DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY

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UNIT THREE
SESSION THREE:
The person as imagining

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The soul never thinks without an image.[1]

Fortis imaginatio generat causam.[2]

It is not too much but too little imagination that causes illness.[3]

While I was watching, thrones were set in place and one most venerable took his seat.[4]

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.[5]

[1] Aristotle's *De Anima,* translation D W Hamlyn, Clarendon Press, 1968, 431a 16.
[2] Latin proverb meaning literally "A strong imagination generates the cause". In other words, imagination has the power to set you in motion towards some end – it causes things to happen.
[3] William Lynch, *Images of Hope,* Notre Dame University, 1974, 243.
[4] Daniel 7:9.
[5] Revelation 21:1. This text implies not only human imagining at work, but also remembering and anticipating. In Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 the phrase is used as a symbol of the new messianic age: the fresh start for which the later prophets long. For Paul the shape of the eventual future has become clearer: all creation will be freed from the dominance of corruption and transformed (cf Romans 8:19).

THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**** Imagining is the process whereby we create and process images internally, consciously or unconsciously, and is a critical part of the life formation process, for better or worse.***

**** Imagining is probably always occurring within us, whether we are awake or asleep, whether we realise it or not, whether we choose it or not.***

**** We can only ever exercise limited control over the imagining process.***

****Imagining is always interacting with our thinking, willing, remembering, anticipating and feeling at different levels of consciousness.***

The power of the image

Have you ever seen the eyes of a small child light up when you settle down with a story and begin, "Once upon a time …"? Children, typically, delight in a story.[6] Adults do too, if they have not been completely deformed by the processes of living in a rationalistic and functionalistic culture that has forgotten how to tell stories. One of the reasons stories can be so enchanting and captivating is the medium with which they work: Stories appeal first to the imagination. Can you imagine a story that is utterly devoid of imagery, makes no appeal to the imagination and appeals entirely to the intellect? The idea of an utterly rational story is utterly irrational.

When we speak of imagination in these and similar circumstances we are probably including more than the faculty of imagination. For example, we might say someone is an imaginative person, or that this or that person lacks imagination. In such statements, we are probably making some general assessment of their ability to engage people, events and things in more less constructive and/or creative ways.

Those described as people of imagination tend to be people who think and choose and remember and anticipate in an open, creative, expansive sort of a way, interacting more or less ingeniously with the people, events and things of their world. Such people come up with inventive ways of dealing with issues, they think "outside the square," they see alternatives and other possibilities that the rest of us miss, they find a way forward even when there is, apparently, no way forward.

Those described as people lacking in imagination tend to be people who think and choose and remember and anticipate in predictable and limited, even constrained ways, they tend to interact with people events and things in a fairly staid manner, governed more by routine than reflection. If there is no way forward according to the

[6] The psychiatrist Bruno Bettleheim explores well the power of the story with children in his book, *The Uses of Enchantment*.

routines and rules, then that's that.

Let us see if we can be a little more precise. Consider the following sorts of examples of imagination at work:

a. Imagination opens up worlds of meaning and possibility

Stories, legends, movies, games and the like depend on imagining – ie the generating and processing of images, implicitly and explicitly. Through imagining we can be in another time in history or in a world that does not yet exist; we can encounter dark forces and be (safely) terrified and we can be swept up in the magic of a moment of romance or triumph; we can be ushered into the incongruities and ambivalences we normally overlook, and made to laugh heartily,[7] or drawn into the darker reaches of human existence and made to silently weep; we can be awakened to insights about ourselves and our world and we can be purged by the catharsis of a great tragedy presented on stage or screen or on the pages of a book.[8] In and through the imagination we can find a very different access to the world, a whole other dimension of reality can unfold.[9] Once the imagination is mobilised – whether it be in the child or adult – the normal strictures of time and place, the normal logic we expect of daily life, restrict us no more.

[7] Recall the effect of a good cartoon, for example. A good joke probably works on much the same principle of going straight to the imagination through which feelings are mobilized, along with thoughts and memories and anticipations. The important thing is the power of the image as the point of engagement.

[8] The English word *catharsis* comes from the Greek word *katharsis*, meaning *purification*. Aristotle held that the function of tragedy performed on the stage is a purging of the viewer's emotions of pity and fear. See observations of Rollo May in "Snippets for Meditation" in these notes.

[9] The power of imagination has sometimes been used to very good effect through so-called simulation games. In simulation games people are asked to play roles in a set situation and experience what that is like. In this way stereotypes can be broken, rigid boundaries lifted and people can actually come to see themselves and the world in new ways. Because of the power of such "games," it is extremely important that people do not play roles close to those they normally live and do get well de-briefed after the role play. A particularly powerful example of this is found in the work of retired American elementary school teacher, Jane Elliott. In order to allow her fourth graders to learn something of the destructiveness of racism, she introduced them to a simulation game which became known as "Blue Eyes Brown Eyes". Those with brown eyes were told they were better than those with blue eyes; those with neither brown or nor blue eyes were simply asked to stand aside. The effects on the children, positive and negative, were quite marked. See internet article, "The Eyes of Jane Elliott." See also the web site http://www.horizonmag.com/4/jane-elliott.asp.

b. The power of the image in advertising

The commercial world has made great use of the power of images in our lives. Every business must have a logo! If you are in London or New York, Sydney or Hong Kong and you see "The Golden Arches" of McDonald's it tells you a familiar story. Similarly the Shell Oil Company's famous shell symbol, or the Coca Cola image or "The Flying Kangaroo" of Qantas, each tells a story immediately we see it. These images *do something* to people. The viewer is moved, even if it is just to avert to the presence of the image and note it as something familiar. And it all happens in an instant. An effective logo targets, not the mind but the imagination. The person as thinking might be mobilised, more or less, later, even after the person as feeling has been mobilised.[10]

c. The media's use of images

Publishers of newspapers and magazines know the power of a good photograph or drawing or cartoon. People who can produce these images with a particular flair are in great demand. A good picture tells a story very powerfully. Television reporters endeavour to give their reports against a backdrop of images that support what they are saying. When reporters do not have the opportunity to show the listener an image – as happens on the radio for example – the reporter must use words that conjure the absent images. And the good reporters do this well, combining the art of storytelling with the business of conveying hard facts, with the former confirming rather than confusing the latter.

d. Societies, cultures and nations use images

Nations and cultures have images which both express and form their lives. Flags, paintings, photographs,[11] buildings, rituals, myths and symbols all give expression to, and help to form – for better or worse – the collective psyche and the self-image of a people. Rollo May reminds us of their function when he writes:

> *We forget at our peril that man is a symbol making creature; and if the symbols (or myths, which are a pattern of symbols) seem arid and dead, they*

[10] Note the power of impulse buying. Hence the importance of effective images and placement of articles in the supermarket to maximize the impulse.

[11] Note, for example, the power of the photograph of the flag-planting on Iwo Jima during World War II. This had an immense psychological impact on the Americans. Clint Eastwood's 2006 film, "The Flags of our Fathers," offers a new and challenging interpretation of this event and therefore the photo. See also the famous photo of Kim Phuc Phan Thi, fleeing her Vietnamiese village after a napalm attack by the US air force, June 8, 1972. Kim now travels the world and is immediately recognised and accepted as an ambassador of peace.

are to be mourned rather than denied. The bankruptcy of symbols should be seen for what it is, a way station on the path of despair.[12]

It may be a useful exercise, for example, to consider the images by which we, in Australia today, endeavour to express ourselves as a people.[13] Nations and cultures, like individuals and small groups, can also use images to deal well or ill with other nations and cultures. For example, propaganda might use images of "the enemy" to reduce them to sub-human beings in the psyche of "the allies", thus making it easier – even noble – to obliterate them and perhaps punish them and make them suffer before they die. Perhaps more subtly, a culture can repeatedly present images – through art, news, entertainment, school texts and so on – of a sub-group in the same culture which promotes a stereotype. This may be a way of keeping that sub-group at a safe and manageable distance. For example, the black American singer and activist, Paul Robeson, walked out of the 1936 premiere of "Showboat" – in which he sang "Ole Man River" – because he felt demeaned by the way he was represented as a black man in that film.[14]

Imagination and fantasy

William Lynch makes a helpful distinction between *imagination* and *fantasy*. He describes imagination in the following terms, contrasting it with mere fantasy:

(Imagination is) the sum total of all the forces and faculties in the human person that are brought to bear upon our concrete world to form proper images of it. … the first task of such an imagination, if it is to be healing, is to find a way through fantasy and lies into fact and existence. … What the imagination does in its own way is to make a bold and difficult passage through darkness or fantasy or lies of all kinds, in order to build or discover a reality. In tragedy what is built or discovered is the finiteness of man – the absolute fact of it – after passage through the dreams of a Macbeth or a Lear.

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[12] Rollo May, *Power and Innocence*, Fontana Books, 1976, 70.

[13] There seems to be an ambivalence in Australia about the images we claim. For example, we talk fondly of an interior geography – "the outback" – that most of us have never experienced and will never experience. In fact, if the truth be told, we are deeply afraid of that interior landscape. Consider the common images presented to us in magazines, on billboards and buses and through the various news media – do *you* identify with what comes through as thematic there? Thematic in these images would be such messages as "young is better than old," "thin is beautiful," "mastery is success," "celebrities are heroes," "those who possess more are to be envied" and so on. What other themes do you see and hear?

[14] Perhaps we in Australia have done this with the aboriginal peoples? If that is the case, then an essential part of the challenge for white Australians in regard to the aboriginal peoples now is one of re-forming the imagination. When Paul Robeson was invited to the premiere of "Show Boat" (1951), in which he starred and sang the famous "Ol' Man River," he walked out in disgust at the way they had used him to portray the black person.

Or imagination discovers the existence and reality of time, or of other people, or of death, or of any fact in the surrounding darkness. In this, its first task, the imagination conquers fantasy.[15]

Lynch reminds us of the categories of *formative* and *deformative* we have used throughout our discussions of the various intra-formative powers – thinking, willing, remembering and anticipating. Fantasy, as Lynch uses it here, could be described as *deformative imagining*. That is, this mysterious and subtle power of imagining is used to evade rather than face reality.

In this context Lynch gives us another useful insight. He speaks of "the absolutizing instinct."[16] This can be the enemy of the imagination because it can make the part the whole – a single event or word or disappointment, for example, becomes *the whole of life*.[17] In this way also, means get transformed into ends, the relative becomes the absolute and the boundaries between the possible and the impossible become hopelessly confused. Lynch argues that this is an ever-present human tendency. We only have to reflect on our own experience and watch the way human systems work to verify what he is saying. Under this "absolutizing instinct"

everything assumes a greater weight than it has, and becomes a greater burden. I wish to emphasize this quality of weight in everything that comes from the operation of the absolutizing instinct, and I want to forewarn about the burden it makes of everything. The absolutizing instinct is the father of the hopeless and adds that special feeling of weight that hopelessness attaches to everything it touches. It is, in general, the creator of hopeless projects and the creator of idols.[18]

Again we could point to *deformative imagining* – the generator of idols and unreal and destructive images – versus *formative imagining* – the generator of images that connect us with what is real. The lie entraps. The truth liberates. Listen to the ruminations of Graham Greene's Whiskey Priest as he lies in a darkened cell full of other people:

When you visualized a man or woman carefully, you could always begin to feel pity - that was a quality God's image carried with it. When you saw

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[15] William Lynch, *op cit*, 243 and 244.

[16] Cf op cit, 105-125.

[17] Thus we have the expression, "A storm in a tea cup" or "It's not a big deal, you know". It may be useful for us to reflect on the times when we are most prone to blow things out of proportion. It is a form of oppression – of self and eventually others. It is also a misuse of the imagination and therefore a good use of the imagination is probably somewhere near the heart of the desired transformation. It might also be useful to think of the kinds of people who are most likely to be subject to this deforming imagining. For example, enthusiasts and "either-or" types might be particularly vulnerable? Might it have a relationship to the experience of depression? Might it also be connected to both remembering and anticipating?

[18] William Lynch, *op cit*, 106.

the lines at the corners of the eyes, the shape of the mouth, how the hair grew, it was impossible to hate. Hate was just a failure of imagination.[19]

The Person as imagining – transcendent and functional possibilities

We can think of imagining as an *intra-formative power which enables us to participate in the formation mystery by creating and processing images.* As always, as we create, we are created – we create images by the power of our imagination and images simply emerge by the same power and in this we are changed, for better or worse. Imagination – like the other intra-formative powers – will not leave us untouched or unchanged.

The person as imagining manifests the radical interdependence of the transcendent and functional possibilities of life formation. The person as imagining as *transcendent possibility* is a potential to be opened to greater possibilities in the context of the Transcendent itself. As transcendent possibility the power of imagining is immense, as it interacts with our thinking, willing, remembering, anticipating and feeling. The imagination, in its ability to break boundaries allows us to know wider horizons than those that seem most obviously present to us.[20] My sense of being grounded in the Great Mystery relativises whatever may be present concretely or may emerge – attractive or unattractive, violent or peaceful, pleasant or unpleasant. For example, with the aid eof imagination I can effectively situate myself within the infinite horizons of the Great Mystery and break free of the oppressive limitations of an isolated, individualistic existence.

The person as imagining in this way is epitomized by a more or less gracious and free acknowledgement of all that might be, a radical choice to affirm the genuine possibilities and be open to *the more than* that is latent in every situation. In interaction with thinking, willing, remembering and anticipating, imagining allows us to recognize the whole of reality as evocative, as beckoning us beyond, inviting us to walk more deeply into the real. This is enabled by a conviction that it is all potentially transformable and transforming in the light of the Great Mystery. The transcendent possibility, in other words, allows us to situate and contextualize our imagining in a life-giving way. Imagining thus supports remembering and anticipating in giving birth to hope. It draws a clear boundary between limit and impossibility on the one hand and promise and possibility on the other. It finds possibility in limits and never allows the impossible to invade and contaminate the possible.

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[19] Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, Penguin Books, 1971, 131. Recall a suggestion made earlier in this course: Think of other people – *imagine* them – as tragic-comic stories like you.

[20] Prisoners speak of using their imaginations to keep the tiny space of their prison cell from crushing them psychologically. Thus they recall people, places and events or re-tell movies or make up stories. Brian Keenan's *Evil Cradling* is a good example.

The person as imagining as *functional possibility* is a potential to use various items of information and employ intelligence, memory, anticipation and various skills, to live in the present moment without being a prisoner of that moment, to develop useful and practical alternatives to what is. The person as imagining is thus grounded in the immediate and the concrete. The person as imagining in this way is epitomized by the ability to see what is happening offstage, as it were, and make appropriate applications and generally engage the world in efficient and practical ways by being inventive. The functional possibility, in other words, allows us to situate ourselves in useful and competent ways in the world.

It is essential to see the transcendent and functional dimensions as necessarily interdependent. The transcendent is the ground out of which we live. The functional enables us to get on with the business and tasks of living in practical and realistic ways. The latter is the servant of the former and must always emerge within the context of the former.

The person as imagining is also the person as thinking … willing … remembering … anticipating … feeling … at different levels of consciousness. We should also note that the imagination is more powerful in some people than it is in others.

Imagination and behaviour change

Medical personnel have successfully used guided imagery to treat pain. A common effect of this kind of exercise is, apart from pain reduction, a generally better attitude and ability to cope with the stresses of the disease.[21] Similar practices are used to help people relax. In this context we could mention the well attested works of Herbert Benson (*The Relaxation Response*) and Patricia Carrington (*Freedom in Meditation*). Eugene Gendlin has a sequel to his book *Focusing* called *Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams*. It is a helpful approach towards employing the imagination in promoting self-awareness without becoming too caught up in the imagery of dreams or the theories of dreaming. And we have already made mention above of simulation games and their recourse to imagination as a way through to new experiences.

One author – Arnold Lazarus – suggests some practical ways to employ our imaginations.[22] He argues that, between something happening – the stimulus – and our behaviour in regard to that happening – the response – there is intervening imagery. This can give us a key to behavioural change. He writes:

> *Words, ideas, values, attitudes, and beliefs, are all replete with imagery. Find the images and you will understand the behaviour. Furthermore, find the*

[21] Ainslie Meares' best selling book, *Relief Without Drugs*, is one of a number in this field.
[22] Cf Arnold Lazarus, *In The Mind's Eye: The Power of Imagery for Personal Enrichment*, Rawson Associates Publishers, 1977.

images and, if you so desire, you will probably be able to change the feelings and the behaviour.[23]

Lazarus offers the following practical suggestions:

- "If you wish to accomplish something in reality, first picture yourself achieving it in imagination".[24]
- Similarly, if you practice something in your imagination it is bound to have an effect on the real situation.[25]
- Positive imagery can help us, for example, deal with a potentially difficult encounter with someone in a more effective way.
- At the very least, it may help us to be better disposed to that person, less on edge, less inclined to say and do things that might exacerbate an already difficult situation;
- Lazarus says "the things we fear in reality, we also fear in imagination. … The things we no longer fear in imagination will also not disturb us in the actual situation".[26]
- Positive or active imagining can also assist us to transform our remembering. For example, we may remember a difficult or troubling moment be re-imagining it with a strong and trusted person present. In this imaginative remembering a troubling past event may take on a completely different aspect.

Another author – Roberto Assagioli – offers insights similar to those of Arnold Lazarus.[27] Assagioli suggests four laws:

- "Images or mental pictures and ideas tend to produce the physical conditions and the external acts that correspond to them";[28]

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[23] Arnold Lazarus, *op cit*, 35-36. He cites the first century Stoic philosopher Epictetus: "What disturbs men's minds is not events but their judgements on events. … and so when we are hindered or disturbed or distressed, let us never lay the blame on others, but on ourselves, that, on our own judgements" (35). If images are such a significant part of the life formation process, one would have to wonder about individuals who constantly feed on pornographic images or images of violence. We might also wonder about the effects of video games – which seem to have a preponderance of violent imagery – on the life formation of our children.

[24] Arnold Lazarus, *op cit*, 73.

[25] Arnold Lazarus, *op cit*, 67.

[26] Arnold Lazarus, *op cit*, 82. Of course, there are some things that we *should* fear. It would be a deformative use of imagination to remove this fear. On the other hand, there may be inordinate or inappropriate fears that are debilitating and these may quite rightly be the subject of this "desensitization" process as Lazarus calls it.

[27] Roberto Assagioli, *The Act Of Will*, Penguin Books, 1976. Assagioli is the founder of a school of psychology called "Psychosynthesis". See also Piero Ferrucci, *What We May Be: The Visions and Techniques of Psychosynthesis*, Turnstone Press, 1982.

[28] Roberto Assagioli, *op cit*, 51. "Every image has in itself a motor element" (51). "The will can be used purposefully and consciously by the individual to choose, evoke and concentrate on the

- "Attitudes, movements and actions tend to evoke corresponding images and ideas";[29]
- "Ideas and images tend to awaken emotions and feelings that correspond to them";[30]
- "Emotions and impressions tend to awaken and to intensify ideas and images that correspond to or are associated with them";[31]

Assagioli reminds us that there is an interdependence and dynamic relatedness between ideas, images, feelings, attitudes and behaviours. They may link up in deformative and self-repeating ways. It is possible for us to enter that cycle and break it with alternative images and ideas. Assagioli writes:

> *Great is the power of images, and they can be said to constitute a necessary intermediary between the will and the other psychological functions. ... The will can learn to direct the imagination to a considerable extent; to achieve this, systematic exercises and training are helpful.*[32]

images and ideas that will help the actions desired" (52).
[29] Roberto Assagioli, *op cit*, 52.
[30] Roberto Assagioli, *op cit*, 53.
[31] Roberto Assagioli, *op cit*, 54.
[32] Roberto Assagioli, *op cit*, 194.

CHRISTIAN ARTICULATION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**** The power of imagining allows us to use images and such related structures as symbols and myths and stories and various artistic expressions, to express, celebrate, foster and thus enhance our relationship with God in Christ.***

The Jewish Scriptures

It might be as well to begin this part of the reflection by noting something that is sometimes badly misinterpreted. In the Book of Exodus we have the so-called "Decalogue" or "Ten Commandments".[33] The people are instructed to worship the God of the Exodus alone; they are to have no carved images or likenesses of anything in heaven or on the earth in the waters or even under the earth.[34] It is difficult to see this as an injunction forbidding the full expression of human imagination in our dealings with God. It is reasonable to see it as an injunction against idolatry. The person as imagining – like the person as thinking, the person as willing, the person as remembering, the person as anticipating – can of course slip into idolatry. But idolatry must not be linked in any essential or necessary way with imagining as such. Idolatry is about a means that has become an end. At the heart of idolatry is a process of absolutizing the relative. Imagining is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Images and symbols and rituals and the like, can be treated as ends, can be absolutized and therefore turned into idols. But they can also be wonderful enriching means by which we come to deep encounters with each other and the Great Mystery revealed in the burning bush (see Exodus 3:1-15).

The essence of this commandment – and the one that followed, concerning incanting the name – is the preservation of the utter otherness of the God of the Covenant. It is an issue of right relationship with the Great Mystery God of the Exodus. It is saying, in other words: "Don't you dare think you can control me. I am with you as who I am. Trust me! The pagans make images of their gods

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[33] Cf Exodus 20:1-17. See also Deuteronomy 5:6-21 for a different rendition. Two different systems for dividing the commandments into ten have been used. The Greek Fathers divided Exodus 20:1-17 as follows – verses 2-3, 4-6, 7, 8-11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. The Orthodox and Reformed Churches follow this schema. The Catholic and Lutheran Churches follow the schema drawn up by St Augustine as follows – verses 3-6, 7, 8-11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17^a, 17^b.

[34] This injunction has at times been taken as an absolute prohibition on religious imagery and symbolism. In the 7^{th} and 8^{th} centuries, in both the East and the West, there was a strong movement to rid the Church of all images. Fortunately that movement was defeated. However, a similar movement was spearheaded in the 17^{th} century by Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) – a convinced Calvinist – and the Puritans. They would countenance nothing by way of ornamentation in the places of worship. Many church buildings in this Puritan tradition thus came to resemble more a court room than a place of worship.

and they incant magical formulae to exercise control over them. That must never happen with you!"

What is condemned here is *deformative imagining*. We can say with absolute certitude that God would not give us such a wonderful gift as imagination and then say it has no place in our relationship within the Covenant. All of our gifts – *formative imagining* included – must be available to us in expressing, celebrating, deepening and maintaining our relationship with this ultimately unknowable and utterly uncontrollable God of the Exodus, the same as it belongs at the heart of all our other relationships.

The Jewish Scriptures themselves, as a text, bear this out. Almost every page presents us with some sort of imagery. The Bible appeals to our imagination like any good story. Consider the imagery in the story of creation where human beings are said to be made in the image and likeness of God[35] and the story of "the fall" – one of the most insightful pieces of literature ever written.[36] The central story of the Exodus depends powerfully on all sorts of imagery to convey the immense and mysterious truth of God's action there. The Christian tradition, in turn, uses that imagery freely – and very appropriately and effectively – in the baptismal and Easter liturgies. Indeed, the image of the desert and the journeying there with the Great Mystery, remains a psychologically and spiritually powerful image to this present day.

The Prophets use images to great effect.[37] The Ark of the Covenant and the Temple are also remarkably powerful images in the lives of the people – images that do not displace Yahweh but images that are ongoing reminders to the people of the Great Promise of God to be in their midst from generation to generation, reminders too of the Covenant and its implications. The Psalms, like all good poetry, teem with imagery.

It is hard to give a full account of the manifold images of Yahweh used throughout the Jewish Scriptures – for example Yahweh is "creator,"[38] "comforting mother,"[39] "jilted husband,"[40] and "powerful warrior."[41] If we try to

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[35] Cf Genesis 1. Not only are human beings made in the image of God, they have the power to procreate and thus "make" others in that same image. Herein lies the essence of human dignity – human beings, unlike any of the other creatures, are called to be co-creators with the Creator.

[36] Cf Genesis 3. Note: Just because we refer to these accounts as "stories" we are not thereby suggesting they are not representations of truth. The most obvious way to represent the truth is to use factual language. But in our struggles to speak the truth, we soon run out of words if we confine ourselves to the merely factual. The more subtle and deeper the truth is, the more we must turn to metaphor, poetry, paradox, symbol, myth and story. These are often better vehicles of truth than are the words of factual language. Cf Michael Whelan, "Thinking About Thinking" in *Without God All Things Are Lawful*, St Pauls, 1995, 115-126.

[37] Cf For example Jeremiah 28:10, 51:63; Ezekiel 3:24-5:4; Zechariah 11:15. The whole life of the Prophet Hosea – who is asked to marry a prostitute – is a stark image.

[38] Cf For example Genesis 1:1-31.

[39] Cf For example Isaiah 66:12-13.

[40] Cf For example Hosea 2:1-24.

[41] Cf For example Psalm 144.

read the Jewish Scriptures without employing our imaginations, we will not begin to grasp the momentous things told there. Apart from anything else, our God-given power to imagine might save us from the curse of fundamentalism.

The Christian Scriptures

The Christian Scriptures continue to appeal to the human imagination every bit as much as the Jewish Scriptures do. Perhaps the best basis for this claim is found in the way Jesus taught: He instructed mostly by way of parables. Jesus clearly had an extraordinary ability to pick the image that could evoke a marvelous journey of discovery, once the hearer let it inside his or her imagination. Paul Ricoeur observes:

> *To listen to the Parables of Jesus, it seems to me, is to let one's imagination be opened to the new possibilities disclosed by the extravagance of these short dramas. If we look at the Parables as at a word addressed first to our imagination rather than to our will, we shall not be tempted to reduce them to mere didactic devices, to moralizing allegories. We will let their poetic power display itself within us.'*[42]

And it is not only the parables that show Jesus' inclination to use images. The disciples have to be salt,[43] the eye is the lamp of the body[44] and Jesus longs to gather the children of Israel as a hen gathers its chicks.[45] And the night before he died he shared the Passover – a feast he must have celebrated many times before – and enacted the ritual associated with that, plus the washing of the feet, plus the injunction that the disciples should meet in this way henceforward.[46] Such ritual actions and symbolic gestures arise from imagination and appeal to imagination and will cease to be living realities in the community without imagination.

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[42] Paul Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables of Jesus", in C. E. Reagan & D. Stewart, eds., *Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, Beacon Press, 1978, pp.239-245.
[43] Cf Mark 9:50.
[44] Cf Luke 11:34.
[45] Cf Matthew 23:37-39.
[46] Cf Matthew 26:26-35; Mark 14:22-31; Luke 22:14-20.

The Christian tradition

The Christian tradition has continued the practice found in the Bible of employing the imagination in fostering, celebrating and maintaining the relationship of the community and the individual with God. We have a rich variety of rituals, religious art, symbols, architecture and literature.[47] The tradition teems with imagery and, like the Bible itself, cannot be appreciated if we do not employ our powers of imagining.

Imagining is also a necessary gift when we are coping with serious change in those matters which are near and dear to us. This might apply generally within the Church today. We cannot possibly hope to foster genuine renewal where imagination is lacking. Without imagination we will be vulnerable, on the one hand, to clinging mindlessly to things that ought to be relinquished or tearing off in directions we ought not go. In this same context we might note the urgency and the difficulty of finding ways – symbols, myths, stories, images etc – to connect the modern imagination with the Transcendent and particularly the greatest story ever told – the story of the Great Mystery's liberating love at work in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.[48]

Imagination is an invaluable tool in building a prayer life.[49] We should also note, however, that imagination may also be an obstacle to the development of prayer. The normal path of prayer through to the higher stages of contemplation, passes through a process of purgation in which we are stripped of all images and

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[47] In good religious art there is a whole spirituality – for example, good ikons. The famous Sr Wendy has a wonderful gift for explaining the subtleties and depths of art – though not all the pieces she chooses are necessarily "religious". So did Kenneth Clarke in his brilliant *Civilization* series. Both of those commentators remind us that good art and architecture and symbolism and ritual always imply the more than, and therefore spirituality. Good art and architecture and symbolism and ritual call us out of ourselves and open us to the Transcendent. This is one reason why atheistic and materialistic cultures tend to produce things that may be functional but tend to be ugly or at least lacking in beauty, unless they move outside their atheistic and materialistic context. Note, for example the buildings erected under the communist regimes in China and compare them with traditional Chinese architecture. The great cathedrals of Europe are expressions of beauty, quite apart from their religious significance. Chartres cathedral might be singled out, not only for its magnificent architecture and stained glass, but also for its famous labyrinth on the floor of the cathedral. If ever a building bespoke imagination and required imagination to appreciate it, Chartres cathedral does.

[48] Needless to say, imagination without the lived reality is going to be of little help and may even be dangerous. Our power to imagine new possibilities – and thus break the power of a "stuck imagination" – like our power to think and choose differently, to remember and anticipate more formatively, is about life and living. Imaginative new rituals and symbols for Christian worship, for example, will prove to be very hollow if they are not backed by a well-grounded expression of the Gospel in our daily lives. It is important to remember this connection when we discuss renewal of the liturgy.

[49] Note for example the works of Anthony de Mello SJ – particularly *Sadhana: A Way To God.* In this de Mello is very much in the tradition of St Ignatius of Loyola who promoted the use of imagination in developing a prayer life.

ideas. Deep prayer is beyond thinking, choosing, remembering, anticipating, imagining and feeling as we know it. Prayer is ultimately a matter of being drawn by Love beyond our normal capacities so that we can enter the graced relationship of deep contemplation, being present to the Presence. But that is painful precisely because it does take us beyond our capacities and into ways we do not know and cannot imagine. Such purgation has the potential to evoke deep anxiety as it forces us to let go of those faculties that have stood us in good stead and made us feel secure.[50]

[50] St John of the Cross is probably the best guide in this *apophatic way*. Paradoxically, St John of the Cross and his friend St Teresa of Avila, use images to great effect.

Snippets for meditation

(1) *"Both formative memory and anticipation are assisted by formative imagination. Formative imagination concretizes in images the past to be remembered and the future to be anticipated in terms of concrete incarnational formation. Imagination, moreover, can create fictitious formation situations or add fictitious aspects to the perception of the real formation situation. The person-in-formation reacts and responds to fictitious formation situations as if they were real, even on the level of unconscious organismic reactions."*[51]

(2) *"The formative power of imagination is due to the power of images and symbols on all of one's incarnational formation and deformation efforts. From the viewpoint of formative incarnation, images are far more powerful than concepts. Most of our life of formative incarnation is guided by conscious, preconscious or unconscious imagery."*[52]

(3) *"The temporary escape of the imagination from an absorbing life situation can only be formative under the following conditions: 1. This function of the formative imagination should be acknowledged and used only as a temporary means of passing diversion and playfulness. One should especially watch that such a playful excursion of the imagination does not turn into a source of central formation directives of one's real life. 2. The images evoked should not be of such a nature that they lead irresistibly to inner or outer acts that are uncongenial with the foundational human and Christian life form, incompatible with one's foundational life situations, and uncompassionate in regard to others. An example would be imagination that is nourished by the reading of sadistic pornography. 3. Formative liberating imagination is marked by its gentling and relaxing effect on the person-in-formation without creating conflicts between the imagery and the foundational formation principles of the person's life. Briefly, a gentle formative asceticism is necessary in regard to the liberating function of playful imagination."*[53]

[51] Adrian van Kaam, "Formative Imagination" in "Glossary", *Studies in Formative Spirituality,* 2:1 (Feb 1981) 123.
[52] Adrian van Kaam, "The Formative Power of Imagination" in "Glossary", *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, 2:1 (Feb 1981), 125.
[53] Adrian van Kaam, "Conditions of a Formative Utilization of the Liberating Imagination" in "Glossary", *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, 2:1 (Feb 1981), 125.

(4) *"The second characteristic inherent in all the elements of the search for glory is the great and peculiar role imagination plays in them. It is instrumental in the process of self-idealization. But this is so crucial a factor that the whole search for glory is bound to be pervaded by fantastic elements. No matter how much a person prides himself on being realistic, no matter how realistic his march toward success, triumph, perfection, his imagination accompanies him and makes him mistake a mirage for the real thing. One simply cannot be unrealistic about oneself and remain entirely realistic in other respects. When the wanderer in the desert, under the duress of fatigue and thirst, sees a mirage, he may make actual efforts to reach it, but the mirage – the glory – which should end his distress is itself a product of imagination. Actually, imagination also permeates all psychic and mental functions in the healthy person. When we feel the sorrow or the joy of a friend, it is our imagination that enables us to do so. When we wish, hope, believe, fear, plan, it is our imagination showing us possibilities. But imagination may be productive or unproductive: it can bring us closer to the truth of ourselves – as it often does in dreams – or carry us far away from it. It can make our actual experience richer or poorer. And these differences roughly distinguish neurotic and healthy imagination.*[54]

(5) *"I began my study of the relation between myth and culture some years ago when, as a young man, I lived and taught in Greece. What particularly intrigued me was the way the ancient Greeks seemed to handle their anxiety and other psychological problems. In the classical phase of Greek culture, anxiety in our modern sense did not seem to emerge as an overt problem.*

"I could not escape the implication that in certain historic periods, the culture provides the help which the individual needs to face the crises of life - birth, adolescence, marriage, procreation, death - so that he does not experience the profound insecurity, self-doubt and inner conflict which we associate with anxiety.

"But scarcely do we propose a discussion of myth and culture when we are confronted by an almost insurmountable obstacle - that is, the myth that we live a "mythless existence." Myths and symbols are scorned and rejected or, at best, taken as unreal, imaginary, and, at worst, become synonyms for "falsehood." The wide prevalence of anxiety and alienation in our society, is, I believe, bound up with our rejection of the language of myth. Jerome Bruner put it well: "When the myths of society are no longer adequate to man's plight, the individual first takes refuge in mythoclasm and then he undertakes the lonely search for inner identity."

[54] Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization*, W W Norton, 1970, 31-32.

"At the outset I shall state the hypothesis which then took shape in my mind: Psychotherapy, and the problems which lead people to come in numbers for psychological help, emerge at a particular point in the historic development of a culture - that is the point where the myths and symbols of the culture disintegrate. The values of the culture are mediated by these myths and symbols, and with their breakdown comes the inner conflict which sends people to psychotherapy"[55]

(6) *"If the well could only learn to be less frightened and helpless, if they could only learn to listen, they might be amazed at the results of hearing another point of view, even if it is a sick one.* There *is an act which really requires imagination, to listen to the point of view, to put on the mind, of those we think mad!"*[56]

(7) "*Once some brethren went out of the monastery to visit some hermits who live in the desert. They came to one who received them with joy and seeing that they were tired, invited them to eat before the accustomed time and placed before them all the food he had available. But that night when they were all supposed to be sleeping the hermit heard the cenobites talking among themselves and saying: "These hermits eat more than we do in the monastery". Now at dawn the guests set out to see another hermit, and as they were starting out their host said: "Greet him from me and give him this message: 'Be careful not to water the vegetables'". When they reached the other hermitage they delivered this message. And the second hermit understood what was meant by the words. So he made the visitors sit down and weave baskets, and sitting with them he worked without interruption. And in the evening when the time came for lighting the lamp, he added a few extra psalms to the usual number, after which he said to them: "We do not usually eat everyday out here, but because you have come along it is fitting to have a little supper today, for a change. Then he gave them some dried bread and salt and added: "Here's a special treat for you". Upon which he mixed them a little sauce of vinegar salt and oil, and gave it to them. After supper they got up again and started in on the psalms and kept on praying almost until dawn, at which the hermit said: "Well we can't finish all of our usual prayers, for you are tired from your journey. You had better take a little rest. And so when the first hour of the day came, they all wanted to leave this hermit, but he would not let them go. He kept saying: "Stay with me a while. I cannot let you go so soon, charity demands that I*

[55] Rollo May, "Myths and Culture: Their Death and Transformation", *Cross Currents*, XXXIII, 1 (Spring 1983), 1 (1-16).
[56] William Lynch, *op cit*, 250.

keep you for two or three days. But they, hearing this, waited until dark, and then under cover of night they made off."[57]

(8) *"The image of death as passivity and helplessness may well be the great American fear. The American has not yet been helped by our artists to handle images of passivity. He has only demeaning and corrupt images of the passive, of not being able, like Horatio Alger, to do all things. And such are his images of waiting, or doing nothing, or being dependent. The American is not equipped, therefore, with an imagination, with a set of images, which would tell him that it is all right to lie down in good time and die, dependently leaving it to God to raise him up again."*[58]

(9) *"Perhaps it is impossible to really despair* with *someone. Perhaps it must be a private act".*[59]

(10) "*We will never achieve what we can't imagine, so what are we hoping for?"*[60]

(11) *"The most significant result of the debate (on the Church, in the First Session of the Second Vatican Council) was the profound realization that the Church has been described, in its two thousand years, not so much by verbal definitions as in the light of images. Most of the images are, of course, strictly biblical. The theological value of the images has been stoutly affirmed by the Council. The notion that you must begin with an Aristotelian definition was simply bypassed. In its place, a biblical analysis of the significance of the images was proposed."*[61]

(12) *"One of the permanent meanings of imagination has been that it is the gift that envisions what cannot yet be seen, the gift that constantly proposes to itself that the boundaries of the possible are wider than they seem. Imagination, if it is in*

[57] Thomas Merton, *op cit*, 28.
[58] William Lynch, *op cit*, 246. Is this perhaps also applicable to Australia?
[59] William Lynch, *op cit*, 254.
[60] The title of Stephanie Dowrick's address to the Adelaide Festival of Ideas, July 12 2003.
[61] Gustave Weigel, "How is the Council Going?", *America*, 109 (December 7 1963), 730.

prison and has tried every exit, does not panic or move into apathy but sits down to try and envision another way out. It is always slow to admit that all the facts are in, that all the doors have been tried, and that it is defeated. It is not so much that it has vision as that it is able to wait, to wait for a moment of vision which is not yet there, for a door that is not yet locked. It is not overcome by the absoluteness of the present moment."[62]

[62] William Lynch, *Images of Hope*, Notre Dame University, 1974, 35.

Suggestions for further study

Bellport, Mary Fidelis,	"The Healing Aesthetic: Fresh Patterns of Wholeness" in *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, IV, 1 (Feb 1983), 11-24. See the other articles in this same number on "Spiritual Formation and the Aesthetic Experience".
Cinema	*Le Bal* (Dir: Etorre Scola; Christophe Allwright and Marc Berman. Note: This is French-Italian family entirely without dialogue; Scola uses people dancing to tell a story of the twentieth century; memory and imagination are keys to this fascinating film.) *Flags of our Fathers* (2006) (Dir: Clint Eastwood.)
Collins, Paul,	"Imagination Abandoned," in Chris McGillion, editor, *A Long Way From Rome*, Allen & Unwin, 2003, 171-193.
Foley, Patrick,	"Remembering, Imagining and Imagining in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition", *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, VI, 1 (Feb 1985), 39-51.
Gittins, Anthony,	"Imagination, Encounter, Ministry" Chapter Three in the author's *Aesence that Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship*, St Pauls, 2002, 43-68.
Kelly, Tony,	*The Bread of God: Nurturing a Eucharistic Imagination*, Harper Collins, 2001 – see especially Chapter 1, "The Eucharistic Imagination".
Lynch, William,	*Images of Hope*, Notre Dame University, 1974.
Musurillo, Herbert,	*Symbolism and the Christian Imagination*, Helicon Press, 1962.
Ricoeur, Paul,	"Listening to the Parables of Jesus", reproduced in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 146-149.
Van Kaam, Adrian,	*Formative Spirituality, Volume II: Human Formation*, Crossroad, 1985,Books, Chap 7.
----------,	"Glossary" in *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, II, 1 (1981), 123-126.
Whelan, Michael, & 7.	*Living Strings*, E J Dwyer, 1994 – especially Chapters 6
----------,	*Without God All Things Are Lawful*, St Pauls, 1995 – especially "Thinking about Thinking", 115-126.

Suggested exercises

1. Read Matthew 16:13-20. Sit still and be quiet for a time. Re-construct the scene described by Matthew's Gospel. Place yourself there with the disciples. Hear and see Jesus ask: "Who do *you* say I am?" Catch his eye. Listen. You might find it helpful to use writing to facilitate this process.

2. Observe the strangers who cross your path this week – in the supermarket, on the bus etc. Ask yourself what their story might be. Listen attentively and gently. Each of those people, like you, is a tragic-comedy. Is it possible to go on calling them "strangers"?

3. What are the most frequently appearing themes in the images you see around you in magazines, on billboards and in the various news media? Do you identify with these themes? What might be the effect of these images and the themes they carry? What are the principal images that influence your consciousness?