt. 18:14). He is talking about the importance of the individual and the concern ministers should have about each individual. The same oral tradition of the gospel carried the story of the lost sheep - but different evangelists interpreted it differently. Matthew teaches about ministry; Luke, about mercy and forgiveness. Both Matthew and Luke are true mythic writers. They understand that the same story or image can have more than one meaning. Those who use the word *only* - the *only* meaning is this - start limiting their theology. God uses the divine Word to teach us many different things.

In Matthew the sheep is not lost, it *goes astray* (18:12-13). The parable gives directions to disciples for dealing with straying Christians - these *little ones* on whom God's heart is set.

All these diverse realities appear between the lines of Matthew's Chapter 18. Not only is a new way of making peace necessary; this chapter outlines a uniquely Matthean way of working for peace. The call is to make peace by affirming the significance of each member (w. 12-14) in a way in which the least feel equally important. The least person matters


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sufficiently as to give cause for the church to mobilise and go in search. In Chapter 18, one of the characteristic motifs is the weight attached to the individual. This is apparent especially in the first part, which concentrates on the little ones, on humbling and wavering believers. These are not considered as groups but as individuals. The entire community is called to assume a clear-cut attitude towards individual believers on the fringes of society, who have no social clout.

The Gospel of John

John's Gospel clearly proclaims that, in the person of Jesus, God is not just revealed but is actually present. This is a point that many are unable to grasp.

When John has Jesus refer to himself as the Good Shepherd he includes all the meaning that the tradition gave to the image. But in John's Gospel, the picture of shepherd is enriched in a way that goes beyond Ezechiel's idea of the shepherd. Here the Shepherd not only brings life but is Life (10:28).

The tenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel is marked by division and hatred as the hostility between Jesus and official Judaism increases. Immediately after Jesus' pronouncement that he is one with the Father*, the Jews took up stones again to stone him* (10:31).

It is the celebration of the Jewish feast of the Dedication (cf. 10:22-42) -a feast of the presence of God in his temple, which is not just a building for Israel. The Temple is the visible place where God dwells in the heart of his people. To go to the Temple and worship is to approach God. The loss of the Temple would mean the loss of the place where the presence of their saving God could be seen and visited in the heart of the nation. During the feast of the Dedication, the Jews reject Jesus' claims to be the Son of God, the one sent and consecrated by God to replace the Temple. They do not belong to the Good Shepherd because they do not respond to his voice (w. 22-29).

Within this setting Jesus presents his hearers with the unexpected. In the precincts of the Temple He boldly proclaims that it is by hearing his voice that one can come to eternal life and never be lost. Shockingly, he asserts that entry to a building does not guarantee approach to God, no matter how beautiful or sacred this edifice may be.

The supreme name of the God of Israel blazes at the centre of the revelation of Jesus' own inner being. The I AM statements of Jesus carry the powerful presence of the Word.

It is important to remember what had happened in Jesus' encounter with the blind man and the authorities (9:1-41). Jesus, as the true leader, known by those who follow him, is contrasted with those who try to lead people but fail because they are not true revealers of God. When the man returns, seeing, to those who had known him when he was blind, they argue about his identity. He, himself, affirms *I am the man* (vs. 9]. He has received more than his sight, this man who now sees. Burning within him is something of the one who gave him his sight and who had identified himself with those words reserved to God.

The Pharisees bear down on him. Their stance is clear: We are sorry, but it is impossible for you to be seeing! This man is a sinner. Our authoritative light decrees that the light is neither in this man, Jesus, nor in you. The once-blind man is thrown out of the synagogue. Jesus offers him faith. He is now free to believe, he is created anew, born anew in true being, 7AM (9:9).

The Jews think that they have all the answers in what they know already. Their response leads Jesus into the parable of the Good Shepherd, a parable that speaks against the falseness of the blind shepherds of Israel (cf. Ex.34:ll-i6). Jesus is the transformation of Israel's hopes for a Davidic messianic shepherd. He is the one whose sheep know his voice and who will lay down his life for his sheep.

Struggling to understand how they can maintain their traditions without the Temple, the people of Israel also grapple with how otherwise they can maintain the light, the water and the shepherd in their midst. Jesus Christ is light, water and shepherd.

The allegory in Chapter 10 is as powerful in what it condemns as it is in what it affirms. It is an allegory in the sense that several aspects of one reality (sheep, shepherds, hired workers and gates to pasture) are used as metaphors to understand another reality (Jesus, believers and leaders).

First, there comes a relatively simple allegory. It is the shepherd who enters by the door and the thieves who climb over the fence. There is a proper way to approach sheep through the gate opened by the keeper (cf. Num. 27:16-17). The sheep know the shepherd's voice and he calls them by their individual names. Palestinian shepherds frequently have pet

names for their favourite sheep. The sheep follow their shepherd and no one else because they know his voice. The *voice* of Jesus is everything about him: his way of life, his loving, his teaching, his dying and his rising from the dead. The point is simple - Jesus is the true leader of the people (the believers) and they know him, as he knows them. Consequently, they will follow him.

In having Jesus use the imagery of shepherding and in having such parables continue the remarks addressed to Pharisees in 9:41, the fourth Evangelist is being true to the traditional picture of Jesus' ministry. For example, Mk 6:34 compares crowds to sheep without a shepherd and in Lk.15 Jesus attacks the Pharisees for their lack of care for the outcast.

Then John uses two different allegories to explain the first. In Jn. 10:l-3a, he tells how to approach the sheep. Jesus is the door to the good pasture through which persons may pass to find the abundant life of belief. The contrast with false leaders is continued (10:7-10). John shows the importance of the relations between sheep and shepherd (lO:3b-S). His theology of the Good Shepherd (10:11-18) begins from differing relationships of the shepherds who are hired and paid and the shepherd who is a blood-relative. Notice the all-inclusive personal knowledge of the shepherd for the sheep: *I know my own and my own know me* (10:14-15).

Jesus is the *good shepherd* as opposed to hired helpers who will not protect the sheep. In contrast to the religious leaders, Jesus cares so much for his believers that he will lay down his life for them. It is a poignant point. Jesus' decision to give up his life is absolutely autonomous. No one forces the act of love.

One point should emerge clearly. Believers belong by nature to the one who reveals the Father.

John piles comparison on comparison to contrast Jesus' claim with those of the religious leaders. The verbal pictures hammer at this single point with ever-widening implications. Jesus discusses unbelief in terms of the allegory of sheep and shepherd. Some persons are Jesus' sheep. They listen to and follow him. They belong to him and are given eternal life by him. Some are not the sheep of Jesus; unbelief arises from those who are not part of the revealer's flock (10:22-29). The Gentile mission is introduced. The question of the Christian mission to the Gentiles is a burning one in the early church. It seems that the church comes only slowly to an understanding of the importance of these sayings of Jesus.

The revelation of God goes to the very heart of that which humanity holds dear, in this case their religious establishment. The vital message, as unpleasant as it may be, is that there can be no revelation that does not in some way evoke a response of unbelief. There is also the marvellous counterpoint of John's story: There is belief even amid the rejection.

The last and greatest of Jesus' life-giving signs is the raising of his friend Lazarus from the dead. In John's account it is this sign that finally brings about the decision of the Pharisees and chief priests to kill Jesus (11:46-53).

Jesus' words about *sheep, shepherd and sheepfold* refer directly and concretely to contemporary Judaism and to his own struggle with the religious authorities. Those who are called to guide others must first see to their own direction so that they can enter into relationships with others in a way that leads to service not exploitation. The communal aspect of participation in Jesus is made explicit in *I am the door of the sheepfold* (10:7). *I am the Good Shepherd* (10:11). Jesus rallies around himself the true flock of God - again he stresses corporateness. What is offered is more than objective information (that the flock is to enter so that they may be nurtured); what is being offered is nothing less than access to God.

The shepherd *calls his own sheep by name*; *they know his voice*; they *hear* his voice. Reflecting on this, I ask myself: How do others hear my voice and what voice is it that they hear?

Jesus, the Word incarnate, is the Shepherd who becomes the paschal lamb. The heroic shepherd goes out to meet the wolf and lays down his life in the flock's defence: *Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep* (vs. 15). Jesus speaks of the shepherd giving his life five times in the one text. Through his death, Jesus will bring life to others - as a shepherd might save his flock by fighting the wolf at the cost of life.

According to John, the very title Shepherd calls forth qualities of the behaviour of Yahweh. First, the shepherd, God's Word, becomes a sheep among the sheep, and then he passes through death to lead the other sheep through the same gate (cf. Heb. 2:14-15*). I have other sheep ... there will be one flock, one shepherd* (10:16). The Father and I are one (10:30). The sheepfold into which Jesus leads those who hear his voice, who hear him speak their new names - whether they are Jew or Gentile - is ultimately this ONE, this / AM, which is Jesus' own being.

The ever-present contrast - sometimes explicit and always there as a dramatic undercurrent - between Jesus, the true Shepherd of Israel, and the false/unfaithful Shepherds (the chief priests, Pharisees and other rulers of the people) continues to unfold. The role of shepherd begins to appear as an integral dimension of human life. This makes Jesus' words more shocking still: *All who came before me are thieves and bandits ... the thief comes only to kill and destroy, I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly* (10:8-10).

Who are these *thieves and bandits!* Here the term applies most directly to the Jewish religious leaders of his time, who in one way or another profit from their position as shepherds to the detriment of ordinary people and of true religion. The worst crime of the bad shepherds, the perverse mediators, is to transform their role of mediation into a closed door, an impenetrable wall, or a way leading nowhere.

One does not need to look to a Temple or false mediators or any other human institution to find the abiding presence of God. God is totally available to us in the person of Jesus. The model of a pastoral style of governance is the attitude of the Shepherd to the flock. Revisiting the origins of this is like drinking waters from a spring. It is to honour our faith experiences in the fabric of daily life and, together, to allow the waters of wisdom to rise up from the deep well of the Word of God.

The Gospel of John points back to the foundational experience of the Church. The encounter with the risen Jesus leads the first believers from the poverty of their faith to true belief. The story of people struggling to come to a deeper faith in Jesus is not, must not be, limited to the characters in the story. It is also our experience.

John's story shows the narrator's love of beginnings. There is a cosmic beginning and then a historical beginning. He also appears to have a love of endings; he ends not once, but twice. *Those responsible for the Gospel had one excellent ending when they devised another excellent ending and, not wanting to choose among them, included them both.*[11]

In many of its aspects John's Gospel is finished by the end of Chapter 20. Jesus has appeared to Magdalene and the other disciples and given them the Spirit (20:1-23). Thomas has confessed Jesus as Lord and God (24:29), and the Gospel has been rounded off with a summary statement of

11 | Robert Kysar, John's Story of Jesus (New York: Fortress Press, 1984)

its purpose. Verses 30-31 help the reader to understand why the story is being told in this way. The Gospel has led the reader to a point of decision. There is no middle course. There are only two possibilities: to perish or to have eternal life. The Fourth Gospel *exhibits a passionate belief in the saving power of a decision for Christ*.12

Ch 21 seems like an anti-climax. It is not part of the story, say many exegetes, but there is no existing ancient Greek manuscript of the fourth Gospel that does not have John 21. However, it has an important point to make, particularly in relation to the role of Simon Peter in the believing community. Ch. 21 faces emerging problems over the community and the exercising of authority within the community. The text shows us the risen Jesus bringing up a buried past and healing old memories for Peter and for the reader. Here as often in John's Gospel, readers are invited to identify with the men and women who meet and experience Jesus. The focus is on the disciples and on Peter in particular. There is a transition for Peter from fisherman to shepherd. Perhaps John is emphasizing that the responsibility of Peter and the other disciples is truly pastoral. When Jesus has fed the disciples with bread and fish, he turns to Peter and repeatedly charges him to feed his lambs, his sheep. This pastoral charge takes us back to the imagery of the Good Shepherd and sheep (10:1-8); a return which recalls that shepherding the flock entails danger and death (10:11-15, 17-18).

As noted in Ch 20, Peter and the other disciples have been given the Spirit and sent on mission. But here are seven of them out fishing almost as if their meeting of Jesus meant business as usual. Peter's announcement, *I am going fishing* (vs. 3) seems like an ignoring or even a denial of the association with Jesus that has shaped his recent past. At the least, it suggests deep uncertainty about the future and the way the disciples should begin their ministry. The disciples have fished all night without success and now the *stranger* on the shore gives them an instruction which they follow and make an enormous catch (21:6,8,11), an echo of *life in abundance* (Jn. 10:10). This is the *life* which, right from its prologue, the Gospel has promised that the light of the world will bring (Jn. 1:4). (Food, for John, often symbolises wisdom; it also implies Jesus' gift to his followers of his body and blood.)

12 | Francis J. Maloney

The reader is not told of Simon Peter's faith but of his action as he leaps into the sea (vs. 7). The others bring the boat to shore. On Jesus' command that some of the fish be brought, it is again Peter who acts as he hauls the heavy nets ashore. Every possible variety of fish is in the net, but the net is not torn. The symbolism is clear. Peter leads, enthusiastically taking action at the word of the Beloved Disciple and at the words of Jesus.

If Peter is the leader, what of his earlier failures? True to the criterion of authentic discipleship demanded by Jesus throughout the Gospel (13:34-35; 15:12, 17), Peter must confess his love for Jesus. It is in continuing to care for the sheep that Peter is to follow the Shepherd (21:19-22). The three-fold affirmation of love signifies Peter's call to leadership within the community. Each time the Shepherd summons him to a care for the sheep that is to arise out of his love for the Shepherd. The question, Do you love me? is the only question Jesus ever repeats.

Why does Jesus ask Peter this question and not others? There are many questions that the reader might imagine him having asked. He might have asked: Simon, son of John, are you aware of the responsibilities you are taking on? Do you realise your weakness? Have you thought that it is difficult to bear others' burdens? Do you understand that you must not preach yourself but Christ the Lord? Are you aware of how many people about you in need of help - the poor, the sick, the needy, the lonely? But Jesus sums up all of this in a single, basic question, repeated with two different verbs in Greek to indicate the different nuances of love and friendship which are being referred to: Simon, son of John, do you love me? It is a question that asks, simultaneously, Are you really my friend?

This question appears to be the central, indeed the only one, because it goes directly to a person's heart. Peter's response shows that he has learned that he must reach yet deeper in his faith and place his confidence in something beyond himself. This primacy of grace, of the divine initiative that is in Jesus, is not a lesson that is learned once and for all. It is on the basis of his love that Peter is entrusted with the task of shepherding the sheep, of being to the community what Jesus was - a good Shepherd.

The narrative began with Peter's initiative, I am going fishing. Much of the story's meaning is in the transformation that must take place within

this man, who has evident personal authority and Jesus' mandate as chief shepherd. Peter's past is not denied, but recalled, forgiven and redeemed. This healing becomes the basis for Peter's new future. Peter's fishing (Jn. 21) signals his taking time off to seek for a pattern of meaning in his life and recent experiences. When he commits himself to the love of Jesus, he is appointed Shepherd of the flock (w. 15-17), and is told that this ministry will cost his life. If the fisherman is to become a shepherd, he must learn to relate to the other disciples in a way which will progressively involve the laying down of his own life.

Something like this process can come true for readers of the Fourth Gospel. For them, no less than for Peter, the *follow me* of the last chapter can evoke and heal memories as the basis for a new future.

The drama of Peter and his transformation has a broader significance. There is an ecclesial meaning as well as a personal meaning for each of those who will follow.

There must be a continual process of conversion in the church's life. The Church is called to communicate the truth of Jesus by serving humankind rather than by dominating it or by complacently preaching the Word to it from outside and above.

The individual or personal meaning of this passage also resonates deeply with contemporary experience. Each of us must undergo an interior journey - from our superficial self toward a centre, a self characterised by freedom and openness. We must find a way of entering the common, the ground of human reality.

Peter is to follow Jesus. His energy and initiative will be needed. In leading others, Peter must follow Jesus' lead. Jesus, the Shepherd, became also the sheep, the lamb, and so must Peter. He will first learn to follow, even as others follow him, and he is to journey toward a death, as does the Passover Lamb. Clearly, the test of true discipleship does not lie in one's dignity or authority. The true disciple is the one who loves and is loved. *This Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has called us to live in union with him and continue his redemptive mission*.13

13 | Const. 2

We are caught into this mystery…

Consider the sheep!

- Reflect on the identity, symbolic meaning and valuing of the flock, in the time of the Gospel writers and now. What is the cultural significance of the distinction made in the ancient Mediterranean world between sheep and goats - e.g. gender divisions, honour vs. shame? When so sheep bleat in fear? When is a sheep silent? (Check out Isaiah 53:7) What is life giving for sheep?
- If you think it helpful, share one of your findings with another person.
- What is your present day concept of the flock?

A related story[14]

A legend tells of how, after the Ascension, some of the angels, archangels and others of the heavenly host were curious about the earthly sojourn of Jesus. They wanted to know about his accomplishments.

Did you found a great movement, have a great army? How many followers did you have?

To which the Lord replied, I generally attracted good crowds, but I only had twelve disciples and a few friends and dedicated followers.

Well, they said, if there were so few they must have been exceptional human beings, leaders in their communities and successful in their careers.

Actually, Jesus replied, they were rather ordinary - a tax collector, several fishermen, just common working folk.

Evidently they must have been a very loyal group!

Jesus answered, / believe they wanted to be loyal but in my hour of crisis one betrayed me, another denied me, and almost all of them fled.

And yet you expect this group to carry on your work?

Yes, I do! said Jesus.

Surely, they said, you have some alternative plan.

14 | Told at the Provincial Chapter of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, 10.24.1996

No, said Jesus, / have no alternative plan.

But you must have another group in reserve somewhere in the event this one fails.

I have no other group, Jesus replied. This group is the only group I have.

We are caught into this mystery…

- Can you tell a *shepherd* story – the old story told in a new way – as wither sheep, or shepherd or both? A good way to start might be, *Once upon a time…* Perhaps choose an episode out of your own experience of encounter or mission that has been significant for you and/ or others.
- Stay with this story for a while. Live with the imprecisions, ambiguities and questions that might be part of how you perceive the situation or event. Shift roles. Imagine the perceptions of the other persons involved. Let story and memory develop. Don't work at explaining or illustrating. When you are ready, the story will speak for itself.
- Try inviting some others to help you show rather than tell the story. Perform it! In the process, together with these persons, go on creating, remembering, associating, imagining and experimenting, until all those taking part are satisfied that the story speaks. (By now, it might have resonances of their story as well as yours.) Then, using your bodies and movements, with as few words as possible - or none - present images of perceptions and feelings awakened in this episode.

Blessing in the shepherd's life and mission

The Scriptures show that while deliverance may be momentary, blessing is continuous in nature. It is the vitalizing power of the soul - that is, of the person's total state of being alive. For soul is a totality, filled with power (Heb. *nephesh]* which lets the soul grow and prosper so that it can maintain itself and do its work in the world. This power, without which no living being can exist, the Israelites called *berakhah* (blessing).

Blessing is both internal and external; it is the inner power of the soul and the good that produces that power. Everything that has vitality also has blessing, because blessing is vitality.

The pattern of blessing is important. To be real signs, God's blessings must be seen and experienced. Blessing effects something concrete. A blessing is a creative act; it brings something new into existence.

The history of blessing

The earliest stage of the history of blessing can be found in the Old Testament. The history of blessing in the Bible reaches back to an early stage in which the actions concerned with the bestowal of blessing still had magical features. There are some remnants here of a magical concept of blessing which is a transfer of power and involves physical contact. The Yahwist seems to have felt it important for his and subsequent generations to know that blessing had this origin and this pre-history.

In the theology of the Yahwist, blessing became an historical concept connected with God's promise and a component of the history of Yahweh's dealings with his people.

This history of how God deals with people shows the connection between blessing and salvation and also the distinction between them. Blessing is often portrayed in terms of salvation, as in the stories of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:36). In Genesis and Deuteronomy, the words *bless* and *blessing* occur more frequently than anywhere else in the Old Testament. The placing of the history of deliverance (Exodus to Numbers) in the framework of two books where blessing is the dominant theme is important. It shows that the arrangement of the Pentateuch is such as to express the close relationship between God's saving activity and the blessing God bestows.

Blessing manifests itself in widely differing ways. Its specific meaning as the power of fertility is revealed in Genesis (cf. 1:22, 28). The first account of creation shows God blessing living creatures, bidding them be fruitful and re-creative of life. God blesses the seventh day, making it holy, a day of rest and joy and contemplation of the works of God. God blesses after the flood, and the covenant is set out more explicitly.

Genesis tells of how Jacob obtained Isaac's blessing by deceit (Gen.27). The episode reveals several essential elements of blessing. The blessing, which Jacob appropriated, is the power of life handed on from father to son. This power affects the one blessed and his possessions (here, cattle). In this earlier understanding of blessing, the father has only one blessing to bestow. Such a blessing cannot be recalled and it works unconditionally. The father bestows this blessing at a time when he awaits his death. The bestowal of blessing follows a ritual which includes actions and words of blessing.

Later in Genesis (Gen. 32), another concept of blessing is presented that goes back to a very early time. It is that of a blessing won in combat.

When God blesses after the flood, the covenant is set out more explicitly. In Deuteronomic theology, blessing is connected with covenant.

The patriarchal narratives, such as the Abraham stories, point to a primary meaning of blessing, which is, having many descendants. Blessing is also the power of fruitfulness in a wider sense of fertility in the family, farming, raising cattle and sheep. Blessing is the centre of life; it is life itself and includes all phases of life. Blessing can include also the power to defeat one's enemies (Gen. 24:60; 27:29; Num. 24:17-18; Deut. 33:7; and Gen. 49:22-26).

God blesses Abraham so that Abraham can be a blessing to others.
Those blessed are to impart blessing. A king must receive the greatest blessing in order that the whole nation can draw blessing from him (1 Sam. 16:18). David is the prototype of the king who has been blessed, and the blessing is the issue in the conflict between David and Saul.

The act of blessing (berekh] means imparting vital power to another person. The one who blesses gives the other person something of his own soul. The handing on of blessing from father to son is a result of its being a power of the soul. The soul of a person embraces everything within the circle of her or his life. If the soul is strong it leaves an impression on all its undertakings. Thus, in foreign lands Jacob and Joseph have the power to spread blessing around them. This power of blessing has spiritual as well as physical effects.

In general, blessing must be reciprocal, no matter what the status of the persons involved (Job 31:20). Blessing includes the paying of respect (Judges 5:24). The king is blessed by his subjects and Yahweh is blessed (i.e., praised) by his people. To bless and to praise belong together.

The theology of blessing centres on the two institutions that were determinative for the settled life of Israel - kingship and temple. Both are essentially concerned with God's constant activity (cf. 1 Kings 8). In Israel the king was the mediator of blessing. The heart of the conflict between Saul and David was that one had God's blessing and that the other was losing the power of that blessing. Two passages that speak of the succession to David's throne refer to God' s blessing (2 Sam. 12:24; 2 Sam. 17:14). Yahweh's freedom finds expression in the choice to make Solomon the bearer of blessing.

Elijah, Elisha, Haggai, Amos, Jeremiah - the prophets were involved in seeing that blessing was continued for the people (cf. Amos: 7, 8; Jeremiah 14, 29:4-7 and 32:15).

The Psalms and Wisdom Books show such blessing flowing out in many ways and within and to many places. It poured forth from the cultic acts in the temple upon people and land (Lk. 18). A part of every community gathering was the blessing with which they were dismissed. Blessings were pronounced on individuals at specific occasions (cf. Ps. 91; ps. 121).

Wisdom belongs within the context of God's bestowal of blessing. Blessing and wisdom are related. *With God are wisdom and might* (Job 12:13). Wisdom, like blessing, is the power to accomplish, to succeed. The

verb *hiskil* can mean to have insight as well as to succeed. Blessing means having vital power in its deepest and most comprehensive sense.

Wisdom and blessing share a universalistic aspect. It is the nature of wisdom to learn from others - from Egyptians, Edomites and other peoples. The entire book of Job is concerned with God's bestowal of blessing; and Job was not an Israelite. Just as God gave blessing to all living things and bestowed the power of growth on all human beings, so wisdom can increase in all people throughout the earth.

This connection of blessing and wisdom has great theological significance. There is no knowledge of God apart from grace manifested in his people. The Old Testament knows a wisdom that grows out of God's power to bless and therefore it has a direct relationship to God's activity and work. It is clear that what the Bible says about blessing involves something that was once of all encompassing significance for religion. Blessing can never be fully *Christianized* or confined.

The New Testament view of blessing and curse relates closely to that referred to in the Old Testament and Judaism. It represents an incorporation of pre-Christian blessing into the Christ event. Christ becomes the one who blesses.

The Gospels report that Jesus blessed the little children (Mk. 10:13-16). He pronounces a blessing at a meal (Mk. 6:41), and at the Last Supper (Mk. 14:22; i Cor. 10:16). Before he ascends to heaven he blesses his disciples (Lk. 24:50-51). He exhorts his disciples to bless those who curse them (Lk. 6:28). The disciples are sent out not only with a message (Matt. 10) but also with the instruction to greet others with a blessing. The effect of the blessing was a part of what the disciples were to proclaim. According to Acts the blessing attached to the commission in Matt. 10 can actually be seen in the career of the messengers of Jesus in the world.

Clearly, blessing is to be prominent in the mission of the disciples. They are to witness that Christ is not only the one who saves, the *soter*; he is both blessing and bringer of blessing.

Expressions of blessing

The Bible contains many examples of occasions when blessing is given -in an exchange of greetings, at weddings, just before dying, at the beginning of a reign, during worship. The practical nature of blessing is

apparent. Blessing is bestowed in both words and action. Scriptural accounts give testimony to the content of blessing and to how it gives the power to live in faithfulness and truth. God gives blessing. Humans are its recipients whom God blesses for their sake and that of other living beings on this earth.

What is it that unites greeting with blessing? Both involve words and actions. A pre-theological origin is recognizable in both. Greeting, in all its forms, such as congratulating or wishing a happy birthday, had its origin in a magical understanding of existence. Greeting and blessing have vocabulary in common (peace, shalom, salus leil) (cf. Gen. 47:7-10). The word shalom is perhaps the best illustration of how blessing comes to include everything - freedom from threats and dangers, the possession of security, good fortune and well-being.

In the New Testament, greeting has remarkable vitality. In Luke's Gospel (Lk. 1-2), greetings are an essential component of the narrative, especially the greeting of the angel to Mary.

Interpersonal relations are not possible without blessing. When people truly meet, they bless each other. In Israel the greeting was a form that contained a deep reality; it established or confirmed a spiritual community. Blessing is necessary for relationship. A blessing is always expected to make the one who receives it a source of blessing for others. One is not blessed at the expense of others but for the benefit of others (be this in terms of wealth, health, education, habitation of a country with a productive climate, personal gifts ... etc.).

All prayer and ministry - all our shepherding - is entry into the reciprocal relationship of blessing with God.

Shepherding and the whole of life

A reflection on Psalm 23

Psalms are the heart of biblical spirituality. In them the whole of life with its changing states of soul and emotion, the present and the past and the future, even death and the mysteries beyond, are taken into song. There are at least twelve psalms that refer to Yahweh as shepherd or to Israel as the flock. Among these, Psalm 23, the song of the Good Shepherd, stands out for its beauty. It is a *jewel of Hebrew religious poetry*.15

In Psalm 23, the experience of David, the shepherd called to be king, is associated with the pastoral activity of God. There are two basic motifs, the shepherd (vv.l-4) and the host (vv.5-6). Some writers see three movements or positions within the shepherding depicted in this psalm: ahead - beside - behind. Initially, the shepherd goes ahead and leads the way (vv.i-3); at the centre, the shepherd walks beside the believer on her/his journey (vs.4); God follows with goodness and mercy (vv.5-6).

The psalm is imbued with faith and trust. I shall not want can also be translated *as I shall not fall short or I shall not fail. This bears the sense not only of I shall want for nothing but also of I myself shall not be diminished,* that is, *I shall not fall into nothingness*. This is a confession of faith based on concrete human history, on individual and corporate experience. Such conviction can transform how we face life and world.

15 | Elena Bosetti, *Yahweh Shepherd of the People* (St Paul's Press, 1993)

Caring - earth, greenness, water, and life

In green pastures you make me rest. The scene is one of peace and tranquillity. The good shepherd seeks the best pastures for the flock and keeps watch so that they can rest peacefully. The Hebrew verb rabats (rest) indicates the posture of the sheep when they stretch out on the grass. Where in Palestine could we find these *green pastures!* The desert of Judah is *barren earth, parched and without water* (Ps. 63:2). Twice a year, Israel sees a miracle with autumn and spring rains. Even the desert becomes green.

The psalm continues with the theme of water. *Menuhah* (rest) is a synonym for *shalom* (peace), the sign of divine blessing, and is associated with the gift of the promised land. The care of the shepherd is invigorating. The verb *shuh* in the transitive sense of *bring back* is a particularly meaningful expression. The RSV translation reads *he restores my soul*, and that means a return of energies.

This *return of soul* can be interpreted at three levels:

Historical — Shuh could indicate the return from exile, a new exodus from Babylon to Jerusalem. Since according to the prophets it was on account of their sins that Israel went into exile, the return would be *metanoia*, conversion.

Ethical — It is Yahweh who *brings back my life*. It is not I who choose to return; it is God, the good shepherd, who *brings back*.

Eschatological — *Walking through the valley of the shadow of death*. The shepherd will not leave our life in the grave but will bring it back. (Jews and Christians pray this psalm in liturgy for the dead.)

Sheep do not know what path is best for them; it is the shepherd who knows the *path of righteousness*. The best paths are not always the shortest or the straightest. The forty years of wandering in the desert certainly did not provide the shortest route to the promised land, but they educated the people. In that sense they were *paths of righteousness.*

Into the valley of darkness ... Darkness does not bring fear if the shepherd is present. The Hebrew text uses *tsalmawet* (valley of darkness) and contains the word *death* (*mawet*). It acknowledges the close link between darkness and death. Often popular fantasy imagines death as a monster swallowing people. Children are sometimes afraid of the dark, but the one who walks hand in hand with the mother/father shepherd is not

afraid. This is the psalmist's experience. *You are with me.* The presence of the shepherd instills a sense of security and brings peace of mind for today and tomorrow.

The One on whom courage depends transcends us and yet is not far away - walking beside us, journeying with us, and keeping watch over our steps.

Your rod and your staff comfort me. The image of staff is linked with the theme of consolation. *Rod* and *staff* speak of the loving presence of the shepherd. The Hebrew verb used is *naham*, which is also that used at the beginning of the Book of Consolation, *Comfort, comfort my people*, *says your God* (Is. 4:1-4). Two terms, *shebet* and *mish'enet* are used here. The *shebet* is a short instrument for striking and correcting. It is also the sceptre of the king and the rod of the shepherd. The *mish'enet* is long and is used for walking.

The psalmist holds together the idea of authority by linking the two terms. There is the rod that guides and the crook of the shepherd indicative of journeying together with the flock. The shepherd strikes the earth with the staff to indicate her/his presence and to show direction to the flock. The shorter stick is the one that the shepherd waves whilst passing through the middle of the flock. This signals a watchful presence, ready to correct the abuses of the stronger sheep over the weaker and to defend both from the attacks of wild beasts.

It was the custom for shepherds to carry two sticks even as the Bedouins do today. The staff was indicative of the characteristically nomadic life of the shepherd, of mobility, liberty and itinerancy. The shepherd used this staff to quicken the pace and to defend against dangers encountered. The staff gave the rhythm for the journey. It served to remind Israel of the road ahead. So it is that Jacob remembers *how with only my staff in hand* (Gen. 32:11) he crossed the Jordan. David confronted the enemy with his shepherd's staff. Moses brought his pastoral staff and with it performed the wonders of the exodus and opened the way to the Promised Land.

He prepares a table for me. The shepherd becomes the host. The banquet is held *in the presence of enemies.* Danger escaped, feasting follows. The divine largesse reflects the reality of oriental hospitality. The table is richly spread, the cup overflows, and perfume is poured on the head. The host spares no expense. Ointment of the finest quality is a mark

of special honour bestowed upon the guest (cf. ps. 133). At Bethany, Mary pours out all the costly perfume over Jesus' feet.

Toh and hesed, goodness and mercy, follow. The guest, refreshed in the tent of the shepherd, can now resume the journey with courage and confidence. Two messengers, *toh* and *hesed*, are present to banish fear.

The verb used in the last phrase of this psalm can have two meanings in Hebrew: *and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord or I shall return ...* The closing thought gives expression to a desire either to return to or to dwell forever in the house of the Lord. It is the great longing of the pilgrim.

God will lead us in goodness and mercy, day after day, all our lives. When these days end, God will *bring us back*, and we shall be together forever.

The Good Shepherd

Yahweh is my shepherd,
I lack nothing.

In meadows of green grass he lets me lie.
there he revives my soul.

He guides me by paths of virtue
for the sake of his name.

Though I pass through a gloomy valley,
I fear no harm;
beside me your rod and your staff
are there to hearten me.

You prepare a table before
me under the eyes of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil,
my cup brims over.

Ah, how goodness and kindness pursue me,
every day of my life;
my home, the house of Yahweh,
as long as I live!

(Jerusalem Bible, p.805)

Related Readings / Reflections

The following excerpts from Barbara Davis' journals invite further reflection on shepherd and shepherding.

Shepherding as befriending:

Seeking God in this life
cannot be a continuous experience.
We often fail to see God
and then we fall into ourselves
and feel there is something wrong
with us - that we are perverse
and responsible for the entrance of
sin into the world
and all subsequent sins.
These feelings affect us mentally
and physically
but the Holy Spirit, the endless life
living within us,
makes us peaceful and at ease,
harmonious and flexible.

In God is endless friendship,
space, life and being.

- Julian of Norwich

Liberation begins in personal awareness (Bernard Lonergan)

'Who am I?' is a question full of mystery. ... It is even more difficult to ask the question of another person, such are the mysterious depths of personality. ...an answer is possible only for one who loves. I may be able to find out a lot about you without love; though even that will be distorted, for without love my information will lack perspective and I will lack perception. If I want to get to know you, I must be willing to love you, and I must be prepared for discoveries that keep opening up further questions. The journey to the heart of any person is a journey into unfathomable depths.

- M Fallen, MSC, *Who is Jesus?*

Of shepherding, loving and the desert experience ...

Madrigal of Christ and the soul

Once a young shepherd went off to despond:
How could he dance again? How could he sing?
All of his thoughts to his shepherdess cling,
with love in his heart like a ruinous wound.

The root of his sorrow? No, never the wound:
the lad was a lover and relished the dart
that lodged where it drank the best blood of his heart
but sighing 'Forgotten!' went off to despond.

For only to think it - forgotten by one
beautiful shepherdess! - drove him afar;
cost him a drubbing in foreigner's war,
with love in his heart like a ruinous wound.

The shepherd boy murmured: O curses descend
on the stranger who's stolen my pretty one: she
keeps a cold distance - stares stonily
on the love in my heart like a ruinous wound.

Time passed: on a season he sprang from the ground, swarmed a tall tree and arms balancing wide handsomely grappled the tree till he died of the love in his heart like a ruinous wound.

- John of the Cross

***Each of us must undergo an interior journey*.** (Barbara Davis)

The Mercy of God (excerpt from poem)

I rose up from the acres of self that I tended with passion
and defended with flurries of pride;
I walked out of myself and went into the woods of God's mercy
and here I abide.
There is greenness and calmness and coolness, a soft leafy covering from the judgment of sun overhead,
and the hush of His peace, and the moss of His mercy to tread.
I have naught but my will seeking God; even love burning in me
is a fragment of infinite loving and never my own.
And I fear God no more; I go forward to wander forever
in a wilderness made of His infinite mercy alone.

- In Jessica Powers, *Loving a Passionate God*

SOME PERSONAL

REFLECTIONS ON

THE

GOOD

SHEPHERDESS

Salvation is never merely general. It is always immediate and personal.

In my life, with its unique parameters and circumstances, God calls me to a particular path which is like that of no other person, because I am no other person. Somewhere in the vast stretches of destiny which belong to the human race as a whole, Cod has encountered me and offered me a distinctive way in which to respond to the initiative of divine love.

I have a unique and singular destiny because there is only one me and only one Cod. One principle of the Incarnation is its specificity. Cod enters my life at a unique point, with a singular call - a call to a path which is mine to choose because it was created with me in mind.

Who is Cod for me? How do I call God these days?

I struggle, as in my experience most of us struggle, with the spiritual insight that God should want to be intimately involved in my life.

- excerpt from Barbara's handwritten notes

We are caught into this mystery…

- What does it mean - this path that is mine, specifically mine? And that of another?
- Walk in shoes that are new to you.
- If you are young, borrow a pair of shoes from someone who is old. Try walking in them.
- What does each shoe feel like against your toes? against your heel?
- If these shoes could speak, what story might they tell?
- See what happens if you finish this story aloud ...
- *I am these old boots* (young, shiny shoes).
  I…
- If you think it helpful, share one of your findings with another person.
- If you can, find someone to listen to you. Maybe, this person might
- be someone willing to exchange both shoes and stories with you.
- Take turns, then, to hear each other.
- Afterwards, enjoy some conversation together. What does all that has happened have to do with being who you are - a Good Shepherd Sister at this age in your life?

The nomadic life of a shepherdess

Leadership and transition

> [One of the experiences of being a leader is the inevitable moment of letting-go, of transition, and of handing over leadership to others. Writing on shepherding, Barbara describes the life of the nomadic shepherd as one of mobility and itinerancy. Among her handwritten material are some notes on the personal task of those whose term of elected leadership within the Congregation comes to an end.]

To claim that one *returns to the ranks* is a myth. The experience of having been in leadership brings a different perspective - for you and for those 'in the ranks'. Some people will not know how to be with you or won't relate in the same way any more. Before leaving office, identify *who is there for me.*

In contrast to entrance into leadership, transitioning is a solitary process. Be attentive to the process. Take note of changes occurring. Remember

that emotions that can surface even years later will still need attention or healing.

Once the list of candidates for leadership is out, those who have been in leadership positions are no longer leaders but managers.

When change happens, some of our suffering arises out of embedded constructs - particular ways of thinking how life should be.
Transition is skin-shedding. We are continuous learners, always shedding the old skins.

What skins am I being invited to shed ... the *shoulds* - old messages and assumptions, the beliefs and behaviours that bind me to a single way of approaching life, the bondage of a work ethic, or perhaps beliefs (especially religious beliefs)- that threaten to keep my world too small?

What is it that I must take leave of? What matters most? Is it loss of some of the necessities and privileges of leadership - for example, credit cards, a cellular phone, a car exclusively for my use? I must also let go of *being needed,* of having the influence that accompanies leadership and that ensures my opinions are heard. Does all of this mean that I am no longer important?

Transition is entry into a new phase. What does God ask of me at this point of my life? What am I now called to do?

How do we determine who our leaders will be, and what do we bring to the choices we will make?

We all come to times of discernment such as this with a certain amount of freedom and unfreedom because of who we are and our past experiences. It is of the utmost importance to become aware of these freedoms and unfreedoms.

We express our freedom by using our gifts and talents by listening, sharing what we believe, being honest, trusting one another, showing courage, taking risks and hearing what God is saying to us.

Our unfreedom also has ways of expressing itself and of reflecting our prejudices and biases. For example, during times of communal discernment for new leadership, we can say (or think) things like -

There is no way I'm letting my name go forward. Over my dead body will I support her for leadership!
Why would you suggest her? She hasn't done anything in the Province for the last six years.

By taking time to name both the light and darkness in our lives, we open ourselves to the influence of God and of one another. We get in touch with our hearts and the degree to which they are prepared to participate in communal discernment. As you know, discernment is more than gathering facts. It involves how we are feeling. It requires us to be sensitive to the movement of the Spirit.

To discern and decide is not abstract or merely notional. Discernment is a creative art, a little like that of the artist, whose touch and capacity to see into the stuff of life can release the potential in the material with which she works.

We are caught into this mystery…

- Consider some of the significant moments when you have exercised or been affected by power (in community, ministry, society, institutions).
- Out of this, select one form of power. Hold it in your hand. Weigh it - is it light or heavy? Feel it - is it soft or hard, smooth or jagged, symmetrical or asymmetrical, sticky or slippery? How is it in your hand? What does your hand want to do with it?
- Invite four or five other persons to sit with you in a circle. Wordlessly and using only your hands, pass the power to the person to the left of you. Like you, each person will have decided the nature of the power being passed (e.g., imposed, demanding, possessive, shared, burdensome), and the related attitude of the power-holder.
- Keep your face as impassive as possible.
- Each participant can change the kind of power that is passed to the next person. Go around the circle three or four times.

The justice of the shepherdess

Some of the phrases echoing in my mind from the Forum on Economic Justice for Women are "one more step along the way", "we are not here by chance", "we are a borderless tribe" and "heat is needed from the top and the bottom". At this Forum a culture of dialogue has developed in which we ventured solidarity and togetherness. We have seen each other's faces!

We have been asking how our shared social responsibility for the common good is going to be fulfilled. This challenges the ways we think and dream about our futures, our hopes, and how we live our lives.

There is spiritual crisis at the very centre of our current global economic situation which is corrosive, violent and marked by duplicity. More and more the profound social teaching of every major world religion is being ignored. We see examples of the tendency for many Christians to dissociate spirituality from questions of economics. Some examples of recent headlines from the International Herald Tribune are chilling in their arrogance:

> *"At home and abroad, world trade benefits Asians. Nike's story shows progress of nations."*
> *"Free trade helps lift world poor."*

We believe that there is something we can do

Mary McKillop, Australia's first official holy woman said something like "*Never see a problem without doing something about it*." Yes. There is much we can do, but we need to do it in solidarity and with each other's support. Johanita has reminded us of the words of St Mary Euphrasia*: "If you remain united and always uphold one another you will work miracles.*"

How we relate is vital. We need to take into account, too, the reality of the people we are working with. They may not always be regular or reliable. They may not always perform tasks to our satisfaction. There will be ups and downs, frustrations and moments of emotion in our working together. We Sisters will need to keep learning how to work realistically and cooperatively rather than controllingly or maternalistically.

The place of beauty

The word beautiful comes from the Hebrew and Greek for good. The Greek word, *kalos*, is used to describe all that is useful for life and pleasant to look at. It could be used to describe the stones that decorated the temple, the fruit of the tree, rich fertile land or seed, salt, wine, or a measure generously given. One of the most interesting and significant uses of the word *kalos* has to do with good works. As M.Theresa Porcile points out, to give birth to beauty is wisdom's way of evangelizing. True justice and mission combat ugliness and give birth to beauty. Small wonder that Scripture exhorts us (Titus 2:14) to have zeal for the works of beauty. This is a call to be lived out in the social reality of this world. It offers a new way of thinking about the issues of poverty and oppression.

Recommendations

From our response to the Forum on Economic Justice for Women come the following recommendations:

- that time be set aside for personal reflection processes which could enable sisters and lay staff to reflect on their own experiences of injustice; and that this process be designed to help them to deal with resistance to information, action and change;
- that actual experiences of exposure to situations of injustice be followed by prayer, discussion and analysis as a means of bringing participants closer to an understanding of the culture and social situations of the persons they have encountered;
- that educational opportunities be provided and programmes created that draw on Scripture and Church documents to show that the practice of justice is integral to evangelization and a living faith; and
- that such an education process will attend to and benefit from the findings of the social sciences - in particular, from their exposure of structural oppression and from implications for translating Gospel values into practical goals.

  Throughout all of this, a central task is to allow the poor to speak their own word to us.

We are caught into this mystery…

- We have seen each other's faces - what faces are these?
- In whatever way you choose - e.g., word, song, mime, dance, painting, prayer, collage, poetry, a photograph - express your response to this seeing.
- If you take what you have expressed seriously, what are some
- implications for you in your present?

Two
GOOD SHEPHERD WOMEN

ST MARY EUPHRASIA
&
BARBARA DAVIS

* The primary source material on St Mary Euphrasia was found among Barbara's papers and is indicative of the seriousness of her commitment to this remarkable woman. It is included here together with Barbara's notes which are based on Sr Odile Laugier's reflections on leadership and mission, and which are used here with Sr Odile's kind permission.

St Mary Euphrasia

Primary source documents

Letter to Mr. Begeay

To Mr. BEGEAY
Notary at Niort
Angers, 22nd February 1851

Yesterday evening at 8.30, we received Mrs. Noireault, nee Louise Saint-Germain. She is in a real state of distress as you will understand. Three days ago, I was coming back from Paris in the same *carriage* as her and finding her depressed and overwhelmed by grief I gave her as much care as I could and tried to console her a little.

Having the reason for her journey made known to me, I sought to dissuade her from the plan she had to visit Mr. Noireault and instead to come to our Monastery to rest a little. She persisted in going to Niort, but she promised me that if she was not successful she would come straight back to us in Angers, as she has faithfully done, for she has not stopped for a minute and arrived with us almost dead. We received her with motherly kindness, for her sort are worthy of pity and concern.

These sorts of troubles are not unknown to us, Sir. For thirty years I have dried many a tear of this sort and we have an establishment of lady boarders in which we have placed Miss Saint-Germain, alias Mrs Noireault, and nearly all who are confided to us have suffered as bitterly as

she, so they find with us a certain ease by the tranquil and retiring life they lead and which we try to make as agreeable as possible for them.

According to the letter that Mrs. Noireault has shown us, written and signed by Mr. Noireault, we are writing to let you know the price of our board and lodging which is 600F per year, payable three months in advance. We have no doubt as to the uprightness and justice of Mr. Noireault in coping with this. This poor little woman is destitute, she has only what she stands up in.

Would you kindly, Sir, use your good heart and your influence with Mr. Noireault so that he sends her immediately linen, sheets, towels and her personal linen, also the other things she wants: her watch and her rings that she returned to Mr. Noireault during their last meeting.

Would you kindly give the letter here enclosed to Mr. Noireault. Tomorrow you will receive another letter that you can show to Mrs. Noireault Senior.

I have the honour to be,

Yours sincerely ...

Letter to Mr. Noreault M.D.

To Mr. Noreault M.D. Niort
22nd February 1851

Sir

Miss Louise Saint-Germain, alias Mrs. Noireault, whom we at first thought to be your wife, came to our house as a boarder at 8.30 this morning. We were appraised of the fact by the letter bearing your signature with which you provided her. This poor woman is extremely distressed and you must be too, of that I have no doubt. She has told me her whole story and I understand how cruel it must be for both of you.

She has done the wisest thing possible and I strongly encouraged her three days ago, being in the same carriage as her on the journey from Paris when I found her at the end of all hope and on the point of poisoning herself. She has told you this.

I was delighted to prevent her from doing this and to be able to take the poison from her, promising her that if she did not succeed with you she could come to us, which she has faithfully done, wishing to be good at all costs. We received her with happiness and tenderness I assure you, her unhappiness concerns us.

Now Sir, we count on you to cover the cost of her board and lodgings, as your letter suggests. We will keep it as minimal as possible. It is 600F per year, payable three months in advance. Mrs. Noireault is too tired to write to you today; she has asked us to ask you to tell her maid to send her her sheets, her personal linen and her personal effects, for she has only what she stands up in; added to which Sir, she asks you to send her her rings and her watch.

Then she begs you Sir, and we add our supplication to hers, that you stop off in Angers when you are en route to Paris. I beg you Sir, grant us for her this consolation. You can be at ease regarding the discretion. No one will know you and together we can discuss many things that cannot be put in a letter.

If you grant her this favour, she will give up all thought of going to see you In Paris; without your visit, she will surely go. Regarding me Sir, there is no need to be embarrassed, these sorts of troubles are not unknown to me, you will not be the first for whom I have eased the pain. You are good; you have a good heart. Mrs. Noireault cannot say enough good things about you, so soften her unhappiness as far as you can.

You know better than anyone else the cause of her misfortune. I leave it to your uprightness and good heart and await from you Sir, a result worthy of the nobility of your sentiments.

I have the honour to be, Yours sincerely ...

My vocation ...

You have often asked me to speak to you about my youth and my vocation. I have delayed for a long time because I did not want you to be occupied with me. But there is a time to talk and a time to be silent and Our Lord has let me know that the time for talking has come.

You know that I lived on the Island of Noirmoutier and that I was orphaned young. When 13 years of age, I was sent to a boarding school at Tours. The Superior was an old friend of my mother and she promised to take good care of me. I cried a lot. I could not understand why they could send me so far away. There were no railways in those days and to reach Tours it took us three nights and three days.

I was not pious, my dear daughters. I did not like to go to confession. And I do not know why God permitted my confessor to treat me so harshly. All my temptations seemed to be mortal sins. My teachers scolded me and vexed me with a thousand corrections which I took very badly. Fortunately, the second Mistress, Mademoiselle de Lignac, who was scarcely 20 years old but an angel of piety, saw my sufferings and, calling me apart, spoke to me with gentleness and kindness. She helped me to make my examination of conscience, enlightening my doubts, and soon gained my affection.

The boarding school was flourishing at that time. There were 90 girls there from the best families. It was an edifying sight. Most of them approached the sacraments every two weeks, even weekly. In the evening they had devotions as we do in the novitiate. I witnessed the greatness of that house and a little later I saw its fall. One boarder, one alone, spoiled that whole group of good-hearted girls. Disorder and corruption soon made terrible ravages. The parents, in distress, withdrew their children. Those who remained went from being angels to devils.

A religious community set up a boarding school in the city and Mile, de Lignac went there. I could not go with her. I was obliged to remain and live with my companions, who treated me very badly when I refused to be influenced by their behaviour. I was put under the care of a Mistress who had been a religious before the Revolution. She had escaped death through a thousand dangers. She was a good religious but excessively severe. Being an orphan, I cried for Mile, de Lignac, who had taken the place of a mother for me. I was very unhappy.

Then I turned seriously to God and sought for consolation in piety. After six months I felt a great attraction to religious life. We were often shown an old building at the back of the garden of our boarding school. They used to tell us very discreetly that some good religious had opened a refuge for young girls who had behaved badly in the world ... that these people did a lot of good there working for the salvation of souls. That thought often came back into my mind and inspired me with a desire to join the community. But how could I manage it? I was only 15 years old!

I wrote to my guardian that I had decided to become a religious in the Refuge at Tours. He replied saying that he would never consent. I could go to the Sacred Heart where my sister was already, but was never to even think of the Refuge. However I was not discouraged, and I told my teachers and companions about my idea. The teachers treated it as childishness. The girls began to persecute me terribly. They would say a thousand insulting things. In the refectory they threw pieces of bread at my head, shouting, "*So much for your vocation. You want to be a religious? Then you must learn to suffer*" ... many things like that.

I continued to pray fervently, counting on the protection of God and longing for a chance to speak to the sisters at the Refuge. At last one evening, one of my teachers, who was fond of me and had compassion, made me promise not to betray her and she would take me out secretly to the Refuge. So we went out stealthily one winter evening. We were received with great cordiality and the superior promised to receive me as soon as difficulties could be removed.

I came back full of joy to the boarding school. But a furious storm had arisen up against me. In taking the roll call of the pupils, my absence was noted. They looked everywhere for me and, not finding me, they guessed I had gone to the Refuge about which I had been talking. My companion found a way to cover up, but I was obliged to acknowledge where I had been. The Mistress scolded me furiously. It was supper time. *"Bread and water for this lady,"* she said sternly. I was shivering with cold and crying bitterly. All my companions, who had been so unjust, suddenly took my side. They revolted against the Mistress. They were so naughty that they had no fear.

They began to say all sorts of things: *"What... poor little Rose-Virginie who never harmed anyone! You condemn her to bread and water. She is a martyr to her vocation. She wants to be a religious. Then let her go to the convent!"*

Then bringing me near the fire, they brought me cakes and sweets - the very best they had. Never had they paid me such attention.

The Mistress could only let them do as they pleased. She had no authority over her pupils who respected no one. Several months passed.

One of the Mistresses encouraged me a great deal. She prepared me for the exercises of religious life. A sister of the Refuge also wrote to me saying that the Blessed Virgin had appeared to her and revealed to her that it was the will of God that I should enter there and that I would be damned if I did not obey my attraction. You can imagine that, for a 15-year-old girl, this marvellous event was irrefutable. And so, whatever objections were made, I answered that the Blessed Virgin said I would be damned if I did not go to the Refuge.

Finally, after many struggles and a lot of resistance, I got what I desired. I left my teachers who had affection for me despite their severity. One in particular, who had treated me most harshly, said to me some time later, *"My child, yon did not understand my conduct. I act to act strongly towards you because you were one of those persons who go for good or ill, according to the direction given them. You are strong now. Go with confidence where God is calling you."*

All the dear sisters of the Refuge received me tenderly like a beloved child. I felt I was in heaven and soon forgot all I had suffered.

(Told to her Sisters in Angers, 1866, and translated from an autobiographical record in French by Sr M Joseph Deegan, RGS)

We are caught into this mystery…

- Take some time now to reflect on your own vocation.
- Did you feel so strongly called, or was your decision - and your remaining faithful to it - altogether other and less dramatic?
- How would you retell it as a story?

A present day view: leadership for mission

To apply a modern concept to a person of another century is a challenge. So much has happened since St Mary Euphrasia's time ... Darwin, Freud, Marx, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the status of women, the evolution of thinking and ideas. In her time, women were treated as children. They did not know the protection of civic laws. A woman, for instance, had no control over her mail. Her husband could take and read it and, if he chose, refuse her access to it. Twenty-nine per cent of factory workers in France were women. Society was compartmentalized and hierarchical structures kept women where they were seen to belong. St Mary Euphrasia was of her time but her beliefs, attitudes and actions stood strongly in contradiction to the injustices of this period. ...

Her letters and various accounts of her life reveal a strong focus on the relational. She had personal relationships with many people: girls and women, workers, neighbours, church officials, benefactors, the Sisters, and other initators of works. A teacher in the French School of Oriental History maintained contact with her. At her invitation, Euphrasia was visited by the benefactresses of Poitier, which was 100 kms. away. During the work on the Tunnel, St Mary Euphrasia went onto the roads and on her many journeys, people would come to meet her and give her news. She organized an Open House, reconciled couples in the parlour, and received official visitors from many different parts of the world. She was equally welcoming of all. The butcher, who used to come once a week, recalled her warmth*. I loved her like a mother*, he said. She was always anxious to meet people, and to listen to what they said and learn what they did.

There was a groundedness, a concrete personal knowledge that animated and informed so much of what she was to do. In 1855, on the same day as she wrote on the important subject of the establishment of the Provinces, she also asked for *a recipe for pickled sausage* for the *German Sisters*. Her care found expression in personal ways, in closeness to the families of the Sisters and in avoidance of any word or deed likely to hurt the reputation of anyone. This did not mean that she was naive; she was clear about each person's strengths and weaknesses. She could express affection without naivete. She knew how to pardon wholeheartedly and with empathy. You wrote out of your pain rather than your heart, she

replied to one person. She could be just as honest about her own pain whilst ensuring that others did not have to bear the burden of this: *I was hurt but now don't worry.*

In those days, people did not go to communion every time they went to Mass. The sisters used to have their three days designated. The sign that they were going to communion was that they wore their mantles. On one occasion, St Mary Euphrasia had corrected a sister the day before and told her she was not to go to communion the next day. Then, passing by that sister on her way to communion, Euphrasia noticed that this sister was weeping and very upset. She went over to her, passed across her own mantle and sent her up to communion. She herself did not go to communion that day.

St Mary Euphrasia placed great stress on daily relationships. In an unpublished conference to the novices are these injunctions:

> *Never deprive the children.*
> *Their hidden pain can become a wall between the person and God. Love and charity are the only things that can pierce it.*

In addition to personal relationships two other aspects stand out: her leadership of the Good Shepherd Sisters, and her sense of mission.

Many qualities emerged as characteristic of Euphrasia's leadership. Her clear and just intuition enabled her to discover the capacities of each sister and to receive these as gifts. There was also her evident willingness to take time - even years - when necessary. She asked prayer of the community before making any important decision, and shared her difficulties with the Contemplatives. With the commencement of a new house, she knew difficult nights, nights of blackness, but after prayer was able to see difficulties in a new way. Her Councillors had great liberty to express their opinions. She took notice and included all of them in decision-making. Because of the Bishop's influence on the choices of Councillors, she had to cope with difference and dysfunction. Yet, with her clear vision of the apostolate of the Congregation, she was able to adapt and grow in her role.

During her term of office, St Mary Euphrasia faced a challenge between cohesion and breaking-point with the congregation. Her Council had differing opinions. She followed what she saw as the directive according to the Spirit of God. She also consulted widely with sisters, laity and ecclesiastics. She delegated, often with grand latitude. In 1834, she said,

I give you all, do what you think, do all that you can, do, pray much, and we will pray for you. And with equal trust, she offered the assurance, *We give you all our confidence.*

St Mary Euphrasia had told the sisters on one occasion, *Don't go into the garden without your boots or you will spoil your shoes.* But then she herself went out into the garden without her boots and one of the sisters corrected her. *You're right,* she replied, *next time I'll wear my boots.* Minor as this episode may seem now, it illustrates both her understanding of the meaning of authority and a related freedom in relationships between the sisters and herself.

Other enlightened stances are also apparent - towards inculturation, for instance. In 1836 she declared *Language is important.* She arranged for Italian, English and German language classes in the Mother House. She herself learned Italian. Aware of the value of music, she liked to send to each house a sister who could play the piano.

Acknowledging the significance of the laity, St Mary Euphrasia involved them in a number of ways. They participated in prayer and ceremonies at the houses, shared friendship with her, helped make first explorations for foundations and sometimes translated her correspondence in other languages.

She was old when she died. Her right hand made it difficult for her to write. Her throat and her breathing caused her difficulty. She died from cancer of the pancreas.

- from notes made by Barbara based on Odile Laugier's reflections which were given to several new Provincials and Councils and the General Council in Rome. Reproduced in this form with Sister Odile Laugier's permission.

We are caught into this mystery…

- Based on St Mary Euphrasia's personal account and the two letters (and, perhaps, what you already know of her life), what would you say are some of the differences between her then and your now?
- In considering the letters written by St Mary Euphrasia, what do you see as characteristic of her role and perspective as shepherdess?
- Which of her qualities do you think speak into the present reality?
- Can you think of a present-day example of where and how this speaking happens or could happen?
- What purpose do you believe to be served by attending to her life, leadership and mission?
- If you were to create an introduction to the primary source material - St Mary Euphrasia's personal story and letters - what would this introduction look like? What would be your focus? What language would you use to describe her or to tell of her life? Why? (Try it!)

Barbara Davis RGS – a tribute

Barbara Davis RGS

Born into life 23.09.1939
Born into eternal life 7.02.2001

Barbara was never satisfied with the status quo. She took risks even at the cost of tension. She was controversial, always pushing us to go further, seeking out untravelled paths but at the same time being able to stay with unanswered questions.
... She helped uncover depths of shepherding in many hearts.

- RGS General Council's words about Barbara at the time of her funeral

Barbara Davis

The joys and hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Jesus Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.[16]

These words found a home in Barbara and deeply guided her in the way she lived out her Good Shepherd calling. Whether as family member,

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friend, teacher, catechist, group mother, local leader, Province leader or General Councillor, this colourful woman was enmeshed with humanity. She was attuned to persons of all ages in diverse situations and in different cultures throughout her forty years as a Good Shepherd sister. A careful listener and a clear communicator, she was alert to the need of others, especially those in pain. She responded with kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and a determination to change unjust conditions.

Barbara was a qualified teacher when she joined the Good Shepherd Sisters in February 1961. While it may have been expected that she would join a teaching order, she nevertheless chose the Good Shepherds through her experiences of taking YCW groups at Oakleigh. She recognized how her life could connect with the Good Shepherds. As she told the story:

> *I started with the girls and it was good. We did some gospel sharing and discussion together and we would talk about life and issues and so on. Sometimes they would ask me what I was doing after the meeting and I might say 'I'm going to the dance at the Dandenong Town hall'. So then we would talk about dancing and guys. It was good. I really loved those girls; their stories really touched me.*

The Good Shepherd nuns at Oakleigh also impressed her. They were down to earth and happy.

> *I felt very attracted to having my life connect with Good Shepherds. The nuns at Oakleigh impressed me. I felt they were very real. I remember one of them who was at the front, as we used to say. When she came up that long cloister at Oakleigh you could hear her singing as she came to the door.*

So Barbara's adventure in Good Shepherd mission began.

Barbara made her first profession on 14th September 1963. Her decision to follow her Good Shepherd calling was a confronting one, as just before her profession she heard that her mother had a terminal illness. She died the following March, and many times Barbara struggled with the complexities of her choices.

After her profession Barbara taught at St Euphrasia's school and worked at St Joseph's class with the younger children. It was the time of Vatican Council II. Its documents opened up new light on catechetics, Scripture, religious life and the theology the sacraments. Barbara

enthusiastically accepted the challenge of the documents and searched for new ways to live out her commitment. She attended catechetical courses and was invited to teach a new form of catechesis at the Collingwood High School and later at the Sacred Heart Class.

In the early 1970s Barbara became a group mother in the Sacred Heart Class and in 1973 began a hostel for girls in Abbotsford Street. These were times of considerable change in apostolic form, community living and prayer styles. While these years contained challenge and some turmoil, Barbara looked back on this era as *one of the most real and genuine times in my religious life.* In 1974 she was appointed as leader of an experimental community known as Alexanders, which began in Abbotsford and later moved to Brunswick. Barbara was an inspirator in this community, urging those with her to develop a form of community life which would enhance and strengthen mission.

Barbara's skills and service in leadership were further developed when she assumed leadership first in Te Horo and then in Perth. In 1978 she was appointed to the Provincial Council. Three years later she was elected as Provincial leader. To all these different positions of leadership Barbara brought a mixture of pragmatism and vision. She listened well, imagined possibilities and took opportunities to further Good Shepherd mission. With her wisdom and encouragement she enabled others to discover their gifts and to venture into new places. As Province leader she placed emphasis on formation and education at both individual and communal levels, and was always challenging herself and others to live an authentic religious life.

In addition to her work, her energetic nature found an outlet in running, attending football and cricket matches, knitting and dancing. She enjoyed social gatherings and shopping expeditions.

Her years as Province leader continued the process of discerning the maintenance and mission goals of the order in Australia, New Zealand and Tahiti. As a result, some larger communities and apostolates were closed and new ventures commenced. These decisions required courage and a responsible leadership which could cope with negative and positive reactions.

Following the completion of her term of office as Provincial in 1987 Barbara went to the United States for two years. She obtained a Master of Culture and Creation Spirituality at Berkeley, California, and then completed a Master of Theology course at Maryknoll in New York.

These studies opened in Barbara a new richness which she shared through retreats and seminars in Australia, New Zealand and overseas countries. Her specialization in the scriptural and theological understanding of Shepherding was an ongoing work and an invaluable legacy to the Congregation.

In 1991 Barbara was elected as a delegate to the General Chapter, and it was at this Chapter that she was elected a General Councillor. A new and different phase of her life began. From her new home in Rome she travelled to many countries, gaining new knowledge of Good Shepherd life and bringing with her encouragement, hopefulness and dynamism. As a member of the General Council she brought her enthusiasm and vision for Good Shepherd mission. Always a hard worker and a voracious reader, Barbara continued to challenge, question and search for new ways for Good Shepherd ministries to find relevance in a rapidly changing world. Among her significant accomplishments as a General Councillor was her work in establishing the Good Shepherd International Social Justice Committee and in helping to bring about Good Shepherd NGO [Non-Government Organization) status at the United Nations.

Following her re-election to the General Council in 1997, Barbara put energy into ongoing formation for sisters and co-workers. She recognized the importance of education and the need for a more equitable sharing of resources between provinces. Formation of lay personnel was a vital concern for her.

At a gathering in Angers in March 1999, she addressed a meeting of lay people from Good Shepherd ministries in the United States. Together they worked to clarify the universal elements of shepherding, recognizing the variety of theological and philosophical bases. Barbara finished the session by inviting the participants to step through the threshold of the shepherd's gate into new journeys. Little did she know the prophetic nature of her words. One the day following the seminar, on a journey from France to the United States, Barbara had her first seizure. She was diagnosed with a brain tumour and came home for treatment.

The last twenty-three months of her life called on a new type of courage from Barbara as she became physically weaker, more dependent on others, more vulnerable with her increasing losses. While undoubtedly she had her moments of anger, sadness and frustration, she retained an equanimity, a trust in God and a deep peace.

Barbara once described the major motivation of her life and work in these words:

> *It is that people have life and have it to the full, and to achieve that the shepherd has to lay down her life to give life. So whatever energy I have, I would really give it to the shepherding ministry.*

Barbara completed her Good Shepherd ministry on 7th February 2001. In a phrase coined by her, a *beautiful shepherdess* has passed through the threshold of the shepherd's gate into the mystery of God. ...

There are many more words which could be used when speaking of the rich, gifted person that Barbara was, and these words will be spoken in the days, months and years to come in many different gatherings. She was a woman who achieved much but who perhaps today might like to remind us that in the end it is love that counts.

I would like to conclude with lines from a poem of a North American poet and Carmelite nun, Jessica Powers. Barbara introduced me to her poetry shortly after she returned home.

Down in the valley there was such a stir:
a sparrow reached the sun.
Why had the wind and weather favoured her?
What had she ever done?
Yet since they must, they spoke the praising word,
measured her flight and paused to gasp afresh.
What was she really but a little bird,
all feather and no flesh?
Only the sun knew, and the moving air
the miracle thereof:
a bird that wings itself with resolute love
can travel anywhere.

- Jessica Powers, *The Legend of the Sparrow*

- Eulogy delivered by Anne Dalton RGS
Requiem Mass, February 2001.

Words from which Barbara drew strength in the last year of her life:

More than ever
I find myself in the hands of God.

This is what I have
wanted all my life from youth.
But now there is a difference;
the initiative is
entirely with God.

It is indeed
a profound spiritual experience
to know and
feel myself
so totally
in
God's hands.

- Fr Pedro Arrupe, SJ

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and those with whom they work.

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