

John and Jesus ¹

*Searching for a way, a model,
– To have the people focus on Yahweh's FATHERLY love,
Yet to still emphasize the need for repentance –
Jesus turned to John the Baptist for inspiration.
What John preached, resonated powerfully with Jesus.
Jesus deeply valued
... John's repudiation of double standards,
... His heightened consciousness of sin's SOCIAL effects,
... His stress on personal integrity,
... And particularly, his insistence on the need for a CHANGE OF HEART
– Out of which would naturally flow
A turning from sin,
And a turning to God, and to one's neighbours.*

*Jesus saw John and his followers as a good model.
Yet John was by no means perfect.
John expected God to come
As a fire, a winnowing wind, a purifier
– In a word, expecting God to come
With power and prophetic severity!
Jesus saw He could work with such a group
... GENTLING their perceptions and language:
... Persuading them that the way of humility and compassion
Was God's preferred way.
He suggested that God's way was one associated with
Entrusting ourselves in faith INTO the power of God,
Exercising authority, through a leadership of service
... And OFFERING not only, like John,
To hate the sin,
But also to love the sinner!*

¹ Year 1, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1984

Jesus, We Invite You ²

*Jesus, we invite You into our home.
Jesus, You are most welcome
... Bringing as You do
Good News of Abba's love for the poor and the lonely.*

*Jesus, make Yourself at home
Within the hearts of all who dwell within.
Jesus, touch our wounded lives
With Your healing, enlivening love.*

*Jesus, further open our hearts to receive –
Both the Body that is Your Church,
And the Body that is Your Word.
Cause both to flourish in our hearts!*

² Year 1, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1984. Composed for Eucharistic Visitation to a deaf, house-bound, elderly lady, Nell Devaney, whom I visited in Brisbane from 1984 to 2004

Healer of the Broken-Hearted ³

*This is the Lamb of God,
Jesus, our Guest –
Who heals the broken-hearted,
Brings comfort to the lonely,
Calms the fears of each one He meets,
And forgives all ...
From the depths of His Divine Heart.*

³ Year 1, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1984

Sin's True Measure ⁴

*Our real identity is given – and received,
Only in forgiveness:
In forgiveness, we allow God
To reveal our sinfulness to us
... Because,
OUR sense of our sinful past,
Is NOT the measure of our sinfulness.*

*Sin's true measure
Is what we have denied ourselves –
God's Presence! God's Vitality! God's Love!
This sin-consciousness
Is a gift of God
... A flitting shadow
Of Love's Reality!
... A weak echo, a snippet
Of the Symphony of Light, Colour and Warmth
That yearns to enfold us!*

⁴ Year 1, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1984

Unreadiness for Mystery⁵

*If – in hoping to be enriched in spirit,
We long for an enhanced spiritual experience –
Then God will continue
To conceal Love's Self in Mystery.
But, if we seek to be encountered by Mystery
... With openness of heart ...
Then we'll truly experience peace
... For peace itself suggests to us,
That our only response
In the face of Mystery,
Is heartfelt poverty of spirit,
– The acceptance of the ultimate poverty of our being.*

*Indeed, peace expresses our humble acceptance
Of our basic HUMAN UNREADINESS for Mystery
... For Mystery is forever a grace,
Forever a Gift.*

*Crucially,
The face of Mystery
Is the Face of the Crucified-Risen Jesus.
Yes ... the Person of the Paschal Jesus
Is Mystery's embodiment
... Now bodied to us within the Eucharist,
Within Christ's Body, the Church.*

*O Spirit of Mystery,
Keep the eyes of our hearts
Ever focussed
'On the light of Abba's glory,
The glory on the Face of Christ.'⁶
– As we gaze on every parish Eucharist,
And on every Eucharist-in-action
Within loving lives.*

⁵ Year 1, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1984

⁶ 2 Cor 4:6

Enjoy Time's Rhythms ⁷

Love time, dwell within time ...

Enjoy its rhythms, its growth cycles ...

Be at peace with time, let it unfold

... Its creative, healing wonders, within.

Be a friend of time, pace yourself ...

Savour how it promotes love ...

Trust its constancy, its faithfulness

... As patient companion, to your changeling spirit.

Let it lead you, gently, evenly

Through its gift of every moment ...

To that ever-present Eternal Moment

... Ever radiant with Love's Presence.

Learn to be open to Love,

Within the moment of Mystery's Unveiling ...

Let each intimate, precious moment

Reveal your grateful 'yes' to Love.

⁷ Year 1, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1984

God's First Gift ⁸

God's first and continuing gift is Their Godself

The Father ... fathering

Jesus Ascended ... brothering

The Spirit ... en-Spiriting ;

And This needs to be ...

Our first

And continuing

Gift to each other ...

⁸ Year 2, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1985

Become Like Little Children ⁹

*Mentally challenged people differentiate, only a little,
Between major and minor events in their lives,
And, even, between degrees of goodness;
In this way, they are like young children.*

Both are led

SIMPLY

Into God's enveloping Mystery,

And both are gifted

SIMPLY

*... Delighting in God's Presence in their life,
With openness, artlessness, and innocence.*

Not so are people

Who constantly stifle their conscience,

Who do not allow CHRIST TO RISE within it

... To enlighten, soften, and sensitize it.

These self-absorbed hearts

Gradually lose their capacity

To differentiate between good and bad

– Firstly, in their DISMISSIVENESS, in minor things,

... Then through increasingly numerous gradations of insensibility ...

Until, hard-hearted, and emotionally impervious,

They simply fail to recognize OBVIOUS good and evil

– In major issues of life.

Their whole conscience becomes –

Increasingly UNRESPONSIVE,

Accumulatively DARKENED,

And ultimately ANAESTHETIZED.

Yet even here,

Christ still whispers ...

'COME TO ME,

All you who labour and are heavily burdened'. ¹⁰

I am the Resurrection and the Life!' ¹¹

⁹ Year 2, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1985

¹⁰ Mt 11:28

The God of Prayer¹²

*At any one moment within us,
God's Presence is the continuing Gift of the Godself
... Coming as IT does, out of the heart of Community,
... Coming as IT does, out of the heart of Eucharist,
... Coming as IT does, out of the heart of Scripture ...*

*God's Presence is thus, not static,
Does not admit of closure
– But is the SAME Presence, ever alive, ever new
– The One Presence giving itself continually ...*

*For one whom God INDWELLS ...
If prayer is 'being in God's Presence',
Then there is no progress FROM prayer,
No return TO prayer.
There is only BE-ING at prayer
– IN Christ who IS our prayer –
Being present to the God of Creation
Now, the God of Compassion
Now, the God of Friendship ...*

¹¹ Jn 11:25

¹² Year 3, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1986

Blest Be You, Abba ¹³

Blest be You, Abba

*Parenting the Church and this community, day by day;
You enter into every circumstance of our lives
With Your ever-present offer, to make us whole.*

*You have raised up Jesus
As the answer to all our dreams and hopes,
Jesus – looked for, with longing through all ages –
Is now our constant companion.*

*Jesus is our saviour, establishing us in freedom
– Freedom from our lack of vision
– Freedom to be like He is.
Thus, Abba, Your love for our forebears is fulfilled,
And Your Covenant of Love with us, is enacted day by day.*

*Like John the Baptist, even as a child,
We are called to prepare the way for Jesus
... In the hearts of those who grace our lives:
To make known to them
– By revealing in OUR OWN lives –
The welcoming and forgiving Jesus;
To invite them to open their own hearts
To Your loving-kindness, Abba
– Alive in the heart of Your Beloved!*

*... So that, in the darkness of all our lives,
The Light of Your Beloved may dawn
– Leading us to that Banquet
Where, together as Your Children,
We rejoice in Your peace.*

¹³ Brisbane Retreat, Gregory Terrace community, 1988. This poem is a free version of the 'Benedictus'

Your Presence Brings Out the Truth ¹⁴
(A Trilogy – Part 1)

*Jesus, here I am again;
It's good to be here.
I feel good, now I'm with You.
You're a real friend.
You always make me feel O.K. ...
Whenever I share with You.*

*I know I'm kidding myself,
Whenever I don't keep in touch with You
... Bluffing myself 'I'm O.K.':
I just don't end up being Your witness!
I sell You short!*

*I'm not the genuine article like You
I'm not really trusting, like You:
I hold onto my fears
I cling to the old patterns
I hesitate, on the edge of courage
I postpone the real decisions
I flirt with sin and temptation
I fail to leave my past behind.
I simply don't come across, AS YOU,
In the here and now.*

*Yes, Jesus, I feel far short of Your dream for me;
I'm just not REALLY open, Jesus, to others in my life.
Why?
Because, at heart, I'm scared;
Not scared of any single effort it takes,
But, scared of BEING You – unrelentingly, day after day!
Abba knows, how I need Your strength
... Need You to be with me, on a daily basis;
I really need You – as a FRIEND, Jesus
... To be with me always.*

¹⁴ Brisbane Retreat, Gregory Terrace community, 1988

Struggling With Your Presence ¹⁵
(A Trilogy – Part 2)

*Even when I know You're there, Jesus,
I quickly take You for granted –
Forgetting You're there, by my side,
Not giving You a second thought.*

*Mostly, I'm just a little person
... Loving my secure routines
... Clinging to my easy ways
... Complacent in my self-image
Because, I don't want to trade 'my crowd'
For Your 'friends', a pretty demanding lot;
I won't even trade my 'loneliness'
For the company of Your 'friends'!*

*I suppose, in my heart, I'm afraid of real change:
I want You there, for sure,
But without making any demands!
The deep change You call for
Really frightens me out of my wits;
Come to think of it ...
I suppose I really prefer my mediocrity
My comfortable anxieties, and comfortable fears;
Actually, I guess even my loneliness
... To what's on offer, from You being with me.
O Jesus!
If only I could ... really ... genuinely ...
Trust my future to You!*

*I know, deep down,
I doubt ... You'll fill my intimacy needs,
And, in fantasy, run to this one, and that one,
Searching for the rainbow, seeking comfort.
I always want contradictory guarantees from You,
Before I step out into the deep waters of real trust ...
"When you seek me
With ALL your heart,
I will let you find Me,
Find me ... as 'I am'!" ¹⁶*

¹⁵ Brisbane Retreat, Gregory Terrace community, 1988

Gently, Gently Into The Presence ¹⁷
(A Trilogy – Part 3)

*Jesus forgive me ...
Bring me to forgive myself for my lack of trust.
With Your gentle forgiveness,
I can then bring forgiveness
To the heart of my presence with others.
Only then, can I be open and true
To Your enabling Presence within me!*

*Jesus encourage me ...
Give me the heart to risk –
The known for the unknown,
Routine for change,
'Having it all together'
For the uncertainty of coping ...
Therein, inviting me
Into radical reliance on You!*

*Jesus move my heart –
To celebrate the breaking in of Your Grace,
To celebrate Your Presence in our humanity,
To celebrate community: our togetherness in You;
And to celebrate You, Yourself
... Beloved of Abba, Giver of the Spirit
The source, the growth, the glory of our lives,
The Whisper in our memory ...
'Come to Me ... and rest'. ¹⁸*

¹⁶ Jer 29: 13-14

¹⁷ Brisbane Retreat, Gregory Terrace community, 1988

¹⁸ Mt 11: 28

Why Do You Hide Your Face? ¹⁹

*Jesus eternally yearns to be with us
... Only sin frustrates this yearning.
Instinctively, through sin,
WE hide our face from the Lord.
We imagine it to be the other way round.
Yet we have ONLY
To turn and 'seek the face of the Lord', ²⁰
To welcome the compassion in the eyes of Jesus
– For our brother's forgiveness to be ours.*

*Sin distances us
– In OUR minds, not His –
From the enlivening presence of Jesus.
To sin, is NOT, to worry
... That Jesus is absent, in that facet of our life;
It is to let slip the opportunity
To BE CHRIST in the situation
– To shrug off the WONDER of Christ's Presence there.
Yet, mysteriously ... through the Paschal Mystery,
The welcoming, compassionate Christ
Is present in the very midst of our estrangement,
In the heart of our loneliness and alienation
... Arms open to embrace: His heart ... our home!*

*Some hearts open; many fail to respond
... Continuing to ABSENT themselves
From Christ's enveloping presence.
But when the effects of such self-exile bite hard,
We turn, and without any irony, or shame,
Project the blame onto Christ, for being absent!*

¹⁹ Brisbane Retreat, Gregory Terrace community, 1988

²⁰ Ps 27: 8 (Grail)

*Thus, it is in Christ's apparent absence, when we cry –
 'Lord, why do you hide Your face?'²¹
 That Jesus often surprises us,
Revealing His Presence through FORGIVENESS.*

*On the Cross, Jesus, too, experienced Divine Absence
 But in a radically HONEST way:
 Traumatized in agony
By Abba's absence ... AS A FELT PRESENCE,
 Jesus kept on trusting in Abba's Promise
– The giving of the promised Holy Spirit –
 To restore Himself, and US in Him,
 To Abba's tender loving presence.
This gift is a homecoming for our humanity,
 In Jesus our brother,
 The Beloved of Abba.*

²¹ Ps 27: 9 (Grail)

The Father Draws Us²²

*The Father draws us in a myriad of ways ...
'Christ plays in ten thousand places
Lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not His'.²³
The Father draws us, firstly, to seek forgiveness
Of Jesus, present in others,
Of Jesus, present in the Word,
Of Jesus, in Eucharist as Sacrament,
Of Jesus, deep within us.*

*Jesus Ascended is ONE Presence
Unveiling Himself in many forms.
A facile faith has us separating Christ
Into MANY presences ...
Confusing us, distracting us, dissipating our energies.
But Grace inserts us into this ONE Presence,
So that, deeply integrated through forgiveness,
We long
... To be Eucharist, broken by brothers and sisters,
... To be Word of God to all in Christ's Body,
... To be IN Jesus Ascended, dwelling in each other
Being 'members one of another.'²⁴*

*As our best model on how to INTEGRATE these presences,
Jesus gives us Mary²⁵
As Mother of the One who Unites
– Uniting us, together as Church,
Uniting us, within ourselves
... Integrating our worship, work, prayer and silence.
Mary is the exemplar, because hers is a life
Lived radiantly in the face
Of the one, seamless Presence of Jesus.*

²² Brisbane Retreat, Gregory Terrace community, 1988

²³ *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* Gerard Manley Hopkins

²⁴ Eph 4: 25

²⁵ Jn 19: 27

The Passover of Your Glory²⁶

*Father, through Jesus, lead us
Into the Passover of Your Glory,
That, together, we may glorify You:*

*Enliven us with Your Love
That we may love You.
Enthuse us with Your Desire
That we may ask of You.
Empower us with Your Freedom
That we may offer all to You.
Breathe into us Your Gift
That we may thank You.
Unite us in Your Spirit ...
That we may be one in You.*

*Glory be to You, Abba,
Our tender, loving Father;
To You, Jesus, our friend ...
Our brother, our saviour, our God;
To You, Spirit
Our love, our joy, and our peace.*

²⁶ Brisbane Retreat, Gregory Terrace community, 1988. This poem I gave out, at the end of my 1991-2 Rome Tertianship (see Note Poem 149), as my personal memento to other participants, of what the Tertianship meant for me. I have also used it, ever since, at Eucharist.

Discipleship of the Word ²⁷

*A true experience of the Word of God
Is always one of DISCIPLESHIP*

This discipleship of the Word –

*Is, firstly, one of LISTENING
... Listening, with the ears of one's heart,
Of opening, like loosened earth, to the seed being sown,
Patient, 'til its rootlets find a home within the depths
... Of one's receptive spirit.*

*This listening, this opening –
Is a responsiveness to being CALLED,
Is an attentiveness to the voice of the Shepherd,
Is a sensitivity to the Spirit, whispering within.*

*This calling
Is Abba's activating Presence, His enabling role,
In the DISCERNMENT
That ought characterize a disciple's whole life:
Abba's active Presence PRIMING the disciple's receptive presence.*

Is, secondly, one of BEING EMPOWERED:

*The disciple's receptive response
Calls forth Abba's generosity –
A cascade of wonders
... A Father's lavishing of GIFTS
Which, once given, are not withdrawn!
Most treasured of all,
Is Abba's invitation to COMMUNION
– To enter the Divine Circle of Love.
From this profound experience,
Flows ALL other gifts
– Enabling the disciple's ministering
To reflect the Good News mission of Jesus
Amidst a people, gathered in the Spirit.*

²⁷ Year 6, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, Jan 1989

*Is, thirdly, one of BEING MISSIONED.
Since there is but one mission
– That of Jesus ... spreading the Good News of Abba's love –
All disciples are missioned, IN CHRIST,
And, through HIS Spirit, are SENT FORTH!
While they are sent on 'individually gifted' MINISTRIES,
They are gifted, not for a solitary aim or goal,
But for the COMMUNAL MISSION
– Of spreading the Good News of the Paschal Jesus
Together, AS CHURCH!*

*Thus, as disciples together,
We are to PROCLAIM
– With our lives –
Abba's love for Jesus
And Jesus' – and thus our – love for Abba;
And to witness, in Their Spirit,
To the Fellowship of Love! ²⁸*

Two Hearts ... One Love ... One Destiny²⁹

*The wedding of any two lives
Is an invitation for us
To bestow worth on two committed people
... In their mutual gifting to each other,
And with Christ,
To honour this union of hearts:
Two hearts ... One love ... One destiny.*

*This wedding of hearts, is also an invitation
For the community present
– A community FORMED by invitation of the couple –
To ENTER the relationship
... To support, nourish, challenge and encourage it.
The relationship at the wedding ceases to be a private one,
And becomes a community-sanctioned one.*

*Thus, the Sacrament of Marriage invites community INTERVENTION
Into its very heart ...
Precisely because it is a community-SUSTAINED relationship.
Such intervention respects three special areas
As the exclusive preserve of the couple –
The area of FINAL choices concerning the welfare of the relationship itself,
KEY choices on the welfare of any children,
And the area of the couple's marriage intimacy.*

*As we, of the community, enter into the HEART of the couple's relationship,
– Now a WEDDED relationship –
There, we hope to find the Ascended Jesus
... Who is at the heart of all processes
That dignify human beings.
So it is, WITH Jesus, that we of the community
Undertake the life-long responsibility
To ANIMATE this unique relationship.*

²⁹ Year 6, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, Jan 1989. Poem composed for a wedding reception speech for Peter and Wendy Morrison, in Feb 1989. Peter had been a student of mine at Woodford prison.

*As we sacramentally welcome this couple into our hearts,
We welcome them to that deeper stream of community life
That safeguards and enhances
The wedded couples within it.
We are always more than witnesses:
We too are to be faithful to our pledge
– To ANIMATE and to CELEBRATE
The continuing union
So as to CHRISTIANIZE it.
In this spirit, we affirm our commitment to them.*

Each Other: The Way to God ³⁰

(Spoken to the wedding couple ..).

Spoken to the wedding couple ...

*In reflecting on Jesus' heartening promise,
Where two or three are gathered in my name
There am I in their midst', ³¹*

*We know that a wedded couple, together, or as a family,
Form an especially blest FOCUS for Jesus' words.
In sacramentalizing your wedded bond,
Jesus ennobles marriage
With a special Presence
– A Presence that enables, affirms, and celebrates
UNITY THROUGH LOVE.*

*Know also,
That, by surrendering yourself to each other
– Through the sacrifice of letting go of self –
You each will come to KNOW JESUS
In a new and unique way
– Jesus who is the integrating presence
Animating your marriage relationship
In every possible way.
Indeed, relating to the other,
Becomes your preferred and the Church-sanctioned way
Of ENCOUNTERING CHRIST in your life!*

*Be clearly aware,
That a unique feature of a marriage relationship
Is its mathematics!
Each is not asked to contribute 50% to the marriage:
If so, 50% would be RETAINED personally,
And, sooner or later, would become the focus of MISTRUST.*

³⁰ Year 6, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1989. See Note Poem 138

³¹ Mt 18: 20

*No, each is asked to contribute 100%,
And Christ assures us that 'the two shall become one'.³²
Moreover, in giving 100% in mutual openness,
Each WILL receive a 100% as SHEER GIFT!*

*Such CONTINUED MUTUAL GIVING is the fruit of prayer,
And of vigilance in replacing a mindset ...
Of 'EXPECTING a return'
– Which puts pressure on the other –
With the much more freeing attitude, of HOPING for a return
... A virtue that springs from the heart of God!*

*Marriage's 'sacrament', in Greek, is 'mysterium' or mystery.
At the heart of all mystery is SURPRISE.
So, if you desire to deepen faithfulness within your marriage,
Then surprise each other
With unexpected expressions of love
... Tender actions and appreciative words, that are UNEARNED,
That are SHEER GIFT,
And which, of their very nature,
Draw both more deeply
Into Love's Mystery.*

Caressing Hearts: Opening Minds ³³

*The Gospel is the sacred voice of Christ,
A sacrament of His Person for us:
All people can listen to the WORDS of the Word ...
Only faith has ears to hear the VOICE of the Word ...
‘His sheep hear His VOICE’. ³⁴
Only lives, lived ‘IN Christ’ know His MIND:
The Spirit opens such minds to Christ’s
... ‘Interpreting the Scriptures to them’. ³⁵*

*Yet, the voice of the Word FIRST speaks to the HEART,
Before ever speaking to the mind.
To encounter the Word, one must first yearn
For the Lord’s KIND CARESSES.
Only in this tender encounter,
Will His voice begin to move hearts,
And animate lives.*

³³ Year 6, Prison Ministry, Woodford, from Gregory Terrace community, 1989

³⁴ Jn 10:3

³⁵ Lk 24: 27

The Word – God’s and Ours ³⁶

*Through the Holy Spirit’s ‘presence-activity’ in Mary,
God’s own Self-Image – His Word,
Is embodied in our humanity.*

*In Jesus
– God’s Word of love for us –
God fully unveils His Desire
... Both, revealing who God Is,
And who we really are
... Freely gifting us
With a new identity
... As His children,
IN Christ!*

*IN Christ
– Our Word of love for God –
We express all whom we are to God:
Our minds, our hearts, and our very being;
And especially our new togetherness in the Beloved.
He is our PRAYER, our WORSHIP – humanity’s SONG OF LOVE!*

³⁶ Year 6, Prison Ministry, Woodford and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1989

Choose a Different Future ³⁷

*We're always free ...
To change our lives:
To choose a different future
– From a different past!*

*Our memory-bank
Holds many pasts:
We've selected, and emphasized ONE ...
Why not choose a more fulfilled 'past',
So as to shape, develop and enliven
A MORE Christlike future ?*

³⁷ Year 7, Prison Ministry, Wacol and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1990. This poem is the choice I often offered the prisoners I taught.

The Christ We Nurture and Love³⁸

*It is the Risen Jesus
With His Emmaus intimacy, and heart-stirring wisdom,
With His warm, inclusive friendship on a dawn-lit shore
– That we HUNGER FOR in Eucharist.*

*It is the welcoming Paschal Jesus
– His face love-lit by the Presence of Abba –
Whom we care for, in others
... Nurturing, healing, educating and affectioning ...*

*Together, we take the tender care
Of His STILL WOUNDED Body;
And, together, IN it,
We, His disfigured, wounded kin,
Are lovingly cared for.*

What a loving Mystery!

³⁸ Year 7, Prison Ministry, Wacol and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1990

Eternal Mutual Love ³⁹

*When love becomes truly MUTUAL,
Jesus promises a special presence
– A Presence
That is essentially
An experience
Of Abba, Jesus, and Loyce ⁴⁰
... Whose love is eternally mutual ...
Living Their Life of Love
Within us!*

³⁹ Year 7, Prison Ministry, Wacol and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1990

⁴⁰ Loyce (loy-cee), my familiar name for the Spirit; formed from Paschal LOVE, JOY and PEACE

At Home with God ⁴¹

*Prayer is being open TO God,
And being open WITH God
– The source of freedom,
And freedom's goal.*

*To be free in spirit,
Is to be truly free ...
Spirit is openness to the ABSOLUTE,
– To God ... who is ALL-FREE.*

*Thus, to be truly at home
With one's spirit,
Is to experience
Being at prayer ...
Open to God.*

⁴¹ Year 8, Prison Ministry, Wacol and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1991

Humanizing Emotions⁴²

*Our human emotions ...
Linked to our instincts,
Triggered by our minds,
Powerfully amplified in our bodies,
Are sub-conscious currents
Flowing, to and fro,
Between our body and mind
– MOVING US OUT of ourselves
To others, and to the world.*

*To truly humanize our emotions,
And to put them at the service
Of our values, and of humanity,
We need –
To NAME them
To CLAIM them
To TAME them
To AIM them.*

*In naming them ...
I identify how I feel,
So my choices can be
Specific and proportionate;*

⁴² Year 8, Prison Ministry, Wacol and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1991. I was moved to write this poem because of the central role of emotions, in educating prisoners. From this year, the Courses I developed and taught in my prison ministry, settled into a pattern (which continued until the end of my ministry in 1998). During my 15 fulltime years, mostly I taught 4 main courses, twice each week, each for 10 weeks:

1. Pre-release – its focus was on the emotional and social changes, and preparation needed prior to, and during, the early months of release from prison.
2. Personal Development – a program to enhance one's self-knowledge and to negotiate relationships better.
3. Anger Management – evaluation of the origins, causes and effects of one's anger problems in one's own personality, and in one's relationships, especially in the domestic violence area. How to choose and sustain change at various levels regarding anger.
4. Drug and Alcohol Management – evaluation of the origins, causes and effects of one's 'problem use' of drugs and alcohol, in one's personality and relationships. How to choose and sustain change at various levels.

*And let others know clearly, how I feel
... Relative to my thinking, duty, and so on.*

*In claiming them ...
I recognize them as MY OWN
– Welcome or unwelcome –
And take responsibility for what flows from them
... Not blaming others – ‘You make me angry’,
But exercising choice
... ‘When I hear that, I become angry’.*

*In taming them ...
I COLLECT the mixture of emotions I feel,
I CALM any contending energies within,
And CO-ORDINATE them, for self-assessment,
Or for a possible response to others.*

*And in aiming them ...
I take care in the expression of my response,
To maintain self-respect
And to ensure respect for others.*

*Overall, we need ...
To own, to value, and to celebrate
Our emotions
... And so humanize them.*

Choosing the Good ⁴³

If our life

... Is BAD

We –

Love things

Use people

Lock into ideas

Chose what's safe

... Is GOOD,

We –

Love people

Use things

Expand our ideas

Choose what's challenging

⁴³ Year 8, Prison Ministry, Wacol and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1991. I wrote this as a memory aide, to enhance prisoner's choices.

Walking in Their Shoes ⁴⁴

TERM 1

*Jesus, it is You,
In and through the poor and outcast,
Who comes to accompany me.
Be WITH ME
So that I ...
May listen to the poor
With a discerning heart,
And walk in their shoes.*

TERM 2

*Jesus, be WITH ME ...
As I stand beside the poor,
And identify with them
As You did.
Let me truly reflect Your Presence
With the poor,
As I render that same service
To my brothers in community.*

TERM 3

*Loving Father,
Gracing us with gifts
Far beyond our needs,
Give us that perception of material goods,
Which was in Jesus,
Who emptied Himself,
'And took on the image of oppressed humanity.'* ⁴⁵

TERM 4

*Edmund, as your brothers,
Help us trust in providence-as our inheritance,
Receiving all from the Father.
Lead us to do His will,
By returning all to Him
And accept our role as stewards of His creation.* ⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Year 8, Prison Ministry, Wacol and Borallon, from Gregory Terrace community, 1991

⁴⁵ Phil 2: 7 – The Inclusive Bible

⁴⁶ 'partners' would be preferable to 'stewards'. These four poem prayers are part of 4 book-marks, given by me to each Brother in Queensland for use in community prayer in 1991, all focussing on the POOR.

The Uplifting Grace of Lourdes⁴⁷

*Following our four weeks' traverse⁴⁸
Through the whole of Europe down to Florence,
... The Spirit stunningly urged me
To go immediately to Lourdes,
– Not as a tourist, but as a pilgrim.
By midnight of the same day, with nil planning, I had departed
– Knowing I had the best of guides ... a Divine Companion.
On my Euro-rail journey, accompanied by a boisterous football team,
The actual pilgrimage – through Pisa, Genoa, the Riviera and Toulouse –
Deeply framed how I prayed in preparation.
I took all I encountered, ON THE WAY,
Into my heart, as one spiritual emblem
... For all those in Australia, and elsewhere,
For whom I was a prayer ambassador, a heart companion.*

*Finally, moving through the richly fertile upper reaches
Of its sub-alpine Pyrenees valley,
We arrived in summery Lourdes,
In the burnished glow of early twilight.
No surprise, when we alighted
At the station, entitled ... Notre Dame!*

⁴⁷ Written in Rome, in the fortnight following the author's pilgrimage to Lourdes, all part of his mid-life spiritual course, the International Tertianship, Rome, Aug to Dec 1991. As a mid-life (48 years of age) member of a religious order, stationed in Brisbane, Australia, I was selected for the International Tertianship in Rome. It was effectively a sabbatical, focussing on spirituality and renewal. A 'Tertianship' implies, in our Congregational context, a THIRD phase of spiritual formation – after one's novitiate, and various other short spiritual formation opportunities. This Tertianship needs to be distinguished from the National Tertianship I attended in Sydney in 1980 for three months. The Rome Course was, I believe, a significant turning point in my life ... perhaps reflected by the many poems I was moved to write during it. The actual Course ran from mid-August to Christmas 1991. I spiritually treasured a trip alone to Lourdes just before the Course began. Overall the Course allowed me to seriously review my life, to be open to many new influences, to share and to discern a deeper future. Besides days-off visiting the Vatican and Rome etc, I felt especially graced by a pilgrimage to Assisi, and, most significantly, by a group pilgrimage to the Holy Land for two weeks. The 'wider' Tertianship had some eye-opening, and heart-opening experiences. My friend, Br Kevin McDade, was my travelling companion. Our pre-Course travels took us from a week in China, almost two in Russia, down through Europe for two, and to Italy for three. With two history degrees, I was fascinated by the places visited. Our post-course travel included Paris, London and Southern Ireland (with 4 days of group activity there, to end the Course). It took us two weeks to return home through the US. Overall, a truly wonderful and life re-orientating experience.

⁴⁸ 'Our' refers to Br. Kev McDade and the author

*In my lodging that night, I prayed with the Spirit
‘That my Lourdes pilgrimage would be one of open faith’⁴⁹
– Being with Jesus IN THE WAY He desires.
I prayed individually for my heart-companions
... That their desires be expressed by me in simplicity,
‘Through Mary to Jesus
To Abba’
And be given fulfilment
Within the Mystery of the Holy Spirit
Who takes all the considerations of our lives
– Especially the movements of our hearts –
In EXPRESSING God’s Will to us.*

*The next day – my only day there – I discovered
That August 13 was the date of France’s Feast of the Assumption
And, thus, the French National Day of Pilgrimage to Lourdes!
No wonder the Holy Spirit had been so insistent on my going!*

*I wrote, ‘It was a day full to overflowing
With Abba’s welcoming, comforting and uplifting GRACE
... The grace of that time,
The grace of that occasion,
The grace of that place,
The grace mediated through the PEOPLE there.
And most transformative of all –
This SANCTIFYING grace was both special for me,
And INTEGRATED me with God’s People,
Through the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.’*

*‘The day began as I crossed the River Gave
– Across its strong, clear, coursing, mountain water –
To the Shrine’s entrance, with its Crucified Christ on a Cross.
I felt at home at once – with its REALITY.
The impact of the Cross, precisely at this point,
Brought home to me ... how ALL our blessings
Arrive through the Sign of the Cross.
This message reoccurred all day.’*

⁴⁹ The extended quotes throughout this poem all come directly from the author’s personal diary for this time.

*I was then, simply led along, in a pilgrim stream of hundreds,
Towards the central Lourdes' Basilica of the Rosary
– Stretching out its encompassing outdoor 'arms' to greet us.
I entered the Lower Basilica
And prayed my way around a beautiful mosaic Stations of the Cross.
Nearby, the Lourdes signature motif said simply and firmly,
Through Mary to Jesus.'*

*Feeling prompted by the Spirit,
I then headed across mown meadowland,
Once grazed by Bernadette's sheep,
Across the Gave, to the Grotto.
Sinking to my knees,
– After squeezing into a wonderful spot
Right in front of Our Lady's Grotto statue –
With simple trust, I placed in Mary's hands,
All the wishes of my heart-companions.
Knowing the unbounded capacity and intimacy
Of Mary and Jesus to respond
To each of us very personally
... Even to our unspoken, unworded desires ...
I knew simply that these wishes WERE granted
– Either fully, or in seed form, to flourish later.'*

*Promising Mary to return to the Grotto,
I re-crossed the Gave, and, by climbing a small side hill,
Gained entry to the Upper Rosary Basilica.
Here, I was gifted with a seat,
Right behind some priests, about to concelebrate Mass.
I placed my open palms upwards, on my lap, in readiness.
Just then ... and intermittently through Mass.
My Holy Spirit Companion unveiled to me,
A personal confidence concerning my future.
I heartfully thanked Abba, with the Eucharist itself.
During Eucharist, I was almost overcome
Both by Abba's astounding generosity,
And by the deep grace of feeling so at home with
The sheer faith of so many, unknown to me!'*

*I believe their faith drew forth deeper faith from me.
... Added to this was the simple kindness of so many.
Particularly touching, was the kindness and faith
Of so many young adults
Privileged to wheelchair the sick, the disabled, the helpless
To and fro, and tend to their toilet and other needs.
It seemed especially the case, on this French National Pilgrimage Day.’
‘After Mass, I was drawn to visit the Basilica’s Crypt
... The long entrance to which had been carved from solid rock,
By many early volunteers, including Bernadette’s father.
There I stayed for almost an hour
– In adoration of Jesus,
Exposed Eucharistically in an uplifting CROWN OF THORNS setting
... Against a pure gold profile of Mary and the Child Jesus.’*

*From there, Jesus’ Spirit led me back up the side hill to its top.
Bordering the wandering track, there was a beautiful Stations of the Cross
... Set against summer-time oaks and maples.
They companioned me in my long climb to the hilltop
Where I experienced a special grace of solitude
... Ironic, in view of the 40,000 pilgrims there that day!’*

*‘Descending, I visited the underground Pius X Basilica
– With its capacity for 30,000 weather-proof pilgrims –
Whose artwork and historical presentation truly inspired me.
Following a cheerful Reconciliation there,
With an Italian-American priest,
I re-crossed to the Grotto,
And to the relatively small St Bernadette’s Church.
Here, I received Communion again
... With a group of Italian, not French, communicants.’*

*I then felt powerfully urged by the Spirit,
To commit to full immersion in the Grotto’s spring water.
As I was duly led, in silence, to the pool, set apart,
I was particularly moved, by the depth of faith,
Of my two attendants, both young men.
After indicating that I kneel in the sacred water,
They then gently lowered me, backwards, into its coolness
... Up to my neckline.*

*I very much felt that it was THEIR belief, obvious in their faces,
That 'stood in' for mine!
I sensed, from them, that I was blest in that BAPTISM
... As were those, whose heart-wishes I carried.'
I believe from that time on, my life IS different
Because of the WELCOME, I now give to Jesus' GRACE.*

*I then re-visited the Grotto itself
... For Lourdes' most distinctive ceremony
– The Eucharistic Blessing of the Sick and Disabled.
It began in the Grotto, with Exposition,
And with a special Blessing there, of some disabled children.
This I witnessed.*

*Then, the Monstrance was carried in procession to the outdoor Rosary Basilica.
Here, many hundreds of wheelchair and 'lie-down' bed pilgrims,
As well as tens of thousands of others, waited.
Before I moved there, I was blest to touch Our Lady's Grotto Statue.
Singing filled the hearts of the vast congregation:
It was a wonderful stimulus to faith.
The 'individual' Eucharist Blessing was then carried out
... With the Monstrance carried very slowly down each row.
A full public Benediction concluded the Ceremony.'*

*For me, the wonder of having one's heart OPENED at Lourdes,
Arises out of this festival of faith
... This sustained festival, celebrating
The sick, the disabled, the broken, the helpless and the retarded.
It is a festival of faith focussed on them,
And draws forth graces for themselves
– And for others, for being with them –
In this Celebration of Infirmary!
It gave me, personally,
The grace to celebrate my own great limitations and weaknesses!
It made me feel blessed, because of this.'*

*I concluded, 'The one further grace
I would have loved to receive,
Was joining the candlelit devotions later in the night.'
But my 10 PM train waited to carry me
Back to Florence, via Pisa ...*

Before Reading Scripture⁵⁰

*O Abba,
You know, in Your Son Divine,
Human flesh and face – like mine!
Enfold us in this Mystery,
... As He exalts our history!*

*Three things in Your Word we see –
The God who LIVES,
The God who SAVES,
The God WITHIN
... One, never without the others be.*

*O Spirit of the Word,
O God within,
Impress Your Divine Presence
Within our spirit ...
Sing Your SPIRIT-SONG
Within ours!*

Receptive to the Spirit ⁵¹

(A Trilogy – Part 1) ⁵²

*No one can come to me
Unless the Father who sent me DRAW him.’ ⁵³
Abba, You draw each of us in a unique way,
Making Your Presence known,
Within our heart and spirit
... Where our feelings, impulses, urges, and desires register.
However, our sinful nature also registers
Through these as well.
Thus, our response to You, Abba,
Is to listen ...
With the ears of Jesus, the heart of Jesus, the spirit of Jesus
... To the promptings, to the murmurs
Of the Spirit within.*

*O Abba, we pray to be responsive ...
To the suggestions of the Spirit,
To the movements, the quickening, the urgings of the Spirit,
And, at the deep level of our core feelings,
In what WAYS ...
To, and with WHOM ...
The Spirit DRAWS us.*

*Abba, we ask for ever deeper receptivity to His Presence,
And that our spirits flow, with heartfelt thankfulness.*

⁵¹ Rome Tertianship, 1991

⁵² All three prayer-poems in this trilogy are from my Examen of Consciousness of God's Presence

⁵³ Jn 6:44

Consciousness of the Presence of God ⁵⁴

(A Trilogy – Part 2)

*Abba, I thank You for Your presence
With me today.*

(Pause for time of reflection)

*Abba, of what parts of my life
Is Jesus not yet Lord?*

(Pause for time of reflection)

*Only Your Spirit can reveal this self-fulness,
And my sinfulness to me;
And He does so, only out of love.
I feel a deep thankfulness in my heart
For this Spirit of Openness*

(Pause for time of reflection)

*Abba, I feel sorrow,
But, much more, I feel wonder
– At being constantly brought to wholeness
In Your Beloved*

(Pause for time of reflection)

*Abba, I feel a sense of deep joy
And abiding peace
Because I have been guaranteed the victory
– Through Jesus –
Over my deep-seated sinfulness.*

(Pause for time of reflection)

*Abba, I feel a growing mistrust
Of my lack of attentiveness to Your Presence.*

(Pause for time of reflection)

*Yet, through Your grace, I have a firming faith
That I am gradually being transformed
From distracted sinner to son of God,
– In Jesus, Your lovable, beloved, and loving Son*

(Pause for time of reflection)

Present to Your Presence ⁵⁵

(A Trilogy – Part 3)

*Abba, let me continue to share
In the deepest movements of Jesus' heart
... Through the Spirit You both share,
Moving deep within my spirit.*

*O Spirit of Presence,
Let me trust in Your timing,
The signs You give,
The people You place in my day,
And in the grace of consciousness of You;
And, especially, let me trust
In Your faithfulness.*

*Abba, I thank You for the gift
Of each person in my life:
For the Freeing Presence of the Spirit in each
(Pause for time of reflection)
And in the various communities and groups
To which I belong.
(Pause for time of reflection)*

*Mary, our Mother, God's Mother,
Show me how to live, day by day, with Jesus.*

*My Guardian Angel,
Re-call me always, day and night,
To the Presence of Abba, Jesus, and the Spirit.*

*St. Joseph, foster father and role-model for Jesus,
Grant me the gift of daily intimacy with Jesus.*

*St. Thomas, Apostle of humankind's encounter with the Divine,
Enable me to see and relate to Jesus, my God,
Present in every person.*

*O Spirit of Presence, gather all our families together
Within the peace of Abba's Tent;
Show each of us,
How to be 'poor in spirit', how to love. ⁵⁶*

*O Spirit of Awe,
Transform our humble lives
So, together, as Abba's children
– Brothers and sisters to Jesus –
We become
'The Praise of His Glory' ⁵⁷*

⁵⁶ Mt 5:3

⁵⁷ Eph 1:14

Kindness⁵⁸

*' Ordinary? Yes, it is.
But there's a whole world of living
In that one word.
It's Jesus' way of living.
We ought be kind to every man, woman, and child,
Because we're all of a KIND.
– Each made in the image of Christ.
And be kind, especially so, in community
– Just as Jesus was
To those who walked with Him.*

*... Kind as a brother, he was;
Can we aim for less?
We truly need to be a brother, not a task-master,
To each lad we teach
– Especially for the one, 'who's left out', sidelined
... Kind to each one, personally.
That's our gift:
Never to hold yourself above anyone
... Being with each one, warmly
– As a brother.
And remember Tom, it's the scamps
– The ones with ugly lives, or deprived lives –
Who really need us as BROTHER
... To be 'kin', to be kind to them.'*

⁵⁸ Rome Tertianship, 1991. From author's drama 'Eddy and I', Spiritual Journal Vol 2, 29-32. 'Kindness' was Edmund Rice's ('Eddy's') reply to the character 'Tom' in Br. Tom's drama on the Founder of the Christian Brothers, 'Eddy and I' – written early in the Rome Tertianship, in September 1991. Through his committed use of 'kindness', 'Eddy' was highlighting a 'key gift', a 'precious grace', that each Brother 'needs to share in, to be one of us.' To Tom's musing – 'It sounds so ordinary' – what follows is 'Eddy's' poetic explanation of 'kindness'.

Chosen by the Trinity ⁵⁹

Father, Son, and Spirit,

Deep down I feel

COMMITTED BY YOU

'To be in Edmund's Congregation

Eternally'

With unwavering certitude.

3 Sep 1991

Abba

Thank You for the grace of this Tertianship

And for my becoming aware

Of the stunning totality of Your giftedness

– To the Congregation, and to myself,

And for the deep joy I feel,

In expressing my 'at-homeness'

With being a Brother.

Discernment ⁶⁰

*Discernment is, at its core,
Being in harmony ...
With one's own key aspirations
– The spirations of the Spirit within –
With the deep movement of the Spirit within one's group in the Church,
And with the deep movement of the Spirit within those
To whom one is sent.*

A Wedded Heart, a Father's Heart ⁶¹

*Edmund brought to his VOWED CONSECRATION ...
Both a wedded heart,
And a father's heart.
These continued as living realities,
Both personally,
And within his developing family consciousness
Of the Congregation itself.
Edmund revealed all this –
In bringing a wedded sense of INTIMACY
In his personal relating to Jesus;
In being a BROTHER to his companions
– His co-visionaries IN Christ;
And FATHERING all those in need
– Especially the youth of his schools.*

Religious Life ⁶²

*The main service of religious life
Is not to provide
A specially skilled and available workforce
In the Lord's vineyard,
But to provide a community of hearts
Who are fully, humanly ALIVE
– Alive to God!*

Certainty⁶³

*Jesus' 'I am the truth'
Is His confident claim
That we can come to know
With continuing CERTAINTY
– Through Himself,
– And through His Spirit,
Of Abba's love and plans for us.*

Jesus' Love⁶⁴

*Promiscuous love is a borrowed love
... A love that is lent out:
Given today, and withdrawn tomorrow.
– But Jesus' love is otherwise:
‘My peace I give to you,
My peace I LEAVE with you.’⁶⁵
This peace is THE ETERNAL KISS OF GOD
... Abiding with us
– The wondrous Holy Spirit of Love.*

⁶⁴ Rome Tertianship, 1991

⁶⁵ Jn 14: 27