were indeed genuine elements of sanctification and truth to be found in other Christian communities than our own.20

Finally, recall John Paul II’s statement on the papacy in Ut Unum Sint (1995), full of ecumenical implication and building on the call for unity made by the Council. Here he writes,

The Bishop of Rome himself must fervently make his own Christ’s prayer for that conversion which is indispensable for ‘Peter’ to be able to serve his brethren. I earnestly invite the faithful of the Catholic Church and all Christians to share in this prayer. May all join me in praying for this conversion.21

As Fergus Kerr notes, the implication of this statement, made within recent memory, is no less than remarkable, ‘[John Paul II] appeals to Christians who are not now, and perhaps never likely to be in full communion with Rome, to help in reshaping the papal ministry.’

Fifty years on from the Council we are called to reflect anew on such resources of faith and to grasp the way in which ecumenism, properly understood, can serve not as a distraction from the search for Catholic identity but as an aid in the discernment of our future life and mission. In short, our dialogue with others can tell us who we are, fostering our self-understanding as a Catholic communion.

CONCLUSION
The Second Vatican Council remains a fresh and inspiring monument of the Catholic tradition and is more important than ever in the realisation of discipleship in the twenty-first century. Approached not merely as a historical event, as an artefact of Catholic memory reserved perhaps for the interest of specialists alone, but as an expression of the Church’s abiding faith, ‘the faith that we believe in,’ the Council underlies the many opportunities and challenges that define the Catholic Church today. A frank assessment of the achievements as well as the limitations of the past fifty years since the Council’s opening serves as an invitation to engage with the work yet to be done.

The Year of Faith
Brendan Leahy

A Year of Faith is a ‘time of grace’ *. The Bible has always recognised special moments of God. This is to be a ‘time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith’ (Porta Fidei, 4) and a ‘summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord’ (PF, 6). The goal is to ‘help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel’ so that ‘everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations the faith of all times’ (PF, 8). It’s not the first time there’s been a Year of Faith. There was one in 1967 just after the Second Vatican Council. Pope Benedict sees the 2012-2013 Year of Faith in line with the Council, but he underlines its missionary, evangelizing dimension because, as he commented at the opening ceremony a few weeks ago, ‘there is more need of it, even more than there was fifty years ago’.

WHY A YEAR OF FAITH?
It’s easy to list the external circumstances that led to its being called: the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, an ‘authentic fruit of the Council’ (PF, 4). Along with these anniversaries there’s the focus in recent years on the New Evangelization as seen in the October Synod of Bishops, dedicated to the ‘New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith’, and the establishment in 2010 of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization.

Apart from these immediate reasons, Pope Benedict’s decision to call a Year of Faith is linked to some of the constant themes of his pontificate. From the beginning he has pointed to the need to underline the primacy of God in a world where there are huge

* In this article I will draw mainly on Pope Benedict’s Letter, Porta Fidei and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s Note with pastoral recommendations.

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changes, challenging us to present God in a new way. In his 2009 Letter to Catholic Bishops, he wrote,

In our days, when in vast areas of the world the faith is in danger of dying out like a flame which no longer has fuel, the overriding priority is to make God present in this world and to show men and women the way to God. The real problem at this moment of our history is that God is disappearing from the human horizon. Leading men and women to God—this is the supreme and fundamental priority of the Church.

The formation or educational crisis is another issue that Pope Benedict has often addressed. Faith needs to be supported by correct knowledge because faith today is not a ‘self-evident presupposition for life in society’ not even for those Christians who ‘are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment’ (PF, 2).

The renewal and reform desired by the Second Vatican Council is another constant theme in Pope Benedict’s pronouncements. In the Porta Fidei letter, quoting Pope John Paul II, he refers to the Council as ‘the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century’ (PF, 5) and repeats that he is convinced that if the Council’s documents are read and received with a correct hermeneutic, that of reform in continuity, then the event of the Council ‘can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church’ (PF 5).

A STRIKING IMAGE

The fifteen paragraphs that make up the Pope’s Letter are dominated by the striking image of the ‘door of faith’. The image is taken from the Acts of the Apostles where Luke presents us with Paul and Barnabas returning from an apostolic journey and telling the community at Antioch that the Lord had opened ‘a door of faith’ for the Gentiles. The door is open to everyone, to all peoples.

The image of the door suggests going through into a new realm of existence, that of entering into God’s space, sharing in a new divine life with its dynamic of mutual giving and receiving, ‘living the life of the Trinity’ as Pope John Paul put it. Going through this door brings us into the Church, the family of the children of God, where I am extended from focus on self to becoming a person of communion, increasingly growing as a ‘Church-soul’ as Origen and other early Church writers put it.


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Proclaiming the Gospel. In terms of proclaiming the Gospel at this time of history, the Pope comments, 'we cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden' (cf. Mt 5:13-16). The Risen Christ sends us out to offer to all the light of his words but for this we need a more credible witness so that the people of today will 'still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus' (PF, 3). The Church as a whole must set out to lead people 'out of the desert', towards the place of life, towards Christ.

Intensify our knowledge of the faith. The Year of Faith is an opportunity to "rediscover the content of the faith... and to reflect on the act of faith" (PF, 9). Pope Benedict wants to emphasise the relationship between the 'act' of faith in which I entrust myself totally to God who has communicated himself to us in Jesus Christ, and the 'contents of faith'.

Throughout the letter the Pope is careful to remind us that 'there exists a profound unity between the act by which we believe and the content to which we give our assent' (PF, 10). At the risk of an oversimplification, it can be said that before the Second Vatican Council, the emphasis was on the objective, content dimension of faith. After the Council, the focus shifted more to the subjective, experiential element of faith. In both cases, there is a danger of undervaluing the other dimension. While Pope Benedict wants us to see the profound link between both dimensions, he also perceives a particular need today to draw on the Catechism of the Catholic Church which provides a 'systematic and organic synthesis' and also offers 'a permanent record of the many ways in which the Church has meditated on the faith and made progress in doctrine so as to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith' (PF, 11). To assist us in Ireland, there's the national directory for Catechesis, Share the Good News (2011).

In his call to 'intensify' our knowledge of the faith, Pope Benedict suggests a number of themes worth pursuing.

- Faith is both a personal and communitarian act. Each person's 'I believe' is a sharing in the collective 'I believe' of the whole Church in response to God. In that sense it is in and from the Church that we learn to say 'I believe'. Faith is a communitarian journey in the Risen Christ who takes hold of our whole being - mind and soul, body and life - and clothes us with his light, enabling us to translate the Truth that is Jesus into 'daily life'. This is important. Faith is not to be limited to a corner of my life.
- 'A Christian may never think of belief as a private act' (PF 10).

THE YEAR OF FAITH

At Pentecost, the apostles showed how faith has a public dimension. They proclaimed without fear. So too all believers are invited to speak and give public witness because faith implies public commitment and social responsibility.

- There's the issue of the relationship of faith and reason that Benedict XVI has touched on so often during his pontificate - from Regensburg to London. Here the topic of faith and science opens up: 'The Church has never been afraid of demonstrating that there cannot be any conflict between faith and genuine science, because both, albeit via different routes, tend towards the truth' (PF, 12).

Michael Paul Gallagher's work, Faith Maps: Ten Religious Explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger² is a text that many have found helpful in accompanying their reflection on faith.

Bear Witness to Faith. The third task placed before us this year is that of bearing witness to faith. 'Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path.' (PF, 14). The faith that works through love brings new life and offers 'a new criterion of understanding' (PF, 6), enabling us to recognise the face of the Christ in everyone who asks for our love (PF, 14). For experiences and stories of faith in new communities and movements, see Susan Gately's recent book, God's Surprise: New Movements in the Church.

So much can be learned from attention to the charismatic dimension of the Church, those men and women (martyrs, saints and all who have witnessed to the Gospel and its demands of communion and justice) who in every generation have blazed a trail of light in the history of the Church and society (PF, 13). In particular, Mary to whom Pope Benedict entrusts the Year of Faith.

GOD'S SILENCE

The Letter could not but refer to the issue that arises often along the journey of faith - God's apparent silence. The Pope acknowledges this: 'How many of the saints have lived in solitude! How many believers, even in our own day, are tested by God's silence when they would rather hear his consoling voice!' (PF, 15). We can think here of Mother Teresa of Calcutta or Thérèse of Lisieux.

Pope Benedict leads us to perceive how the rhythm of faith goes through a dying and rising as we read in St. Paul's Letter to

Meaning and Relevance
- a conversation among priests

Johanna Merry

If one were to describe current realities which signal a world undergoing rapid change and in crisis, certain patterns emerge. Unemployment, financial uncertainty, forced emigration, disruption of communities are widespread, in addition to ongoing stories of war, violence, famine, disasters, decadence and widening inequality. Globalisation and its attendant technology have brought the distant near, experience immediate, sometimes with overpowering effect. Institutions of church and state are subject to a degree of unravelling as one crisis replaces another; the conflict of competing ideologies has accelerated as the secular world jostles with an ecclesial one, at times attempting to override one another. Cosmology, ecology and contemporary physics have added breadth and freshness to the study of the universe, whilst traditional values and belief systems are challenged by a maelstrom of knowledge, fluid principles, fragmenting family systems and social breakdown.

This article seeks to capture the collective mood of priests today who seek to make ongoing meaning of their life and mission into the future amidst a mounting tide of turbulent currents. Inspired by a group of priests who gathered in a ‘borrowed room’ to ponder the question of meaning and relevance through exploration and conversation, the garnered musings of a wider spectrum of religious and missionary priests who gathered in other borrowed spaces for ministry mentoring are also reflected in the narrative. Hope-filled patterns emerged, which may stimulate an appetite for conversation among priests about their evolving identity and mission into the future.

I wondered about ‘borrowed’, how and why this depiction? What emerged was a sense that their own space was cluttered, that an alternative space was needed to take stock: a borrowed space also meant borrowed time, accentuating the focus to get what they wanted, done; a room with a different view from the places and spaces from which they came and at a distance from the familiar

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