

Pope Francis has made mercy a central theme of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* – and his pontificate? – calling for a “culture of mercy”.

Walter Kasper had given his friend, Jorge Bergoglio, a copy (German) of his book on mercy just before he entered the conclave. The cover of the book carries his endorsement: “This book has done me so much good”.

Kasper’s scholarship is evident here. (It is a pity most of his references are in German.) But he writes lucidly, allowing a range of readers an experience of depth and substance.

In my pastoral experience I have repeatedly come across resistance to the idea of mercy. For our contemporaries, mercy implies an imbalance of power where the person with power lets the powerless off the hook. It also often implies enmity. Perhaps more off putting for many older Christians is the implication that it implies I am worthless. Kasper faces these and similar issues in Chapter One: “Mercy: A Crucially Relevant but Forgotten Topic”. He writes: “The failure of theological reflection concerning the message of mercy, which is central to the Bible, has allowed this concept often to be downgraded”.

After dealing with some approaches to the subject from outside the biblical tradition in Chapter Two, Kasper takes us into the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures in Chapters Three and Four. Chapters Five through Nine develop the concept within the Christian tradition.

Kasper does not give a manual-style definition of mercy. Yet he takes you “there”. God’s *rachamim* is complemented by *hesed* “that exceeds all human expectations and bursts every human category”. “His mercy is how God provides resistance to evil He does not do this forcibly and violently; he doesn’t simply do battle; rather, in his mercy God repeatedly creates new space for life and for blessing”.

Jesus is the enfleshing of God’s mercy. “What is new in Jesus’ message and distinguishes it from the Old Testament is that he proclaims God’s mercy for all in an ultimate way. Jesus opens up access to God not just for a few righteous people, but for all”. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father’s mercy “takes its bearings, not from the fair allocation of material goods, but rather from the dignity of the son. It is the measuring stick of the Father’s love”. “The father’s mercy in this parable is the higher form of justice”.

Kasper draws the reader to face some challenging implications of God’s mercy. For example, he reminds us that being merciful and being poor go hand in hand: “Therefore the Church cannot give credible testimony to Christ, who became poor for us, if it, and in particular the clergy, give the impression of being rich lords. . . . In following Jesus, the Church can be a church for the poor only if it, and particularly the clergy, seek – if not to live like the poor – at least to adopt a simple and unassuming lifestyle”.

This line of thinking makes Chapter Eight – “For A Culture of Mercy” – a particularly challenging reflection. Kasper writes: “The current prevalent economization of the social sphere, therefore, constitutes a diminishment and even an ‘amputation’ of the human person. When that happens, society loses its soul and becomes a soulless system. The current economic and financial crisis is ultimately, therefore, an anthropological and spiritual crisis”. He credits Pope Benedict XVI with opening Catholic social teaching to a whole new possibility by speaking of a “culture of love”.

This book has the potential to bring wonderful energy and focus, not only into the study of theology, but into the lives of each and every one of us. ☺

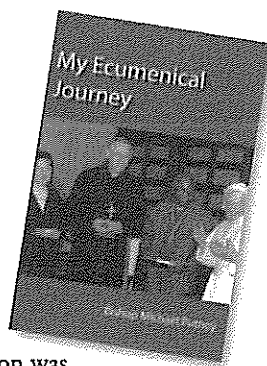
Michael Putney’s journey as priest (1969-1995) and bishop (1995-2014) spanned a period of remarkable achievement following the Second Vatican Council, a period which experienced growth towards a restoration of the “oneness” which characterized the Church in its first thousand years. “Adventure” and “vision” are very much evident in this book, brilliantly conceived as a selection of Michael’s papers and presentations from the 1980s until the present day. The compilers of the volume – Elizabeth Delaney SGS, Gerard Kelly and Ormond Rush – have made their choices with a view to providing insights which will be useful to those continuing the journey today, and who find themselves at an important juncture as yesterday’s ecumenical agenda nears completion and a new agenda emerges.

The book’s topics arise from Michael’s ecumenical involvement in the local church communities of Brisbane and Townsville, as well as participation in ecumenical dialogue at the national and international level in forums such as the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the International Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue. His writings canvass a wide range of ecumenical landmarks and achievements as varied as “Confessing One Faith” (1991) which resolved divisions between churches of the East and West over the filioque clause, the ARCIC statements of agreement between the Anglican and Catholic churches, the game-changing Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church (1999) and the National Covenant between 19 Australian churches (2004) which continues to set a benchmark for ecumenical relationships around the world. Importantly, these years also witnessed the emergence of *koinonia* or “communion” as a fruitful way forward for ecumenical reflection on the Church.

The articles in the book deal, from a Catholic perspective, with a broad spectrum of ecumenical relationships – with the World Council of Churches, with the Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and Evangelicals – as well as Christian-Jewish relations. Topics include “The Approach of the Catholic Church to Ecumenism”, “A Catholic Understanding of Ecumenical Dialogue” and “Baptism, Eucharist and the RCIA”. The Catholic Church’s continuing journey towards reconciliation with the Jewish community

A journey of truth and love

In his book, *My Ecumenical Journey* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2014), Bishop Michael Putney chronicles a life story of ecumenical relations and academic exploration. Dr Trish Madigan OP notes some of the paths in this extraordinary journey in her review of the book.



The Chancellor of the Townsville Diocese, Len Horner, speaking of Bishop Michael Putney after his death on 28 March 2014 said, “He gave you that feeling that we were on some fairly good adventure, you know, we were

doing great things. His vision was so big he brought us into the world church, the national church, and yet he was very involved at a local level.”

BOOK REVIEWS

is canvassed in "Jewish-Catholic Relations Today in the Light of Forty Years of Nostra Aetate."

Many Australian Catholics along with others continue to ask: Why is the Catholic Church not a member of the World Council of Churches? In what ways is the exercise of the papacy problematic for other Christians? How is it that the Catholic Church does not recognize the ordained ministry of other churches and why does it not ordain women? Is there not a conflict between dialogue and evangelization? Why can't we share Eucharist with other churches? Although the presentations featured in this book will not lead to immediate resolution of practical problems, they will assist with understanding the Catholic Church's approach to complex issues and perhaps lead to more creative and pastoral ways of engaging with them.

In his deep and wide exploration of the ecumenical journey through various key

documents Michael Putney provides valuable insight into the theological values which underpin them. Often, he explains, in popular thinking about ecumenical relationships in a secular society which values "tolerance", there can seem to be a requirement to choose love over truth. However, true ecumenism takes seriously both truth and love, both faith and charity. If one focuses only on truth or faith then one will lack the love that is needed to overcome differences. If one focuses only on love or charity, relationships that are not based on a shared faith will eventually fall apart. Ecumenism requires a relationship of love that can sustain very honest communication. A truth that emerges clearly is that ecumenism is not a marginal church activity for a few enthusiasts, but is at the heart of what it means to be "Catholic".

Michael Putney's ecumenical journey began as a young seminarian in Brisbane when he spoke in an oratory competition about the life and message of Paul

Couturier, originator of the modern form of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This event, he says, became "a real moment of conversion for me."

From there he went on to be the first Catholic representative on an ecumenical inter-seminary student committee. Later, while studying overseas, he was exposed to ecumenical study seminars and some of the great ecumenists of the twentieth century, including Yves Congar OP, John Zizoulas and Jurgen Moltmann. One hopes that our Catholic theology students and seminarians today continue to be encouraged to access comparable kinds of ecumenical experiences.

This book would be of value to anyone interested in deepening their understanding of the Catholic Church's journey towards Christian unity. It would be a wonderful resource for parish discussion groups, particularly for people of a younger generation who may not have much familiarity with historic ecumenism. ☪

The mind and heart of Pope Francis

John Bosman MSC reviews *Pope Francis – Untying the knots* (Bloomsbury, 2013), and finds it compelling as reading but also offers insights into the life and times of Pope Francis.

Paul Valley's book *Pope Francis – Untying the knots* is a thriller. The author speaks easily of his subject's beginnings and learnings, of his schooling and maturing, of his family and people, so that we gain some insight into the pope's mind and heart.

The book has a useful index, presents a helpful timeline of Jorge Mario's life and has interesting photos.

The dossier spread just before the 2005 conclave was not the first anonymous critique written against Jorge Mario Bergoglio. He sees no need to defend himself, rather acknowledges that "I had to learn from my errors, indeed hundreds of them. Today I ask forgiveness for the sins and errors that I did indeed commit" (p 193).

Happiness grows from sorrow, freedom from breaking shackles. Bergoglio experiences life as tough, yet experiences it as gift. His inexperience in leadership leads him to inner strength and wisdom, his own and other people's suffering call forth from him deep and unchartered responses. For him to change habits of thought, attitude or action is not a sign of fickleness or dare-

devil risk taking, but a growing involvement in life.

The author traces the journeyings of an intriguing human being, a young boy who blossoms under the love of his grandmother, who helps his incapacitated mother to cook the family meals, who grows to appreciate music from his mother's listening to music, a boy whose father teaches him the value of work and leisure and learning. As a young man he divines beneath external structures the lure of life's inescapable and indestructible vulnerability. Religious and social structures blinded and overwhelmed him as a young provincial, though inwardly he sensed their inherent call to togetherness for life and not destruction.

He critiqued, distanced and even endangered two of his former teachers during the Dirty War of Argentina, but ultimately heeded their commitment to the poor when he grew to be 'the bishop of the slums'. Of course he was intimidated by guns as well as solemn decrees, that all but strangled his spirit, yet eventually untied his entangled heart.

Today when so many hearts and minds, when the planet and continents, nations

and Churches are at risk Francis gives the impression to be unflustered and unhurried, to have time. Francis takes note of joy and innocence, of cruelty and oppression, of refugees and prisoners.

The book presents interesting anecdotes of a beautiful, warm human being who is contained but not isolated, a leader with and for his people. There is a simplicity and humanness about the man. The simplicity of outlook is there because "he looks at reality from the point of view of the poor" (p196). The pope strikes me as one who invites us all to "taste and see the goodness of the Lord", who honours his predecessor in word and deed, who embraces his brother cardinals on equal footing (except for the one who wants to kiss his ring), who puts off his stole and asks us to pray for him as he comes to bless us all in God's name.

The book is a gem. ☪

The Swag Summer Edition

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Major Features – 1,400 words