

A Long Sermon for Holy Week

Part 3

The Easter Vigil : The Mystery of New Life

Herbert McCabe OP

*... because it is only Christian men
Guard even heathen things.
G.K.C.*

At the time of the full moon at the Spring Equinox the people of the Messiani extinguish all their hearth-fires and every lamp and lantern and source of light from amongst them. They gather then on the hillside at midnight and in the darkness a Holy Man strikes the new fire from the rock of flint and with this a great sacred fire is made to blaze. This new fire from darkness represents, for the Messiani, the rebirth of Messia, their dying god, and also the rebirth of the year and the coming of new life out of darkness and winter.

An image of the risen god in the form of a tall candle is then lighted from the fire to symbolise his return to life from the dead, and adorned with certain sacred signs by which past and future and all time is made to centre on this time and this place. Led by the flame of the image the whole throng then moves in procession from the fire to the place of assembly. As they go they take new flame from the image for their own torches and lanterns and they dance and shout the praises of Messia 'the new light of the world'.

When the crowd is once more assembled Messia is erected amongst green boughs and flowers and other signs of fertility and a Holy Man addresses it in song, bringing this Holy Night to coincide with the mythic nights of creation and of the birth of the Messiani people, the daylight night of the death and rebirth of God which, for the Messiani, is also the death and rebirth of Man. This is followed by the solemn chanting of the creation myths and other legends of the sacred story of the Messiani, always with the theme of darkness and the conquest of darkness by light.

Then, while two Singing Men start an hypnotic chant naming the names of the holy ones of the Messianic past, a great bath of water is

prepared which is to receive power from the Fire and the Light so that it will become the Waters of Life. Those who are to be initiated into the mysteries of the Messiani must pass through this water, and, moreover, all the people are splashed with it, for they believe that this will bring them fertility and renewed life during the coming year.

The climax is reached with the common sacred banquet of the Dying and Rising God/Man. Now from Fire and Light and Water we pass to Bread and Wine consecrated and made holy, for in consuming them together the Messiani believe that they are mystically devouring the very flesh and blood of the Dying God: their bodies are thus made one with his and share in his new risen life. When this mystery has been enacted the entire throng, men, women and children, make their way to another place for cocoa and buns.

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I think this could stand as a sample outsider's account of what goes on in the average suburban Roman Catholic church on Easter night. Let us consider what it means.

It is quite natural to see the three great days of Holy Week as three acts in a kind of passion-play, following the story of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ as three successive events. There is no harm in looking at it this way, but if we look at the history of Holy Week, at how the liturgy developed, we may see more deeply into the mystery than that.

In the first place, the Easter Vigil is not just Act 3 of a sequence. It is the oldest and was for quite a long time the only celebration of Easter. From the very earliest days we know about, the night of the resurrection was celebrated quite apart from any commemoration of Thursday or Friday. The Easter Vigil is complete in itself: it is not just a happy ending tagged on to the mystery of the Last Supper and the Cross.

The liturgical reformers associated with Vatican II, seeing the pivotal importance of the Vigil, the 'Mother of all Vigils' and the central point of the Church's year, quite rightly wanted to make it more available to people. They hoped it would become for all Christians *the* great celebration. Now the results, as is well known, have been very disappointing. In Britain and in Ireland this has been partly due to inertia. Whatever we say or write or preach, people still feel, as their parents did, that Holy Week centres on Good Friday afternoon. For a very large number of people the Easter Vigil is still 'Midnight Mass' at Easter, a kind of pale imitation of Midnight Mass at Christmas.

I think the Vatican II reforms are partly responsible for this. In the interests of making the Vigil more available they have shortened it (and that in itself was no bad thing) but in shortening it they have badly

impoverished it. The magnificent restoration of the Easter Vigil of 1956, a truly awe-inspiring piece of liturgy, has been reduced, not to a mere shadow, but to something very different from the original celebration. By hindsight I think we can now see that if the Vigil was to take a hold on people, if it was to form the centre of their consciousness and unconscious, to be the central image for them of the meaning of their existence, it could not afford to lose its magic.

This, I would complain, is just what happened in the 1970 Roman Missal. Before the restoration, just thirty years ago, the 'Vigil' was a very ramshackle affair and its meaning was badly obscured by the preposterous practice of celebrating it on Holy Saturday morning instead of at night. But, still, its strange power lay in its complexity and above all in the way it related the Christian mystery to very deep human things in a visual and almost tactile way, to strange things lurking in the depths of human consciousness. To put it as simply as possible: the old Easter Vigil was a very sexy affair, and the modern one looks as if Mrs Mary Whitehouse has been getting at it. The 1956 restoration, which brought the Vigil back to its proper place in the middle of the night, really did retain the riches of the old liturgy. It was, I think, the greatest liturgical creation of the modern Church, and fourteen years later we pretty well threw it away. Maybe I exaggerate here, but let me give you an example.

In the 1956 restoration, as in the ancient rite, the baptismal font is seen in essentially sexual terms. It is seen as the womb of Mother Church fertilised by the entry of the Holy Spirit, and this is seen in the phallic form of the lighted paschal candle entering the waters. Christ's fertilisation of the Virgin Mother Church by bringing her the Holy Spirit is compared in this liturgy to the fertilising of the *primaeva* waters, the waters of chaos, by the breath of the Spirit, in the reading from Genesis 1. So the bringing to new birth of believers in the womb of the Church is united with the bringing to birth of the universe. In the rite the priest is instructed to lower the lighted candle into the baptismal water in three stages, penetrating more deeply each time, and each time singing on a higher note: 'Descendat in hanc plenitudinem fontis virtus Spiritus Sancti'. It is quite plain that an impression of mounting excitement is meant to be visibly, tactually felt. It was a very strange and primitive ceremony in the middle of the night. Finally, when the candle has reached its deepest point, the priest is to blow three times on the surface of the water in the form of the letter Ψ (psi). (There are liturgists who say this is no more than the sign of the cross but others see it as the initial of *psyche*, life). The priest then continues 'totamque huius aquae substantiam regenerandi fecundet effectu': the latin brings out the full resonance of 'regenerandi' and 'fecundet'.

As the candle penetrates the water it is said to be entering 'hanc plenitudinem fontis': the 'fullness' (fem.) suggests the fullness of mother

earth, the coming pregnancy of the womb of Mother Church, and this womb is to be fertilised by the 'virtus' which is the Holy Spirit—the word, of course, comes from 'vir', man. The Holy Spirit is the virility through which the fullness of the womb is pregnant with new life, 'in order that the whole substance of this water may become fecund for re-birth'.

Now contrast this with the 1970 version as we have it in English: 'The priest *may*' (he doesn't have to) 'lower the Paschal Candle into the water either once or three times as he continues, "We ask you, Father, with your Son, send your Holy Spirit on the waters of this font."' It's a nice little reference to the Trinity but all that primitive fertility symbolism is gone. 'He holds the candle in the water and says: "May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life."' An unexceptionable bit of theology; but you see what I mean about Mary Whitehouse.

I think it is tragic that we are now in danger of losing the richness of the Easter celebration that was briefly restored to us thirty years ago. Instead we have a cut-price ceremony tailored to the imagination, or lack of imagination, of some Euro-theologians, and filtered down to us by a committee dedicated to putting the whole thing into the kind of suburban English guaranteed not to offend anybody by violence or sex or mystery. Here my complaint ends.

The first of the baptismal readings is the creation-myth from Genesis 1: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said "Let there be light" and there was light. And God separated the light from darkness.' Here are all the fundamental images of the Vigil: the Spirit of creativity and fertility on the waters, the light and the darkness. This poem represents God as making the world and all its inhabitants in a week. Happily, apologetes have long ago stopped trying to convince us that this 'really means' six stages or geological epochs or whatever. They have stopped alleging that it was a primitive and unsophisticated way of explaining how the world came into being. We all now recognise that it is a poem written in what, if anything, was a rather decadent period of civilisation, and, of course, the poet meant exactly what he said. He is talking about a week and his imagery depends on this. The first and most obvious point is that God is represented as finishing his creation in six days and then resting on the sabbath. The sabbath rest is interpreted in this poem as a celebration of, and even a sharing in, God's completion of his creation. It represents something being finished, something consummated. The creation poem provides a permanent symbolism for each day of the week (or rather for each night of the week, for the Hebrew day lasts from evening to evening), a symbolism made

use of by Christ himself, by the evangelists and by the liturgy.

Let us look at one detail of this. The work of creation begins on the first day, that is to say *Saturday* night. This is when the Spirit of God moves over the waters, and fertilises them, and also when God creates light and separates it from darkness. The work of creation is finished on the sixth day; and the seventh day, from Friday evening, is the day of rest, of consummation. This, of course, is the point of the Friday on which Christ is said to die. Like God at the end of his creation, he rests on Friday night: 'It is consummated', he says. The Divine Office ('Tenebrae') of Holy Saturday is full of images of sleep: it begins 'In peace itself I will sleep and take my rest'. Throughout the sabbath day he rests in the tomb. The point is stressed by John: the body must not remain on the cross on the sabbath, 'for that was a great sabbath day.' After the sabbath we come again to Saturday night, in which we have once more the night of the beginning of creation, and that is when the resurrection occurs. The day of the resurrection is the first day of the new week; as the Fathers of the Church used to say, the 'Eighth Day' of the week. The new beginning of creation follows on the completion of the old with the death of Christ. The Vigil of Easter Saturday night represents the Eighth Day, the New Creation.

From the earliest times this is what the Church has celebrated every Sunday. The early Jewish Christians, after observing the sabbath throughout Saturday, would gather to observe the feast of the Lord's resurrection on Saturday night or Sunday morning. In spite of the Lord's Day Observance Society and in spite of those Ulster Unionists who used to put padlocks on children's swings on a Sunday, the Day of the Lord is something quite distinct from the sabbath. The first man who combined the two to make Sunday into a day of rest was the Emperor Constantine of ambiguous memory; and then the resting was essentially a matter of closing the Law Courts because it was thought inappropriate to torture people on the day of the resurrection.

So the Easter Vigil has no immediate connection with Holy Thursday and Good Friday. It is the 'Christian Sunday writ large'. The earliest Christians began by meeting each week on the Day of the Lord for the reading of scripture and the breaking of bread, the celebration of the Lord's supper; and fairly soon, we do not know quite how soon, the great Lord's Day, at the time of the Passover, the anniversary of the resurrection, became a special feast; and that was the vigil and feast of Easter.

The rest of Holy Week, as I expect you know, developed from special ceremonies connected with the Holy Places in Jerusalem, and that really was something a little like a passion-play. It was a commemoration of the events of the passion and cross, and the veneration of what was believed to be the cross itself. These celebrations were clearly exciting,

dramatic and impressive—we know about them from the letters of a very enterprising 4th-century nun called Etheria who travelled to the Holy Land and described them in interesting letters to her community. Soon a version of the ceremonies spread throughout the Church, and Holy Week was gradually formed.

I have said all this not by way of a lecture on liturgical history but because it raises an important question about how we are to understand the resurrection. Are we to see the Easter Vigil as complete in itself or as Act 3 in a series? Similarly, are we to see the resurrection as something complete in itself or as the final act of a series? He was crucified; he died; he was buried; on the third day he rose from the dead: are we to see this as a sequence of events all on the same level? Certainly this seems the simplest way to see it, but a meditation on the liturgy of Holy Week may suggest other thoughts. The Easter Vigil we might think is not the commemoration of the last of a series of events but rather a celebration of the meaning of the whole series. It may be as though we had a passion-play that re-enacted the events of the passion, and then *another* play enacting the meaning of the whole thing.

This brings us to a question much discussed by Catholic scholars and others: should we see the resurrection as an historical event in the same sense as the crucifixion or burial but simply following them in time? Was the resurrection an historical event distinct from the death of Christ? I want to stress that this is something debated amongst Catholic scholars and theologians as well as others. None of them wish to deny that the resurrection took place; the question is simply its relationship to history. Was it something that happened to the corpse of Christ in the tomb as truly as the crucifixion and death happened to the living body of Christ on the cross? To put my own cards on the table, I think that it was. I think that there was an event other than the crucifixion in consequence of which the body of Christ was *not* to be found in the tomb but is transfigured and glorified. I just want to indicate that there are perfectly good and devout Catholics who believe in the reality of the resurrection as firmly as I do but would put things differently.

The resurrection was a distinct event from the crucifixion of Jesus but not, I shall suggest, a distinct event of the same sort. I think it was an event whose whole point was to show the meaning of the cross. The best picture of the resurrection is the cross. It is the evangelist John who comes nearest to identifying cross and resurrection. For him they are both the 'lifting up' of Jesus and he does not want to make it clear whether he is speaking of the cross or the resurrection. They are both the 'hour' of Jesus, the consummation of his mission from the Father. Similarly, while Luke in Acts has the first sending of the Holy Spirit from the risen Christ at Pentecost, fifty days after the passion, for John it is on the cross that Jesus first 'breathed forth his Spirit'. I do not think

that John had the slightest intention of denying an historical sequence of events (any more than he meant to deny all those miracles and parables that he never mentions); it is simply that he uses the structure he gives to the life of Jesus to bring out the meaning of what occurred. In any case, whatever we think we can discover about the historical events, we need to be clear that the cross and the resurrection are the one mystery and that we misunderstand each of them if we take them in isolation.

The cross, of course, is primarily about the failure of Jesus, about the collapse of his mission and about his identification with the most miserable of people. Because of the cross, whatever our sufferings, whatever betrayals we have to face, and whatever tragedy or misery we are caught up in, we can say not only that God knows and understands and pities us, but that he knows about it from personal experience, that he has compassion in the original sense of 'suffering with'. It is not only that as creator he must be present to all sufferers—and more present than they are to themselves—but that he himself has gone through it; he has suffered not only in our suffering but in his own suffering alongside ours. Because of the cross God is a fellow-sufferer with us, one of us; because of the cross we can have pity on God, be sorry for him. This astounding doctrine is not, of course, available to those who deny the literal divinity of the suffering man Jesus. Pity for God is something well understood by, for example, the indigenous Indian Christians of Latin America, with their tradition of intense concentration on the suffering Christ, the suffering God. It is an aspect of Catholicism that used to be treated rather patronisingly by Europeans, who saw it as some kind of vestige of pre-Christian thinking, but as it begins to make its impact on Latin American theology, in particular liberation theology, the results are truly astonishing.

The cross, then, is primarily about the defeat of God, but of course it is also a sign of triumph. In his preface to the Restored Holy Week Liturgy of 1956, Cardinal Cicognani speaks of the cross as '*nostrae redemptionis trophaeum*', the trophy of our redemption, and the words are singularly well chosen. A trophy is a sign of victory, but more than that. Originally a trophy was something very definite: it was a wooden post or stake to which you fastened the spoils that you had taken from the enemy. That is *exactly* what the cross is. Nailed to this post is a human being in whom all humanity has been wrested from the enemy, from death and sin. '*Regnavit a ligno Deus*' we sing: God rules, reigns, from the wood of the cross. It is the sign, the sacrament, of the power and triumph of God and man over death.

The popular Western practice which makes the crucifix the central Christian emblem—I mean the actual crucifix representing Jesus dying on the cross—is, it seems to me, entirely sound. It is an image of the weakness of God and the foolishness of God and the helplessness of God

which is greater than the strength and wisdom of men. I am sure that when Paul said that the weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men he did not mean that God is so strong that even his weakness is stronger than our strength: he meant that the power of God looks like weakness; and weakness—not the weakness of ineffectiveness but the weakness of love—is our best picture of the power of God. From creation itself right through to redemption the power of God is exercised not in manipulating and interfering with things but in letting them be, because the power of God is the power of love.

The cross, then, is an ambiguous symbol: a symbol both of failure and of triumph; or, rather, a symbol of triumph through the failure of Christ in love. What you give someone when you give them love is the gift of yourself. And what does that mean? What it means is that you give them space. You give them a place where they can be themselves. To give someone love is to give her herself, to give him himself, to let him be.

Impersonal things, chairs and tables and sticks and stones, have no space, no emptiness around them. They are hedged and humped around by other things. When you come to the end of this thing there is another thing immediately outside it, so to speak. There is no space in the impersonal world, it is merely that some things are thinner than others. Now, we too can be hedged and cribbed and cabined and confined by things and by other people. What gives us elbow room, what gives us space to grow and become ourselves, is the love that comes to us from another. Love is the space in which to expand, and it is always a gift. In this sense we receive ourselves at the hands of others. Of course this is true in innumerable ways—we have to be born of others, for a start—but our growth, our personal development, also takes place only in the space that others provide by their love. It is a space that we cannot just take for granted but which, in another sense, we can only take for granted to us by someone who loves us.

It is because of the love of parents and others that children are able to grow and become themselves; and of course in the absence of this love they fail. To give love is to give the precious gift of nothing, space. To give love is to let be.

The power of God is pre-eminently the power to let things be. 'Let there be light'—the creative power is just the power that, because it results in things being what they are, in persons being who they are, cannot interfere with creatures. Obviously creating does not make any difference to things, it lets them be *themselves*. Creation is simply and solely letting things be, and our love is a faint image of that. The cross does not show us some temporary weakness of God that is cancelled out by the resurrection. It says something permanent about God: not that God eternally suffers but that the eternal power of God is love; and this

as expressed in history must be suffering.

The cross, then is an ambiguous symbol of weakness and triumph, and it is just as important to see the ambiguity in the resurrection. If the cross is not straightforward failure, neither is the resurrection straightforward triumph. The resurrection is primarily about victory, as the cross is primarily about failure, but the victory is not unambiguous; this is brought out very clearly in the stories of the appearances of the risen Christ.

The pure triumph of the resurrection belongs to the Last Day, to the Parousia, the final consummation when we shall all share in Christ's resurrection. That will not, however, be in any sense an event in history but rather the end of history. It could no more be an event enclosed by history than the creation could be an event enclosed by time. But when we look at resurrection as within history, when we look at Christ's resurrection from the tomb, it is ambiguous.

May I say something a little enigmatic here? We can think of Christ's resurrection, if we like, as the *first* resurrection, the first-fruits of the dead, that is to be followed by ours when we will join him later on. That is one simple and obvious way of looking at it. But perhaps we could think of his resurrection and ours as *the* resurrection, the victory of love over death, seen either within history (that is Christ's resurrection) or beyond history (that is the general resurrection). "Your brother" said Jesus to Martha "will rise again". Martha said "I know he will rise again at the resurrection at the last day". Jesus said: "I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die". Christ's resurrection from the tomb then would be just what the resurrection of mankind, the final consummation of human history, looks like when projected within history itself, just as the cross is what God's creative love looks like when projected within history itself. Christ's resurrection is the sacrament of the last times.

I suggest that we need to bring to bear on the resurrection something like the kind of thinking that Catholics have traditionally brought to bear on the eucharist. Just as the transformation of the bread and wine involves no physical or chemical change in them but a change at a much deeper level (as creation itself involves a 'change' at a much deeper level), so we should not see the resurrection of Christ to glory in terms of physical or chemical change, the mere 'resuscitation of a corpse'. Like transubstantiation, the resurrection can have a date without being an event enclosed by history, without being part of the flow of change that constitutes our time. Moreover, just as for the mainstream Catholic tradition the colour and size and location of the consecrated host are signs, and not the colour, size and location of the body of Christ that is sacramentally present, so we should surely say that the visible and

tangible appearances experienced by the disciples after the resurrection are signs, and not the physical appearance of the risen Christ who was really present to them. If we see the post-resurrection appearances in such sacramental terms, we see them to be as real as the eucharist but no more physical than the eucharist, and we need no longer seek to make a consistent single physical story of them.

The resurrection from the tomb, then, is ambiguous in that it is both a presence and an absence of Christ. The resurrection surely does not mean that Christ simply walked out of the tomb as though nothing had happened. On the contrary, as we shall see, he is more present, more *bodily* present, than that; but he is nevertheless locally or physically absent in a way that he was not before.

It is, of course, essential to the Catholic tradition that the resurrection of Christ is bodily; that is to say that it is Christ himself, this human bodily being who is risen. The resurrection does not cancel but rather crowns the incarnation, the enfleshing of the Word. It is not, for example, that some thought about Christ, some inspiring memory of him, lives on in the minds of his followers. The message of the resurrection is that the incarnate Christ is alive and is with us. 'Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum': I am risen; I am *with* you.

I think I should say a word about bodies and 'being with'. One of the things that gets in the way of our understanding bodies is that at school we heard so much about bodies travelling with a uniform velocity or accelerating or colliding with other bodies; the word has come to be associated with impersonal things or objects. One disastrous consequence of this is that we begin to think of 'my body' as the impersonal, objective bit of me and to locate 'my self' somewhere else, in some non-bodily bit of me. We need to take a new and candid look at what it means to speak of 'my body'.

Think of a telephone. There it is on the table, an object occupying a bit of your world, part of your visual space. You can do things to it, move it or dust it. Now what happens when the telephone rings? You pick it up and start talking and as you do this the telephone ceases to be an object in front of you, a part of your world; it becomes a means of communication with somebody, a means by which you are with somebody. As it does that it disappears. If it is working properly you do not see yourself as talking to a telephone; you are talking to someone by means of a telephone. It is true that you can give an account of what is happening in terms of the vibrations in your throat causing variations in a magnetic field and so on, but what you experience is not, normally, making changes in the telephone, but the presence of the person at the other end of the line. The telephone is not now an object to you, it is the way you are with another. I mention this because it seems to me that in the case of your body this situation is reversed. A telephone is most of

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the time a thing, an object before you, but just sometimes it becomes a medium of communication with the rest of the world. Your body, on the contrary, is normally experienced as a medium of communication and is just occasionally treated as an object, a part of the world. The ordinary way in which you are conscious of being bodily, conscious of 'having a body', is being conscious of it as your way of being present to the world. Your body is first of all a means of communication and indeed it is the source of all other forms of communication. Telephones and books and satellites are only media of communication in so far as they are used by human bodies. Nothing uses the body, except in the sense that we may speak of one part of it being used by the whole—'He used his left hand to twist the knob'. It is because the body is the source of communication that we say it is alive, that it has a soul. The body that communicates by conventional signs, by symbols it has not just inherited but created, by language, is humanly alive, it has a human soul.

It is because of the body that we make signs and symbols and the whole of what we call culture and the specifically human form of social life. That is why all human symbols are in some way commensurate with our bodies. Civilisation is just the network of communication between bodies. It is one of the peculiarities of the human body that, unlike other animals, we can extend our bodiliness outside our skin: the city is nothing other than the human body or bodies extended outside the skin of the human animal. Primarily, then, our bodies are our way of being present.

A special thing about Jesus in Palestine was the intensity of his bodily presence—which of course included his speaking. People experienced him as so present to them that they felt altogether accepted; and because they were sure of acceptance and forgiveness they were able to accept and forgive each other. That is how Jesus did, for a while, create around him a group of people who in varying degrees lived in his presence and in this presence were touched by the God who is love. In his bodily presence for a few years this was possible for a few people.

Because our body is primarily our way of being present, our fundamental form of communication, absence always or nearly always means bodily absence. That is why death is the most extreme form of absence. Love, friendship, requires bodily presence. As I have said, speech is a bodily presence and so it is possible to have a kind of presence from a distance by letters and telephones and other ways of conveying words; we don't have to be actually touching or within reach all the time. But when the beloved is away we long for more direct forms of presence. We cannot give an account of human love and friendship except in terms of bodies.

Now, the resurrection of Christ means first of all that we are in his presence, his bodily presence, and this, of course, is what we celebrate

and symbolise in the sacraments of the Church, centring on the eucharist, the sacrament of his body: we sacramentally come in contact with the body of Christ, touch the body of Christ; our bodies are linked with his. We celebrate it too in the New Testament, with the declaration of stories of the appearances of the risen Christ. These are all ways of celebrating that Christ is alive, bodily alive, and therefore with us. But, as I was saying in the first section of the Sermon, we are only in contact sacramentally with Christ through a special depth in our intercommunion with each other. Christ is present but ambiguously present; what we see, the presence we experience, is the presence of each other. Our resurrection at the end of time will mean that we are no longer sacramentally but unambiguously present to Christ; but in the meantime his presence is also a kind of absence—‘We proclaim his death until he comes’.

Notice how in all the stories of the resurrection appearances the signs are those of bodily presence—Jesus eats and drinks with his disciples, he asks Thomas to touch him; and yet it is just as clear that this is not an ordinary bodily presence. It is important in the Thomas story that Thomas does not in fact touch him but reaches into his bodily presence by faith. It is important that Mary Magdalene does not at first recognise him. Here is a bodily presence not too tenuous but too intense to be accommodated within our common experience.

It is this presence that we now celebrate in celebrating the resurrection, a new kind of bodily life that we are sharing but one that in this age is only visible sacramentally. When the disciples met with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus they did not recognise him even though they were drawn to him by his exposition of the scriptures. It was only when they stopped for the night to share a meal with him that they knew him in the breaking of bread. It is in the breaking of bread, the eucharist and the whole shared christian life, that we know the Christ who is with us. ‘And immediately he vanished from their sight’. The Emmaus story is a comment on all the resurrection appearance stories: once we have recognised the presence of Christ in the eucharist, in our celebration of the sacrificial love of Christ by which we are able to love each other, there is no need for any other appearance. We are to find the risen Christ, find our own risen life, in our unity with each other and with humankind, the friendship we symbolise and seal in the eucharist.

We encounter the risen Christ, so the Gospels tell us, in two ways, in two great signs, each a sign both of the sin of the world and of the love of God: the poor and the sacraments. The poor are primarily a sign of the sin of the world: the oppressed, the homeless, the naked, the hungry, all those who stand in need of our help, unmask our world for what it is: a world structured by sin. In these we find Christ in judgement on our world. This is the point of Matthew’s vision of the judgement: if you

want to see what it means for God to be in judgement on the world look at the poor; that is where Christ is judging, and judging by the standard of the love of God. Here we have a visibility of the risen Christ: the love which gives judgement for the poor. The second sign is the Church and its sacraments, in which we celebrate the coming of the Kingdom of love which contrasts with our world and into which our world is being transformed; and yet, as we saw earlier, this is a celebration that belongs intrinsically to this world of sin.

The kingdom to which we are dedicated in our baptism, which is founded on the new bodily life of the resurrection of Christ, is a life in which we will encounter Christ neither in the poor nor in the sacraments. For there will be neither poverty nor the sacred symbols of religion in the coming Kingdom. The Church will have withered away, poverty will be no more. Then we will be fully and bodily present to our risen Lord, sharing in his transformed humanity and in his divinity for eternity.

The Destabilising Poverty Crisis

Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns

The opening address at the 18th World Conference of the Society for International Development (S.I.D.), Rome, 1 July 1985

Together with the Catholic Bishops of the United States (in their first draft of the pastoral letter on the economy) I would like to affirm:

‘Every perspective on economic life ... must be shaped by two questions:

— What does it do *for* people?

— What does it do *to* people?

The poor have a special claim on our concern because they are particularly vulnerable...’

This World Conference is at the same time an opportunity and a responsibility. It is an opportunity to take up again one of the most difficult of world debates: the relation between the North and the South. And it is a responsibility because even though this Conference is one of