

## Theology in a Time of AIDS

Theology is always in time, its narrative character underlines that. The human enterprise of theology can be developed only over time. Out of time, before and beyond there is no need for theology and no possibility of narrative. All that, apparently reasonable discourse hinges on the nature of time, which remains finally as mysterious to us as it was to Augustine. The two key Greek words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*, continue to be helpful in distinguishing time as objective and measurable, what is now called clock time, and time which is subjectively significant for person or community. *Kairos* is in that sense storied time. In Jewish and Christian terms *kairos* indicates a time and event of divine call for human response. So it was with the prophets and Jesus' announcement of the reign of God. This was the *Kairos*, the time of God's special presence and summons.

These two, *chronos* and *kairos*, may be distinguished but not separated. The time-laden character of theology involves both. Change in theology as in everything human is related to the ticking clock at least in its biological form. The significance of that change relates to human subjects and their capacity to read the signs of the time. To speak of theology in a time of AIDS is to consider the (chronological) time-span from the first (recent) diagnosis of AIDS in 1981 into the 1990s and its subsequent development into a global pandemic but it is to do more than that. How much more only the finished article will tell.

'Theology in a Time of AIDS' has some of the melodramatic ring of the title of Marquez' novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*. There is certainly drama but tragedy rather than melodrama in the AIDS story of the last ten or twelve years. However, why pick out AIDS as theologically significant? Why not cholera or tuberculosis, rampant again in a new resistant form? And why give theological significance to any time characterised by major diseases or other crisis? Did we have theology for the time of the Black Death or any of the great wars? Not in so many words perhaps. But the prophets of Israel, Jesus himself and great religious thinkers and theologians from Augustine to Barth have sought to respond to the crises of their times as particular calls from God. It is perhaps only a recent fashion to name the crisis and bracket theology with it, as a 'Theology for a Nuclear Age'. The tradition of addressing fresh human crises theologically or in a reflective religious way is much longer and stronger.

The extent and depth of the pandemic as charted by the World Health Organisation suggests a major world crisis. At the World AIDS

Conference in Berlin in early June 1993, Michael Merson, head of WHO's Global Project for AIDS (GPA), revealed that since last year a half million people with HIV had gone on to AIDS, so that in early 1993 there were two and a half million people suffering from AIDS, an increase of 20% over 1992. There are thirteen million adults and adolescents HIV positive and one million children. The total of fourteen million compares with eleven to thirteen million in 1992. And these figures almost certainly suffer from under-estimation. Of equal importance to the figures are the rate and range of growth. The former beliefs that this was a disease of gay men and IV drug-users (through their own fault for some commentators) have had to yield to the recognition that heterosexual intercourse is now the more common means of transmission and that no group of whatever class or race, gender or sexual orientation is immune to infection by HIV.

These numbers have meanings that no mere digits could convey. The meanings emerge in the stories of individuals, families and whole societies devastated by the fears, the sufferings and the deaths experienced throughout the world over the last decade and more. To appreciate the real challenge to theology in a time of AIDS it is necessary to listen to these stories and their tellers, persons with AIDS themselves, the HIV infected, their families, partners, lovers, carers. More illuminating still for theologians would be engagement with the struggle in the praxis of caring for and suffering with. On the basis of such stories and praxis, of co-suffering or compassion, fresh analysis may be possible and new understanding emerge.

Some of these stories formed the basis of theological reflection for a Commission organised by Caritas Internationalis (CI), the world-wide confederation of national Catholic social service and development organisations which has been co-operating with local initiatives around the world in seeking to harness Catholic and Christian responses to the challenges of HIV and AIDS. In contexts as diverse as North America and South-East Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and Africa this group has been at once learning and teaching by listening to, critiquing and retelling the stories, the analyses and the practices it has itself encountered. The reflections outlined here are an attempt to mediate between these encounters and the Catholic theological tradition. Unfortunately the richly storied background to the reflections cannot be presented in detail here.

A world crisis and its harrowing and heroic stories of human suffering require Christian response and reflection, some fresh theological consideration. The HIV/AIDS crisis has some distinctive characteristics beyond its global range and savage suddenness, as it brings together in such devastating mix the great human powers of sex and death. How this mix affects theology and in particular moral theology will be a primary concern of this chapter.

### **Retelling, reflecting and rereading**

The short if substantial story of the AIDS/HIV pandemic and the comparatively slight story of the CI group's activity provoke in the telling and retelling reflection on the Christian traditions which sustain and inspire the group. The retelling and the reflection issue in rereading of the Christian scriptures and traditions which may reveal omissions or misunderstandings or at least open the way to fresh and fuller understanding. Liberation theologies of the Latin American, black and feminist kinds are only the most recent examples of how serious social challenges with their new questions on human meanings and morals have compelled serious and fruitful rereading of these scriptures and traditions. It would be rash to claim at this stage at any rate that AIDS/HIV could have far-reaching implications for the practice of theology and the understanding of Christian faith. The experience of liberation theologies should, however, alert us to underestimating the impact of the pandemic on Christian thinking and practice and above all preclude reducing the discussion to marginal if genuinely important details like the use of condoms or exchange of needles in programmes of prevention. The questions for theology raised by AIDS/HIV may not be confined within the conventional limits of moral theology. Their questions for moral theology go well beyond the tabloid writers' concerns with condoms and needles. (The tabloid mentality is not always restricted to journalists.) The theological rereading undertaken here examines central issues of Christian belief and living before it takes up some of the significant details in their proper Christian context.

### **Divine presence and power**

Theology is first of all about God. Discussion of theology in a time of AIDS must begin with God. It is plausible to hold that the pandemic raises no new questions about God and indeed, as Leslie Houlden argues, no new theological questions at all. At least it raises some old questions in new and for the persons immediately involved in very acute forms. The Book of Job may constitute the most profound reflection we have on the relation between human suffering and divine presence in power. Indeed Job's own bodily sufferings and attendant mental anguish and anger may awaken painful echoes in contemporary readers wrestling with the impact of AIDS/HIV. Yet new generations of sufferers with a different ethos of religious belief/doubt and personal, cultural or even medical expectations will experience ultimate questions in quite different ways.

Job's confrontation with the mysterious God of the whirlwind, with his claim to creative laying of the foundations of the earth and to the powerful differentiation of animal life, leaves him awed and humbled before the presence and power of his creator and vindicator/redeemer. He has won

his argument with his confrere comforters. Personal sin is not the cause of his suffering and he is not being punished by God for such sin. The lesson must be continually repeated and the Book of Job read again and again in face of those Christians who still think of human suffering in terms of God's punishment for personal sin and see a particularly apt application of this doctrine in the emergence of AIDS/HIV.

The presence and power of God in the whirlwind do not resolve all the difficulties. They do, however, open us up to the finally mysterious ways of God in creation and providence. These ways take a radically new turn in Jesus Christ. The power and the presence, whose time (*kairos*) has come in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom or reign of God, offer a very different response to human suffering from the whirlwind proclamation. Leaving aside Jesus' own ministry to the sick, to which we will return, we are confronted with the mystery of God entering fully into the human condition, even to the point of taking on human suffering and dying in the passion and death of Jesus Christ. The crucial and cruciform revelation of God's cosuffering (compassion) with human beings in Jesus manifests a new aspect of the mystery we also call love. It is not simply comprehensible to us, but it does reassure us about the presence. "Where are you God as I am overcome by the pain and desperation?" "Right here with you just as I was on Calvary." And the power, the omnipotence as we used to say? No more absent or frustrated than on Calvary but taking its mysterious ways through creaturely and bodily fragility to a healing in love and life that may or may not issue in renewed bodily life and health. The inexhaustible loving which endured through Calvary does not abandon those for whom Calvary was undertaken in the first place.

### **Jesus and the kingdom**

Jesus and his God are not to be understood simply in terms of the passion and death on Calvary. These undoubtedly form the climax to his life and mission as they do to the gospel narratives. Yet they are only properly and fully understood in the light of Jesus' public life and ministry, by which he pursued his mission and encountered his destiny. By the announcement of the kingdom or reign of God which opened the ministry and specified the mission Jesus at once confirmed and transformed the tradition of Israel. The kingdom motif in Israel anticipated a restoration of a Davidic style kingdom with the God of Israel, Yahweh, newly present in all his power and glory. The presence in power which Jesus offered in the name of his Father was no less glorious for those with eyes to see but its paradoxical character defeated the perception of many contemporaries.

This was not a kingdom first of all for the powerful and wealthy, who were to be toppled from their seats and sent empty away. The sinners and the prostitutes, the poor and the socially marginalised like the lepers and

the tax gatherers would go first into the kingdom. By identifying with these, by eating and drinking with them Jesus overturned the accepted canons of religious and political respectability. It was eventually to cost him his life as he was considered too subversive of the established order and after a show trial was crucified between two other criminals outside the gates of the city. Exclusion had reached its terminus in criminalisation and execution for him who would make the excluded the centre of his mission. For Christians who feel the urge to reject or avoid or neglect people living with AIDS/HIV the counter-example of Jesus should be a forceful reminder. As we do it to one of these least ones.

Jesus did not simply seek the company of the excluded, he did see that as a way of establishing a new set of relationships, a new kind of community, a new Israel which would embody the kingdom of God which he announced. In this new community God's presence and power would be evident above all in the practices of love. And it would be effective love, feeding the hungry, setting the prisoners free, restoring sight to the blind, letting the lame walk, healing all manner of sickness. Jesus' ministry to the sick has inspired generations of Christians. He explicitly rejected the old mistake of Job's comforters. "Neither this man nor his parents have sinned," he told his disciples of the man born blind. In this case as in others the healing manifested the power and the glory of God by attending to immediate needs of the suffering and excluded. The new Israel would also be a new creation with the God-given powers of creation restored and fulfilled. In Christian care and human scientific development these God-given resources are to be harnessed in restoration of health and comfort of the afflicted. Love after the manner of Jesus, unconditional acceptance and care of the needy, must be expressed in the most effective way possible, medically, socially and personally.

### **Moral theology and natural law**

The community of disciples which follows Jesus and seeks to proclaim and promote his kingdom of God in the world for the healing/transformation of the world, must act in imitation of Jesus, sharing his heart and mind. The reading and rereading of that mind and its thoughtful application to the needy and excluded of a particular time form that part of the permanent theological task called moral theology or Christian ethics. It is a task that must be approached thoughtfully using the resources of God-given minds after the fashion of Augustine, Aquinas, Barth and all the other great Christian thinkers. It can never treat the mind in separation from heart and action but it must be true to its gifts and limitations. Over the millennia Christian, Jewish and indeed pagan minds have contributed powerfully to elucidating how Christians might act individually and socially in imitation of Christ. The more systematic attempts to do this have issued in different if related theologies which were distinguished

at a later period in the Catholic tradition (c. 1600) as moral theology. It has never been an entirely satisfactory distinction, particularly when it hardened into sharp division. It was a distinction unknown to Augustine and Aquinas. Here the focus will be on some systematic outline of Christian living according to the mind of Christ without losing touch with the biblical narratives or later doctrinal insights and developments.

Catholic moral theology has been dominated over the centuries by the concept of natural law. With a certain biblical basis and a strong base in the western philosophical tradition it has proved of enormous value both in the development of systematic thinking about Christian morals and in dealing with particular cases. In CI's ventures into areas of very limited Christian background in Asia and Africa this same natural law approach offered a first step, if only a first, in seeking some mutual moral understanding on AIDS/HIV with people of quite different religious and cultural backgrounds. For Catholics and people sharing a similar philosophical background it will continue to sustain and illuminate moral analysis. The absence of what Alasdair MacIntyre might term any public moral consensus can make the claims made for natural law from a Church or theological background seem arbitrary or simply the diktats of authority without any real basis in the reason to which it pretends. The current criticisms of the Enlightenment enthronement of reason make natural law arguments harder to sustain outside a limited Catholic circle. The approach adopted here is not therefore directly based on natural law arguments. The sources are more immediately biblical and theological. Yet it will undoubtedly overlap with and be nourished by the content of the natural law tradition in its structural design and case-discussion.

### **Kingdom values and moral virtues**

The new presence and power of God realised in the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is another description of the kingdom of God which he declared fulfilled in his time (*kairos*), fulfilled that is in relation to the promises his people of Israel had received and the expectations they had developed. A paradoxical and disconcerting fulfilment as we have seen. Fuller and further descriptions of the kingdom may be drawn from Jesus' teaching and ministry as well as from his death and resurrection and his immediate disciples' response. However, even a cursory reading of Jesus' parables of the kingdom reveals how obscure or rather mysterious it remains. Inevitably so when one is speaking of the presence and power of God, creating and sustaining, enabling and healing, fulfilling and transforming humanity and the cosmos, to essay a further but still beggarly description of the mystery which we inhabit and which inhabits us.

The kingdom of God which is about us and within us, in Jesus' own words, seeks and enables our recognition, our expression and manifes-

tation of it, our participation in its development. As we are called in the Genesis narrative to participate in God's original creative activity, so we are called in the Jesus narrative to participate in God's new creative activity. But who are the "we" who are called? The "we" must match the range of creation and new creation. The "we" is first and last of all humankind. It is only the community of Jesus' disciples who can explicitly recognise the kingdom. But the kingdom is for all human beings and above all by Jesus' example and teaching for the least of our human sisters and brothers, meaning the least by the standards of the worldly world, the poor, the socially excluded, the sick, who in a time and place of AIDS can so easily coincide. So the disciples of Jesus, as entrusted with the vision and enabling call of the kingdom, must offer a lead in responding to these least ones by active caring, loving personal relationships and structural reform.

The anticipation of Jesus' vision of God's kingdom which the Hebrew prophets in particular proclaimed provides a basis for a moral structuring of the kingdom call as it affects the Christian lives of disciples and the moral goals of the whole human community. While this is primarily a biblical and theological approach it will have evident connections with a natural law approach. It is not the only biblical/theological approach possible but it may be quite illuminating in relating morally the kingdom of God to human society in this time of AIDS/HIV.

As I have already developed the discussion of kingdom values more fully elsewhere I will deal rather briefly with them here. Within the biblical-theological tradition it is possible to discern a range of values which are to be realised in the presence and through the power of God. Some of these express the presence and power of Godself in stories of Israel and of Jesus. Characteristic of God in covenant they are to characterise human beings in covenant with one another as well as with God. They embody the very presence and power of God in personal interaction and social structure. In that created and creative dialectic of person and society kingdom values foreshadow fulfilment of person and society, the thrust of God's successive covenants. The realisation of these values, however partial, is a realisation of the kingdom in its historical limitations. In another philosophical idiom they may provide a basis for a vision of society which connects with traditions other than the Jewish and Christian.

The four kingdom values which seem to serve these theological and philosophical purposes are those of truth, freedom, justice and peace (*shalom*). They may also be called primary kingdom values because they reflect the primary reality of God. Other values which do not reflect God immediately may be termed secondary. This does not make them unimportant but simply states that they are not in themselves characteristic of God. Values related to our embodied condition such as chastity are not directly applicable to God and so are secondary in this sense.

### **Presence and power of God in truth**

The pursuit of Pilate's question "what is truth?" in its current hermeneutical complexities is a task for another time and place. Truth is central to the Jewish and Christian traditions, as central as God. It is God. More accurately and profoundly God is truth. The ultimate reality revealing itself is basic truth for humanity, at once summoning and enabling human beings to recognise the truth and to live by it. Only by listening to the God-given call to truth, by seeking and at least partially attaining the truth and striving to do it or live by it can human beings live with one another. The dialectic of person and society demands minimal truthfulness for its minimal successful resolution. Such minimal achievement is an expression of the kingdom, of the presence and power of God.

Social and personal crises like war and the pandemic AIDS/HIV threaten truth. At least without continuous commitment to truth the crisis will be misunderstood and the response mistaken. The temptation to conceal the truth of the extent of the pandemic is one aspect of how the threat may aggravate the crisis. Fears of contagion by family, friends and carers based on untruth can readily undermine social and personal responses. Only the truth in the gospel phrase will set us free to deal effectively with the crisis. And it is the divinely begotten hunger for truth which may hope through research to find medical means of prevention and cure.

Quite complex problems of confidentiality and information can arise for people living with AIDS/HIV, for their partners and carers, medical and social. How the truth is respected in the context of personal rights to privacy and dignity and of social need may not be easily discerned. The other kingdom values of freedom, justice and peace/solidarity will play a role here as they will in handling most moral dilemmas arising from the pandemic. Beyond that it is important to recognise that kingdom values do not come cheaply. Truth like grace will often be costly. It is the responsibility of the community of disciples, of witnesses to the kingdom, to ensure with Jesus Christ that the cost is shared and the heavier burden of it borne by those in the best position to pay.

### **Presence and power of God in freedom**

The freedom of God in creation and covenant forms the basis of human freedom of choice as well as of the progressive liberation of person and society which the kingdom of God seeks, enables and achieves if only partially in history. In the messianic programme announced by Jesus in Luke 4 the basis of kingdom liberation is already set. With prisoners to go free, the blind to see, the lame to walk and the poor to receive the good news of the kingdom, the basic enslavements of the human condition, personal and social, sacred and profane in sin and



oppression are to be overcome. The freedom of the children of God is at once gift and task. The maturing of person and society so that each person and each society is gradually enabled to harness itself and its resources in creative self-expression and other-service indicates the human shape of kingdom liberation.

In face of the pandemic the search for freedom from further infection through effective and humane preventive measures is an essential response to the kingdom call. Development of therapeutic measures connects the kingdom call to truth and its call to free people from the slavery of disease. And freedoms may well clash here or certainly appear to clash. Programmes of mandatory testing for so called risk groups or of quarantine for people with AIDS/HIV are usually unfair restriction of people already restricted socially or physically. Here the cross-over between freedom and justice emerges in human rights or liberties. In quite a different manner freedom and maturity emerge for the sexually active as forming the basis for the integration of sexuality into personal maturity in relating to other sexual beings. The interrelation of the primary kingdom values with one another and their influence in shaping the secondary values must be continually kept in mind.

### **Presence and power of God in justice**

For many biblical scholars justice is the central description of God in the scriptures, particularly in the Hebrew scriptures. A more popular but inaccurate analysis would contrast the God of justice in the Hebrew scriptures and covenant with the God of love in the Christian scriptures and new covenant. In both scriptures the justice of God is the shape which the love of God, or better, the love that is God, takes in covenantal saving relationship with the errant Israel and sinful humanity.

Divine justice characterises God's commitment to and responsibility for the world and for humanity through the covenants of creation, with Abraham and Moses, and in Jesus Christ. That commitment and responsibility require and enable human commitment and responsibility to and for one another. The great prophets of justice in eighth-century Israel (BCE) denounced as unacceptable to God assemblies of worshippers who neglected the widow, the orphan and the stranger, the judges who refused justice to the poor (cf. Amos). For Jeremiah faith in God is primarily expressed in justice. In more contemporary language recognition of, respect for and response to the human others is the test of authentic recognition of the ultimate other. The fairness and equality which justice demands focuses in both old and new testament versions of God's kingdom on the deprived and excluded. The blessed who hunger and thirst after justice as disciples of Jesus will be judged, rendered justice themselves on how far they fed and cared for these least ones. To feed and care for them is to care for Jesus, the incarnate ultimate other.

In a more analytic mode justice is distinguished as personal and social, as regulating fairness in relations between individual persons and in structural relations within society. Many of the problems revealed by the pandemic are problems of justice, personal and social. Some of these may be adequately expressed in terms of human rights and pursued in that fashion. However, not all delicate justice problems may be translated into human rights language without considerable loss of moral impact. Issues of testing, for example, may be usefully treated in terms of rights but there are cases such as mandatory testing of candidates for admission to seminaries and religious orders where larger concerns like witness may also need consideration. Here the interconnection between kingdom values emerges as freedom and justice overlap in rights, and truth and peace overlap in witness.

### **Presence and power of God in peace**

Peace is a much neglected theme in theology and particularly in moral theology, where it barely figured as a side-issue in the just war discussion. Yet it is a central theme in the biblical tradition of the kingdom and increasingly central to the survival of the human race. The presence and power of God to be realised and manifest in genuine peace between and within individuals, between and within societies, constitutes the most profound kingdom challenge facing the disciples of Jesus Christ today. In the biblical tradition peace, *shalom* in Hebrew, far exceeds the minimalist absence of war or maintenance of law and order, the *pax romana*. Flourishing in communion might be a much better description of the peace anticipated in the kingdom and offered by Jesus to his disciples and through them to the world. It incorporates both ideas of flourishing in unity or solidarity with implications of truth, freedom and justice. It also involves the more specifically Christian themes of healing, reconciliation and forgiveness.

The AIDS/HIV pandemic should stimulate then a much needed development in understanding and promoting the kingdom value of peace. The dimensions of solidarity, healing, reconciling and forgiving have obvious relevance for both the personal and social challenges of AIDS/HIV. Their understanding and application here will provide insight into other peace needs and possibilities.

### **Kingdom values and sexuality**

The presence and power of God which Jesus announced as the kingdom involves personal, social and cosmic transformation. In seeking to express in moral terms the significance of the kingdom four structural values were selected as primary for their biblical roots, their structural role in moral living and above all their attribution to Godself in Hebrew

and Christian tradition. Other moral values which by these criteria are described as secondary have their own biblical roots, their role in moral living and a relationship, however indirect, to God. Yet the primary values will shape these secondary values in ways to be explored. Of immediate concern here is the value associated with sexuality, the value of chastity and how it is influenced by the primary values.

That God was not sexually described or defined was a notable and distinctive achievement of Hebrew religion. However, the origins and development of human sexuality were related by that tradition in its own distinctive way to God's creative presence and power. In one Genesis account (Gen 1) when God created humanity, "male and female he created (it), in the image of God he created them". For love and companionship, for life-giving and co-creating this gift of sexual duality was given to humans as images of God. This kind of human loving, sexual loving is celebrated in itself as gift in the Song of Songs. In other biblical writings it is recognised as mirroring God's love for Israel (Hosea, Isaiah) and as a sacrament or sign of Christ's love for the Church, the community of his disciples. A Christian theological view of sexuality has no place for the "sex is dirty" syndrome.

The divine gift of sexuality implies a human call and task. The goals of loving and life-giving, broader human goals are specified more exactly in sexuality. These goals have to be sought over time by the development and integration of a person's sexual endowment into a fuller personal, relational and social life. The Catholic and Christian tradition with its biblical foundation sees the climax of that development emerging in marriage. Full sexual expression of the whole person belongs in this tradition to the established and yet developing community of love of one man and one woman which is open to new life. The kingdom value of truth with its associates of fidelity and honesty belongs to and protects this sacramental community as the Catholic tradition describes it. Freedom is essential to the origins of such a commitment as the freedom interrogation at the beginning of the marriage rite confirms. Justice belongs in different ways to the fulfilment of the marriage call. The injustice element in adultery provides one example of this. Without peace and its unitive, reconciling and forgiving dimensions marriage would not exist or survive.

The Christian community and the Catholic Church also recognise the sexual endowment and kingdom call of the unmarried, the single, the celibate and the widowed. Indeed celibacy for the sake of the kingdom has played a significant, sometimes a dominating, role in relating kingdom and sexuality. The "perfect" chastity of the celibate calling was contrasted with the "imperfect" of marriage. Celibates and other unmarried people are not asexual and not automatically and statically chaste. Chastity is not something a person is born with and with a bit of luck hangs on to. No moral value or associated virtue is like that. People become chaste, as indicated above, by gradually integrating their sexual

gifts into responses appropriate to the different relationships in their lives, husband-wife, parent-child, brother-sister, friends, neighbours, colleagues, acquaintances. So celibates and other unmarried people are called to grow into the value and virtue of chastity. In this growth the primary kingdom values will protect and promote the value of chastity for the unmarried as they do for married people. It must be admitted, however, that little specific positive elaboration for growth into chastity by the unmarried exists in the Christian moral tradition. Moral theologians and teachers have usually settled for the simple negative guidelines – no intercourse outside marriage. Reducing the whole sexual life to intercourse is not particularly helpful to married people either. Celibates and singles, heterosexual and homosexual, need more help than that if they are to become dynamically chaste. They too are called to be people whose sexuality promotes loving and life-giving/enriching relationships as signs and realisations of the presence and power of God. Some further consideration will be given to this in the later sections.

### **Christian ministry and morality**

With the biblical-theological background sketched here and in the context of the ministry promoted by Caritas Internationalis in response to the pandemic, it may help to focus the discussion of practical moral issues in terms of Christian ministry. In this way particular issues are related to the personal ministry of Jesus in the gospels, and to the ministry of the community of disciples in discerning and promoting the kingdom, with their emphasis on the deprived and excluded. The moral distortions which Jesus criticised for imposing insupportable burdens on the weak may be more readily apparent and avoided.

In structuring these brief notes on some of the moral issues raised by AIDS/HIV in the context of Christian ministry, only four aspects of ministry are considered, companionship, care, analysis of typical cases or casuistry and education. As aspects of ministry to the kingdom they assume acceptance of kingdom values, primary and secondary.

### **Companionship**

Jesus' recognition and inclusion, to the point of table-fellowship, of the poor and excluded provides the model for Christian ministry to people with AIDS/HIV. The first moral response of disciples must be to accompany the ill and infected. Without unconditional acceptance and persistent accompaniment the most skilful professional care, moral analysis and education will lack Christian authenticity.

Companionship (like sharing bread-table companionship) will only persist if the suffering is shared. This remark needs careful unpacking.

Clearly one human person cannot fully understand the suffering of another and so share adequately even at the simply knowing level. Much less can one person take over or share in a direct physical way another's pain. Yet sympathy and compassion are more than simple companionship or care. Indeed companionship and care are stimulated and sustained by the acceptance of the other in her suffering into one's heart and mind and imagination. Despite the limitations of language we can say that we are sometimes inhabited by the others, by the suffering of the others. This compassionate reception of deprived human others is at the heart of Jesus' ministry. God's acceptance, being inhabited in Jesus by the burdens and pain, privations and failures (sins) of all human beings, is at the heart of the doctrine of salvation. In imitation of Jesus and of the Father disciples open themselves to the suffering others while respecting their distinctiveness as persons even in their suffering. The patronising encouragement of dependency fails to respect the suffering person from whom the carer has so much to receive. Companionship is at the service of the others' personal self-respect, integrity and autonomy. Compassionate companionship after the manner of Jesus and God, which involves co-creating, co-suffering and co-redeeming in the community of caring, may be the best description of the first moral obligation of disciples to people living with AIDS/HIV.

## Care

To be true to itself compassionate companionship must seek to offer effective care to the suffering while encouraging and enabling them to care for themselves as far as possible. Given the limitations of their freedom, justice also demands such caring. Only in this way can they be integrated into the healing solidarity and peace of the kingdom. Care, like compassion and all other aspects of ministry, must constantly look for guidance to these primary kingdom values.

Care must operate at every level at which suffering operates and not be reduced simply to medical care, essential as that is. At the medical level itself the call to truth in researching further understanding of the origins, transmission and overcoming of the virus(es) has obvious kingdom resonances. A further kingdom call is to ensure that medical understanding is effectively disseminated, particularly where myths about origin and transmission are widespread. Sometimes these myths are simply due to ignorance. Sometimes they are promoted out of prejudice/prejudgement about so-called "deviants" such as gay men or drug-users while information about heterosexual transmission is ignored or distorted.

Research into cause and cure is still so far from completion that it must be encouraged and funded as fully as possible. Meantime, the best medical care available must be provided as truthfully, as freely and as

fairly or justly as possible. The manipulation of sufferers by deception or coercion in the name of treatment clearly violates personal dignity and kingdom values. Financial exploitation by medical and pharmaceutical interests is no less morally objectionable. Striving for fair distribution of therapies available becomes a particular Christian responsibility in a world where the powerful and privileged readily corner medical as well as other resources, and the generally deprived, especially in the third world, are exposed to the worst ravages of the disease.

Medical treatment, even much more effective treatment than is at present available, could not hope on its own to heal the psychological and social destruction wrought by AIDS/HIV. Counselling care remains critical to psychological healing. Social healing involves more radical measures from overcoming prejudice to cultural change to economic reform. Programmes of care in these different areas, which for Christians form part of the coming of the kingdom, will be effective only over time. The kingdom is coming, but in history only over time. This may be illustrated by one or two instances.

To care effectively for drug-users, already infected with HIV or exposed to infection, takes time. Drug-addiction is not cured instantly and by a simple decision of the will. Willingness to be helped will usually be very hard to elicit or to encourage. In the time needed for that an important first step in saving life and making time for recovery could be weaning people from the use of shared needles.

In the impoverished circumstances in which so many drug addicts live, it may be necessary, among other measures, to provide clean needles free of charge, without endorsing in any way drug-addiction or the drug-culture. A Christian care of drug-addicts, which seeks to protect the infected from infecting others, and the non-infected from being infected by others, could regard the provision of clean needles as a morally acceptable interim measure, where the interim is being used to save life and so offers some hope of tackling and eventually overcoming the drug-addiction and the drug-culture.

In quite different situations of AIDS/HIV transmission by sexual intercourse, prostitutes and their clients in sex-tourism and the sex industry may be no more capable of instant conversion than drug-addicts. This "incapacity" has its psychological reasons which vary with individual people. Social, cultural and economic reasons, which may be even stronger, vary with the particular society and culture. Some studies as well as popular impressions suggest that for prostitutes economic reasons may be strongest of all. To care for people with AIDS/HIV in these situations and as part of that care to prevent them spreading it further, every dimension of the problem has to be analysed and tackled. All this demands time for individual and groups. In that time care for life may require interim measures akin to the provision of clean needles for drug addicts. With all the risks of misunderstanding both in regard to the

“safety” of so-called safe sex and to the apparent endorsement of promiscuity, it may be socially necessary and morally legitimate to accept the use of condoms. However, it must be made clear that this is in no way regarded as good in itself. It is tolerated as an interim measure to protect life and allow time for the personal and social conversion which the coming of the kingdom calls for and enables in these situations also.

### **Casuistry**

Discussion of care has already involved analysis of typical cases or what has been more traditionally called casuistry. Despite its recent bad press among moral theologians and others, casuistry is a useful instrument in detailing Christian moral response to a range of difficulties. It must, however, be kept in its subordinate role of instrument and not be allowed to dominate Church moral discourse as it sometimes has in the past.

The approval, reluctantly, of needle exchange for drug-addicts infected or threatened by AIDS/HIV is an exercise in the ministry of casuistry. The general moral rejection of the use of these drugs is not in question. What is in question is how do you get this rejection to work for these people in a situation in which they are putting their own and others' lives at risk by sharing needles. To make time to set people free from the enslavement to drugs it is necessary to save them from the life threatening condition of AIDS/HIV. How far clean needles may help in the particular case is for the good case-worker and casuist to decide.

In further justification of such a decision the principle of lesser evil is invoked. It is morally right to seek to persuade somebody intent on evil to do a lesser evil. To wound rather than to kill where somebody is intent on shooting his neighbour to death. In just war discussion the principle of proportionality between the evil against which the war is waged and the evil the war is likely to involve has the same moral thrust. Just war theory recognises the inevitability of suffering and evil in war and calls for its reduction as far as possible.

The principle of the lesser evil has its limitations. In practice what counts as lesser? In theory can evil, however lesser, be properly intended and approved at all? The distinction between moral and pre-moral evil adopted by some recent moral theologians is sharply controverted by other moralists in situations like contraception and abortion for which it was first introduced. The principle of double effect suffers from much the same difficulties in similar situations.

A more general difficulty with the principle of lesser evil and variations on it might be its static view of the situation and therefore its apparent surrender of moral principle for short-term and uncertain gain for person or community. In a more dynamic view of the situation the Christian and kingdom intent is to accompany and care for people beyond their present

enslavement. With the goal of an eventual transformation of person, culture and community the first step to clean rather than dirty needles may be more easily seen as moral. It will be more easily seen of course by those engaged with the practice than by those elaborating the theory. And there may be more than one moral theory to support the practice while no one theory may be entirely satisfactory. In life and in love, those major human and Christian realities, theory must frequently limp behind practice. This will return for consideration under the rubric of education.

A similar casuistic ministry could apply, as outlined above, to caring for people under threat from AIDS/HIV in certain sexual situations. The moral growth into kingdom values has to start from where people are and everything morally possible must be done to help them survive into that period of growth. The concern over condoms, which can become a fixation for some people, must be put in context. If their safety is falsely exaggerated by ignoring various potential sources of failure, human and mechanical, a more truthful approach is required. If condoms are introduced as a cover for endorsing promiscuity or exploiting the sex trade that should be exposed and opposed. Risks of this kind can never be entirely excluded and have to be balanced against the open and serious intention of liberating people from the danger of life into some hope of a humane and kingdom style of living. In this kind of situation the prohibition of *Humanae Vitae* on the use of artificial contraceptives as disrupting the intrinsic connection between the unitive and procreative dimensions of the marriage act does not seem to apply. In these practices there is no truly unitive act to disrupt. Where a married partner is infected, the pressures created by AIDS/HIV on the couple and their relationship would more readily persuade the compassionate casuist that the use of condoms could be acceptable to prevent an act of marital loving, which in the words of *Humanae Vitae* is divinely intended to be life-giving, from becoming death-dealing.

## Education

In preaching and teaching the good news of the kingdom the community of disciples is engaged in education. For that education to be effective the community must practise what it preaches. The disciples' ministry of education must also be modelled on Jesus' ministry. Education or communication for conversion is based above all on witness. In this light the ministries of companionship, of care and of truthful and sensitive casuistry contain the heart of the Church's education programme.

Education is also a two-way process. The would-be educators must themselves be educated. The teachers must listen and learn. With such a new phenomenon as AIDS/HIV and its continuing developments only a learning Church can be an effective teaching Church. A couple of implications of this rather obvious point may be usefully spelled out.



Learning can and must take place at many different levels in the Church and deal with many different aspects of the pandemic and response to it. In this learning process persons living with AIDS/HIV, their partners, companions and carers have much to contribute. Through their experience they may have unique access to understanding some of the moral needs and possibilities arising out of the pandemic. This was adverted to earlier in the discussion of casuistry. The interaction between this immediate experience and associated understanding and the moral tradition of the Church may already be yielding results. This, however, takes time and no theological or theoretical analysis may be entirely adequate to the practical experience and understanding. Mutual education between the practising and the teaching Church must continue. And there are more serious issues pending than the couple of examples cited earlier might indicate.

Pastoral modifications of the kind suggested by the discussion of drug addiction and sexual intercourse in the context of AIDS/HIV do not seriously affect traditional Catholic positions. The rereading they imply is not really revisionary. Yet as already mentioned there are gaps in the Catholic moral theology of sexuality. It has little positive to say about sexual morality outside marriage. In an area where experience should count in discernment and formulation women's experience has scarcely been heard. The need for development then is not simply occasioned by the spread of AIDS/HIV.

Catholic moral teaching on sexuality, while it has a solid central core in regard to marriage, may have a good deal to learn about the wider meaning if it is to provide adequate education to future generations. One area in which many people with AIDS/HIV, their companions and carers are struggling is that of homosexuality. Part of the struggle and suffering is caused by prejudice and social rejection. The Christian call to unconditional acceptance of all people and especially of the marginalised must clearly apply to homosexuals as people. It cannot be achieved overnight. Education is needed. That education will have to face new evidence about the origins and development of homosexuality. Kingdom truth demands no less, and the kingdom values of justice and freedom exclude discrimination against homosexuals just as much as against other social "lepers". The kingdom value of peace with its implications of unity, reconciliation and forgiveness confirms this need to integrate homosexuals into a genuinely Christian and inclusive community.

What further shifts in attitude and practice new evidence and reconsideration of old positions require is far from clear. That homosexual orientation is no longer regarded as a matter of self-indulgence or personal whim would seem reasonable. Beyond that the witness of remarkable loving care which some gay men have shown to their partners and friends with AIDS/HIV should be recognised as of moral and Christian significance. The moral superiority of stable relationships between

homosexual males as compared with casual relationships can hardly be denied. Such education which is coming mainly from the front-lines of the AIDS/HIV crisis has yet to interact effectively with the directors of Catholic education. What the outcome of that interaction will be cannot be predicted here. Meantime, the companions and carers must act as lovingly as they can on the basis of the best insights available to them.

### Continuing the story

Theology remains permanently unfinished. The stories, the caring, and the grieving, tragic and inspiring, continue; so must the theological reflection. And for all the suffering and the threat posed to the whole human community, the stories may also open up fresh possibilities of redemption and liberation by the inbreaking kingdom of God.

Instead of detailed footnotes of a piece which had been born as much of experience with the work of Caritas Internationalis as of reading, a list of the more recent references seemed more useful.

1. The worldwide impact of AIDS up to 1992 may be studied in *AIDS in the World, A Global Report*, ed. Jonathan Mann, Daniel J. M. Tarantola, Thomas W. Netter (Harvard University Press, 1992). To June 1993 see the papers of the World Health Organisation IXth International Conference on AIDS, Berlin, 7-11 June 1993. The reference in the text is to the *HIV/AIDS Pandemic: Global Spread and Global Response*, the opening paper at the Conference on June 7 by Dr M. H. Merson, Director, Global Programmes on AIDS. A brief account of the Irish situation is in Marcelle Duffy, *Positive Proof: The Emergence of HIV/AIDS and the Irish Response* (Dublin, 1993).
2. The story and work of Caritas Internationalis on AIDS/HIV is available in a range of reports and conference papers. Papers from three of these conferences have been edited and published for limited circulation by C.I., Palazzo San Calisto V.00210 Città del Vaticano. These papers were presented at conferences in London 1987, St Lucia 1989 and Hong Kong 1991. They are also available from CAFOD, Romero Close, Stockwell Road, London SW9 9TY.
3. Personal stories in memoir, fiction and poetry abound, e.g. Paul Monette *Borrowed Time, an Aid Memoir* (New York, 1988); John Mordaunt, *Facing up to AIDS* (Dublin, 1989); *Poets for Life, Seventy-six Poets Face Up to AIDS*, ed. Michael Klein (1989; pb 1992).
4. Church response to AIDS is widely documented from papal statements through bishops' conferences on the Roman Catholic side and equally well documented among the other Churches. *Origins* NC Documentary Service (Washington) carries all the relevant Catholic documentation. In this connection the two American documents *The Many Faces of AIDS, A Gospel Response* (USCC Administrative Board; *Origins*, 24 Dec. 1987) and *Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis* (US Bishops' Meeting, *Origins*, 30 Nov. 1989) bear careful reading for certain differences of emphases at least. Cf. Richard A. McCormick, SJ, "AIDS: The Shape of the Ethical Challenge" in *The Critical Calling* (Washington, 1989).
5. The general shape of this paper's approach to moral issues through kingdom values is worked out in some detail in the author's book, *The Gracing of Society* (Dublin, 1989).
6. Specific ethical issues relating to AIDS/HIV are dealt with in a wide range of journals and books. A useful background to that discussion is Susan Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York, 1990). Other useful collected volumes are Frederick G. Reamer, *AIDS and Ethics* (New York, 1991) and *The AIDS Reader*, ed. Nancy F. McKenzie (New York, 1991).
7. A large Christian literature, theological, ethical and spiritual is emerging. Of Roman Catholic background: *AIDS: Meeting the Community Challenge*, ed. Vicky Costick, Preface, Cardinal Basil Hume (Slough, 1987); James Allison, *Catholics and AIDS: Questions and Answers* (London, 1987); Of Anglican background: *Embracing the Chaos: Theological*

*Responses to AIDS*, ed. James Woodward (London, 1990). For a gay approach: John E. Fortunato, *AIDS, The Spiritual Dilemma* (San Francisco, 1987); Ronald E. Long, J. Michael Clark, *AIDS, God and Faith* (Los Colinas, Texas, 1992).

8. Cardinal Hume's observations on "Church's Teaching Concerning Homosexual People" (*Briefing*, 22 July 1993) is a valuable pastoral reflection on thorny issues highlighted by earlier Roman documents, *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986) and *Some Considerations Concerning Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-discrimination of Homosexual People* (1992). For a much sharper reaction to the second, much less authoritative document, cf. John F. Tuohy, "The CDF and Homosexuals, Rewriting the Moral Tradition", *America* (15 September 1992).

9. Spiritual literature includes: *Embracing the Mystery, Prayerful Responses to AIDS*, ed. Sebastian Sandys (London 1992); Robert Nugent, *Prayer Journey for Persons with AIDS* (Cincinnati, 1989).