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# The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE  
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

*Michael G. Lawler*  
*Todd A. Salzman*  
Pope Francis, Ecology  
and Climate Change

*Jos Moons*  
Encounter or  
Proclamation?

*Luke Macnamara*  
Martha and Mary

*Eamon Flanagan*  
All Saints, All Souls

*John Cummins*  
Silver Jubilee  
Reflections

*Glen Morrison*  
Disturbing Deacons:  
Upstanders Through  
Moral Resistance

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## Articles

Michael G. Lawler/ Todd A. Salzman	Pope Francis, Ecology and Climate Change	579
Jos Moons	Encounter or Proclamation?	588
Luke Macnamara, OSB	Martha and Mary: Rivals or Partners?	596
Eamon Flanagan, CM	All Saints, All Souls	603
John Cummins	Silver Jubilee Reflections	604
Glenn Morrison	Disturbing Deacons: Upstanders Through Moral Resistance	615
Patrick Manning	Homilies for Decemer (C)	623

## Chronicle

Michael Mullaney	Pass It On!	628
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## New Books

Henry O'Shea, OSB	The Mystical Imagination of Patrick Kavanaugh	632
	A Poetic Christ	633
	Poverty in the Early Church and Today	635
P.J. McAuliffe	A perfect Peace. Newman: Saint for Our Time	636
Eugene Duffy	Climate Generation	637
Fintan Lyons, OSB	Mystery and the Culture of Science	638

# The Furrow

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A pastoral monthly founded 1950.

The motif on the cover of The Furrow is from Jeremiah 4:3, which reads in the Vulgate:

Novate vobis novale  
Et nolite serere super spinas.  
Yours to drive a new furrow,  
Nor sow any longer among the briers.

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# Pope Francis, Ecology and Climate Change

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Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman

Some 500 religious leaders and climate scientists recently signed a joint appeal for climate action, noting that “climate change is an ecological and moral emergency that impacts all other aspects of our shared lives and requires us to work together to protect our common home.” This call for action follows the international recognition in the Paris Climate Agreement, ratified in 2015 by 175 countries, of the pending disaster that climate change poses for the planet and its people, especially the poor of all nations. It also emphasizes the need for a cooperative international effort to reduce green-house gases to safeguard the planet and its inhabitants. In this essay, we follow the “see, judge, act” model of Catholic social teaching to explore the issue of ecology and climate change. To analyze and propose responses to this crisis we rely on both Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato si’* (henceforth LS) and the four sources of ethical knowledge, science, experience, scripture, and tradition. Jeffrey Sachs, one of the world’s leading economists, says of *Laudato si’* that “it inspires in its profundity and *it speaks to our urgent needs* in a very direct way.”

## CATHOLIC TEACHING ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Two ethical misperceptions have led to the present ecological crisis. The *first* is relativism, a “disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects” (LS 123). This relativism extends to the environment, which humans treat as a mere object to satisfy their own immediate needs, with no care

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or concern for the environment itself. Pope Francis emphatically asserts this disregard, declaring that “the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (LS 2). It “is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (LS 21). The *second* ethical misperception is a distorted anthropology, what Francis calls a “misguided anthropocentrism” that “leads to a misguided lifestyle” (LS 122). For Francis, the distortion is an anthropology that replaces creation with human beings as the center of reality. He declares that “when human beings place themselves at the center, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative” (LS 122). Everything that does not serve immediate human needs becomes irrelevant.

The distortion creates separation *not only* between humans and “sisterearth” (LS 1, 2, 53) *but also* between humans themselves. In the economic disparities between developed and developing countries and between the rich and the poor, “some consider themselves more human than others, as if they had been born with greater rights” (LS 90). Such an anthropology violates proper relationships between humans and sister earth and between neighbors and the poor who suffer the most from the devastating consequences of climate change. It also denies the proper relationship between us and God, denying that we are not absolute but creatures created by, and in the image of, God. The implications of relativism and misguided anthropocentrism lead to ethical norms that disregard the common good and focus on fulfilling only immediate personal desires and needs (LS 123). To correct these foundational ethical misperceptions, we must embrace a perspective that recognizes “objective truths” and “sound principles” (LS 123). We must foster an anthropology that recognizes that “there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (LS 118). We must embrace an “integral ecology” (LS 137) that recognizes that everything and everyone is interrelated. In this essay we propose a *two-fold* approach for analyzing and evaluating the ecological crisis; the “see, judge, act” method of Catholic social teaching *and* a virtuous perspective that begins with ecological conversion.

The ecological perspective of a faith that sees the injustice of the ecological crisis and seeks to establish justice aligns well with the “see, judge, act” method of pastoral reflection initiated by Pope John XXIII. The perspective allows Christians first to *see* injustice at the root of the ecological crisis, to *judge* that injustice, and to *act* to establish justice in light of that judgment. To guide us in this method, we propose “ecological virtues,” first and foremost the virtue of ecological conversion. Francis notes that many otherwise prayerful Christians often ridicule concern for the environment

## POPE FRANCIS, ECOLOGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

and do nothing to change their habits to live out their Christian faith consistently. He calls all of us, to “ecological conversion, whereby the effects of encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. *Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue*; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS 217 emphasis added).

### ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

Pope John Paul II introduced the term “ecological conversion” into official Church teaching, intending by the term increased sensitivity to the ecological disaster confronting humanity. Pope Francis also focuses on the need for ecological conversion in our relationship with and attitude towards our environment. To understand ecological conversion, we must first understand ecology. The term derives from the Greek *oikos*-home, as in *Laudato si*’s subtitle, *On Care for Our Common Home*, but it has both a narrow biological and a broader theological meaning. *Biologically*, it designates the interrelationship between all natural organisms, including humans, and their environment. *Theologically*, it acknowledges the environment as God’s creation and calls for humans to care for it, guided by the ecological virtues of gratitude and love for creation, solidarity in and mutual responsibility for our common home, and justice for all who share it, especially for the poor and vulnerable who are always the most damaged when creation is damaged. For Francis, ecological conversion calls for a recognition that creation is God’s loving gift, and that we are called to imitate his generosity in caring for it. Ecological conversion entails an awareness that humans are not disconnected from the rest of creation but are inseparably joined to it and in it in intimate communion. By developing our individual, God-given capacities, ecological conversion can inspire us to greater enthusiasm for resolving climate problems (LS 220).

*Conversion*, turning away from sin, including the sin of exploiting our God-created environment-home, is at the very core of Christian theology. Religious conversion is falling in love with God. It calls us to fall in love, not only with God but also with God’s creation, to love and care for it, and to recognize and repent “our errors, sins, faults and failures” (LS 218). Ecological conversion is a dimension of Christian faith, a specific conversion to creation. The ultimate goal, Francis teaches, is to be so converted that “we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion” (LS 220). Conversion always reshapes how we see, judge, and act. In the climate crisis under

## THE FURROW

discussion, we must always be aware how easy it is to be distracted from the love of God and God's creation by self-love and the selfish use of creation for our own exclusive benefit.

SEE

The Catholic Church has an abysmal record of integrating scientific knowledge into its understanding of reality. We need only look to its seventeenth-century condemnation of Galileo for defending Copernicus' heliocentric model of the solar system or the nineteenth-century rejection of science in Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors*. More recently, a greater respect for science has been promoted by Popes John Paul II and Francis. John Paul highlights the need for intense dialogue between science and theology. Theology and science, he teaches, must enter into a "common interactive relationship" in which each discipline is "open to the discoveries and insights of the other." Francis advocates "an intense dialogue between science and religion" (*LS* 62). *Laudato si's* use of science in its exploration of environmental questions is unprecedented in Church documents. Specifically, it draws from the science of climate change and presents a harsh but accurate indictment of the current situation: a "throwaway culture" is turning the earth into a pile of "rubbish" (*LS* 22).

The scientific evidence for climate change and global warming is undeniable. There is overwhelming consensus among climate scientists (97%) that global warming is occurring and that humans are responsible for it. Climate scientists emphasize the need for public policy to shift from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy such as sun, wind, and water. Environmentalist Bill McKibben judges that "We're a long way down the path to disastrous global warming, and the policy response has been pathetically underwhelming." Given the overwhelming scientific evidence for climate change and its disastrous impacts, we ask what accounts for the lack of leadership among policy makers to address this crisis?

JUDGE

Religious and ecological conversions give us the insight and courage to ask difficult questions about our relationship with our environment. When addressing environmental ethics in general, and climate change in specific, ethical method may select all *four* sources of ethical knowledge and prioritize them in the following order, science, experience, tradition, and scripture. This prioritization of the sources is not a general ranking of their

importance but a ranking of importance for the particular issue of ecological ethics.

Ethical method must consult *science* to reach a scientifically-informed understanding of the actual and projected threat of climate change. There is indisputable scientific evidence that climate change is occurring, that the actions of humans significantly contribute to it, and that, if nothing is done to address it in the near future, the consequences for humanity, again especially for the poor, will be catastrophic. Science, however, Pope Francis notes, cannot provide a complete explanation of life; it must be complemented with other sources of ethical knowledge (*LS* 199). Based on scientific data and widespread experience, the teaching of recent Popes affirms that climate change and global warming are real and calls for the international community, especially wealthier nations that can really make substantial reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions, to work towards reducing these emissions. The Pontifical Academy of Sciences called “on all people and nations to recognize the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming caused by emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and by changes in forests, wetlands, and grasslands.” It appealed to all nations to develop and implement, without delay, effective policies to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change on ecosystems and communities. By acting now, the Academy said, in the spirit of shared responsibility, we accept our duty to one another and to the care of our planet.

Fifty years ago, historian Lynn White already recognized the ecological crisis and explored the interpretations of the creation stories in Genesis as a *partial* cause. *Laudato si'* also focuses on those creation stories (*LS* 65-75). In Genesis, God creates human beings on the sixth day and gives them “dominion (*radah*) over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on earth” (Gen. 1:28). The Hebrew verb *radah* has both a strong sense, “subdue, rule over,” and a weaker sense, “govern.” The strong sense of *radah* emphasizes humans’ dominion over creation and justifies their exploitation of it. Pope Francis teaches that the strong sense is not the correct interpretation of *radah*. The *weaker* sense interprets it as humans caring for creation, and the scientific evidence that illuminates the damage humans have done to the environment justifies the weaker sense of *radah* over the stronger. Throughout *Laudato si'* Francis prefers the term *care*, for the environment, for the neighbor, for the vulnerable, and for the health of all. The four sources of ethical knowledge combine to create a Christian perspective to judge the current ecological crisis and to act to correct it.

## THE FURROW

### ACT

Moral conversion opens a virtuous pathway for ecological conversion. The moral shift from self-satisfaction to objective value enables one, first, to *see* injustice and, then, to *act* to redress it. A major human value is the human dignity of each and every person; a second is the value of all creatures (plants and animals) that have “value in themselves” (*LS 33*); and a third is a healthy interrelationship between them all. Humans, other creatures, and their shared environment are all being negatively impacted by climate change that yields changes in weather patterns that, in turn, impact crop and food production and cause more frequent and more severe storms and rising sea levels. Both scientific research and everyday experience show that the direst effects on the environment are suffered by the world’s poorest. Moral conversion calls for virtues like love and care for every human being, especially the poor and vulnerable, for all of God’s creatures, for their responsible and healthy relationship, and for corrective and preventive measures to protect their environment. We choose at this point to emphasize especially the gospel virtues of love for all our environmental neighbors and justice for all of them, for our well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of the whole planet.

Focusing on the *virtue of care*, *Laudato si’* addresses the need to protect and preserve vital values, especially the human dignity of the poor who suffer the most from any environmental damage. The twin assaults on vital human values, climate change and environmental pollution, cause numerous health hazards and millions of premature deaths across the world (*LS 20*). They also cause the extinction of plants and animals, which unbalances the ecosystem on which all life depends (*LS 36*). “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” (*LS 42*). When this relationship is threatened, as it is currently threatened by climate change, humans can attempt to compensate for the imbalance through science and technology, but these interventions often have their own negative effects on our ecology. A just response to protect vital values must be two-fold. Humans must immediately cease their assault on the environment with pollution and toxic waste and they must allow it to heal with scientific solutions that do not further destabilize an already unstable ecosystem. This requires national and international cooperation and planning to address very complex issues.

Social values, like the good order of the whole community, take precedence over any individualistic values of members within

the community. This is the *common good* argument of Catholic social thought, “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26; *LS* 156). Francis declares that “climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” (*LS* 23). Human dignity is foundational to the common good, but it can be realized fully only in relationships that put restraints on what any individual can demand of the community. The realization of social values requires the prioritization of community *over* individualistic values or desires. Too often, individualism shapes culture and promotes a distorted prioritization of the relationship between individual and community. This distorted prioritization of individual over community, individual profit over societal preservation and sustainability, has contributed greatly to the ecological crisis we now face. The economy, and those who have the power to shape it, “accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings” (*LS* 109). The prioritization of profit, and those who benefit from profit, over the common good and protecting the environment, demand moral conversion. Such conversion, in turn, demands “profound changes in lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies” (*LS* 5). There must be moral conversion *individually, socially, and politically*. Each individual human being is called to embrace a simpler life in the manner of St. Francis of Assisi (*LS* 10), for whom “less is more” (*LS* 222), or, in the manner of Mahatma Gandhi, who famously invited women and men to “live simply so that others can simply live.” “If everything is related, then the health of a society’s institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life. ‘Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment’. In this sense, social ecology is necessarily institutional, and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities” (*LS* 142).

The virtues guiding the common good include solidarity and justice, the “firm will to give their due to God and neighbor” and, we add, to God’s creation in which all neighbors live.

#### SOLIDARITY AND SUBSIDIARITY

All are called to be in solidarity with both sister earth, which Francis declares to be “among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (*LS* 2), and the actual poor whom he describes as suffering most from the devastating effects of climate change (*LS* 132) and

## THE FURROW

who suffer the injustice of an unjust distribution of the world's goods (*LS* 152, 232). Christians are all aware of their summons to adhere to Jesus' great commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). One way to love God concretely and effectively, we suggest, is to love and care for his creation; and one way to love our neighbors as ourselves concretely is to love and care for their creation-*oikos*-home. We must be careful here that we do not love and care for the poor and vulnerable only by giving alms for their support. We must certainly do that, but we must also seek to raise them out of their poverty. The principle of subsidiarity prescribes that a community of a higher order should not deprive a community of a lower order of its proper functions, but rather it should support it, always with a view to the common good. The ecological crisis we have been discussing is a clear case in which the less powerful societies among the nations of the earth are helpless before the crisis and desperately need the help of the more powerful societies to resolve it. It is also a clear case for the conversion of the unjust social structures that are controlled by the political and economic elites (*LS* 196).

Another way in which all individuals can concretely and effectively exercise solidarity and subsidiarity is by pressuring institutions, like local, national, and international businesses, to divest from technologies and fossil fuels that are known to harm the environment. Pope Francis wisely counsels that "caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation" (*LS* 36). Contrary to the obvious common good, "many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms" (*LS* 26). For Aristotle, virtuous leaders create virtuous communities. Jewish communities are created and sustained by virtuous prophets like Moses; New Testament communities are created and sustained by the paradigmatic virtuous prophet, Jesus the Christ.

Our present culture tends towards the denial of the existence of any divine ground of being, meaning, and value. For *Christians* who are religiously converted, however, divine meanings and values are incarnated in Jesus whom they confess as Son of God, and whom they profess to follow. The meanings and values embodied in him, they believe, are to be embodied also in them. For Christians, therefore, the search for meaning, value, and direction in life, is simple, follow Jesus who claimed to be "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). When human beings place themselves at the

center, Francis teaches, “they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative. Hence, we should not be surprised to find the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests” (*LS* 122). When Christians imitate the meanings and values embodied in Jesus, they are living by meanings and values more than sufficient to resolve every human crisis, anthropological or ecological. Every virtue is a personal habit or disposition ordered to an act; the virtue of justice is ordered to acts of justice, the virtue of love is ordered to acts of love. We now underscore the single virtue that should characterize Christians, namely, faith in Jesus that leads to the conviction that following him in all things will enable them to resolve every human crisis. “Only by cultivating sound Christian virtues,” Francis asserts, “will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment” (*LS* 211).

Among the virtues that comprise a virtuous ecological perspective are especially prudence, responsibility, courage, honesty, care, faith, hope, love, solidarity, subsidiarity, and reconciliation, all of which pervade *Laudato si’*. Though we have focused on ecological conversion to address the ecological crisis and to guide the “see, judge, act” ethical method of Catholic social teaching, Pope Francis has recourse to other virtues that complement conversion and highlight the radical response individuals and local, national, and international communities must take to address the crisis. “Various convictions of our faith,” Francis teaches, “can help us to enrich the meaning of this [ecological] conversion.... Then too, there is the recognition that God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore.” We read in the Gospel, he continues, “that Jesus says of the birds of the air that ‘not one of them is forgotten before God’ (*Lk* 12:6). How then can we possibly mistreat them or cause them harm?” He concludes his encyclical with a heartfelt plea: “I ask all Christians to recognize and to live fully this dimension of their conversion. In this way, we will help nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied” (*LS* 221).

# Encounter or Proclamation?

## *Roman-Catholic preaching according to Pope Francis and the Homiletic Directory\**

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Jos Moons

In recent years, the Vatican published two documents on what Roman-Catholic preaching should be. Seven months after Pope Francis had spoken about preaching in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013),<sup>1</sup> the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued a guidebook for preaching, the Homiletic Directory (2014).<sup>2</sup> In this article, I propose to take a closer look at these two documents and their significantly different views on preaching.<sup>3</sup> In the second half of the article, I will evaluate the two conceptions of Roman-Catholic preaching in the light of homiletic theory and interpret them in the light of the Second Vatican Council.

### A CONCERN FOR QUALITY

Historically speaking, the Directory has the oldest roots. It goes back to the synod on the Eucharist in the year 2005 and the Post-

1 See *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, signed November 24th, 2013.

2 Issued on June 29th, 2014.

3 This difference seems to have gone largely unnoticed. The American homiletic handbook edited by E. Foley does no more than briefly presenting the documents and making short references, see E. Foley (ed.), *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching, Developed under the Auspices of The Catholic Academy of Liturgy* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 32-34. Both documents are almost absent in D. White, *The Liturgical Homily: Its Theological Development in Vatican II and Pope Francis*, in *The Australasian Catholic Record* 93 (2016), 173-179 and in the special issue entitled 'La joie de prêcher', *Lumen vitae. Revue internationale de catéchèse et de pastorale* (2014/2).

\* This article is a reworked and shortened version of 'De preek: ontmoeting of kerygma? De visies op verkondiging van *Evangelii gaudium* en het Homiletisch Directorium', in *Collationes. Tijdschrift voor Theologie en Pastoraal* 47 (2017), 90-104. Republished with permission. Dr Eugene Duffy offered helpful advice; I would like to thank him for that.

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Synodal Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007). Amongst other things, the Synod Fathers and Pope Benedict XVI were concerned about the homily: “the quality of homilies needs to be improved” (no. 46). Three years later, in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict brought up the issue of preaching once more, this time asking “to prepare practical publications to assist ministers in carrying out their task as best they can: as for example a Directory on the homily, in which preachers can find useful assistance in preparing to exercise their ministry” (no. 60).

At the moment that this Directory saw the light, the Roman-Catholic Church was under new management. In 2013, the Argentine Jesuit, Jorge Bergoglio, had been elected Pope. In his first document *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope took great liberty in addressing the issues that in his opinion needed attention, such as the homily.<sup>4</sup> For to his regret, “both the laity and their ordained ministers suffer because of homilies: the laity from having to listen to them and the clergy from having to preach them” (EG 135).

#### QUALITY ACCORDING TO *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*

Clearly, the Synod fathers, Pope Benedict, Pope Francis and the Congregation for Divine Worship all share a concern for quality, yet what exactly do they mean by quality? For Pope Francis quality has to do with *dialogue or encounter*. As the homily is part of the liturgy, and as liturgy is essentially dialogical, so too the homily: “It takes up once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people” (EG 137). That statement comes with immediate practical consequences for the preacher, who “must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren” (EG 137).

This point is clearly important for Pope Francis, for in the articles that follows he further develops it with the help of the image of the Church as mother. Does a mother not know the concerns and needs of her child? Following that example, the Church should speak to us in our mother tongue; in her preaching we should be able to sense her “maternal and ecclesial spirit” (EG 139-141). Inculturation is important too, for it connects the tradition with the context of the people (EG 142-144). “The preacher has the wonderful but difficult task of joining loving hearts, the hearts of the Lord and his people” (EG 143).

In the second part of the reflection, which focuses on the preparation of the homily (EG 145-159), the Pope developed the

4 Cf. EG 16-18 and 135, 145.

## THE FURROW

fundamental notion of a dialogue between God and his people practically by discussing concrete aspects of preparing a homily. In addition to drawing inspiration from Scripture – by studying it (EG 146-148), living it (EG 149-151), praying with it (EG 152-153) – the preacher should also draw inspiration from his people (EG 154-155). According to Pope Francis, the people of God and Scripture equally deserve the sort of deeply reverent and deeply prayerful attention that we call contemplation. “A preacher has to contemplate the word, but he also has to contemplate his people” (EG 154).<sup>5</sup> This is indispensable for knowing what a concrete community needs and for discerning what God has to say in a specific situation.

Lastly, the interest in and care for the faithful means also taking care of presentation. Instead of complaining that people do not listen, preachers should look into the mirror: “perhaps they have never taken the trouble to find the proper way of presenting their message” (EG 156). Paying attention to presentation includes limiting the length of a homily, using appealing images and accessible language, structuring one’s message and adopting a positive instead of denouncing and lamenting the ills of the moment (156-159).

## QUALITY ACCORDING TO THE HOMILETIC DIRECTORY

The Directory grew out of a similar concern for quality, yet for the authors of the Directory, quality has to do mainly with *theological content*. Initially that is not too clear. The relatively short first part discusses preaching more broadly, addressing the liturgical setting of a homily (HD 4-15), a correct interpretation of Scripture (HD 16-25) and the value of spiritual preparation (HD 26-36). Yet in the long second part of the Directory on the *Ars Praedicandi* (HD 37-156), the focus on content becomes apparent. The title is somewhat misleading, as these words do not have their usual meaning, namely, the art of attractive and inspiring preaching. Rather, the Directory’s authors wished to “provide concrete examples and suggestions to help the homilist put into practice the principles presented in this document” (HD 37). In fact, they demonstrate how to arrive at a faith message on the basis of the hermeneutical interplay of liturgy, Scripture, Catechism. Indeed, with ample reference to these sources, the Directory gives examples of possible themes for the Easter Triduum (39-50), Easter Sunday (HD 51-56), the Sundays of Lent (HD 57-77) and Advent (HD 78-109), the Christmas Season (HD 110-139).

5 The Spanish text of the Exhortation links the two contentions more softly, without ‘but’: “Un predicador es un contemplativo de la Palabra y también un contemplativo del pueblo”.

The Directory concludes with two appendices or supplements. The first one consists of an extensive list of the relevant Catechism articles for the three liturgical years, per Sunday, after which a shorter second appendix gives an overview of the relevant “post-conciliar ecclesial sources”. Possibly the strongest proof of the Directory’s content-focused understanding of quality is found in the introduction to the first appendix, where the homiletic need is specified to be a need for *doctrine*: “A concern that has been voiced often in the years since the Second Vatican Council, notably in Synods of Bishops, has been the need for more doctrine in preaching. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a truly useful resource for the homilist in this regard” (HD 157).

#### TWO TYPES OF QUALITY

The Directory’s understanding of quality differs substantially from that of Pope Francis. Both *Evangelii Gaudium* and the Directory stress the liturgical setting, proper exegesis and the role of prayer.<sup>6</sup> Yet for Pope Francis, preaching means dialogue and encounter. It requires contemplation of *both* the Scriptures and the faithful, with particular attention for content as well as presentation. By contrast, the Congregation for Divine Worship focuses on content, promoting not so much the encounter with the people of God but rather the interaction between Scripture, liturgy and theology, especially the Catechism.

The Directory’s focus on content clarifies several questions that the text raises, such as the question why the part dedicated to the *ars praedicandi* is not about eloquence and rhetoric, as the title suggests, but on hermeneutics. Another such question has to do with the place of the people in the Homiletic Directory. Occasionally it mentions the needs of the community, often with references to Pope Francis and *Evangelii Gaudium*. For example, it emphasized “that the homily should be tailored to the needs of the particular community, and indeed draw inspiration from it” (HD 8), a statement that it supported with a substantial quote from *Evangelii Gaudium*.<sup>7</sup> Yet in fact, that is no more than lip service, as this aspect never materializes into an integral element

6 The Directory suggests that in giving prayer pride of place, it follows *Evangelii Gaudium*. In fact, it does not, as *Evangelii Gaudium* mentions three elements, without prioritizing prayer, namely: study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity. See HD 26 and EG 145

7 For other examples, see HD 2, where the authors specified a sensitivity to the congregation as one of the “four important themes of perennial importance described briefly in the conciliar documents”. Yet while the other three themes are elaborated in Part I – which consists indeed of three chapters – not so for the congregation. See also the inclusion of the community in the presentation of *Lectio Divina* (HD 27-36, no. 33).

## THE FURROW

of the reflection. Indeed, in its demonstration in Part II how “the principles presented in this document” work in practice (HD 37), the Directory *left out* the community and focused instead on the encounter between Scripture, liturgy and theology or Catechism. One cannot but conclude that the Directory’s image of the homily is a far cry from Pope Francis’ call for a double contemplation.

### GENRES: HOMILETIC AND KERYGMATIC PREACHING

Another way to bring out the specific characteristics of both visions is to dwell for a moment on homiletic genres. These include the homily as testimony, where the proclamation of the gospel builds on the faith journey of the ‘I’ in a way that resembles what Augustine did in his Confessions, the didactical homily and the narrative homily. For our current reflection, two other genres are important: encounter or *homilia* and proclamation or *kerygma*.

What Pope Francis proposed in *Evangelii Gaudium* corresponds to the *homilia* genre which typically mediates between experience and faith. Therefore, the preacher needs to be at home in both. Acting like a mediator, he connects daily life and liturgy with faith and the Scriptures, so that God may deepen and enlighten the ordinary. The Directory’s view of the homily corresponds to the *kerygmatic* genre. The kerygmatic preacher may be compared to a town crier. He comes into town and instantaneously brings his message, whether people are interested or not. Surely that is the task of the preacher: to proclaim God’s salvation in all its splendor, so that God’s healing power may touch people.

Although these are both accepted forms of preaching, modern homiletics favors *Evangelii Gaudium*’s vision, especially in the light of the post-conciliar so-called “turn toward the assembly”.<sup>8</sup> This turn reflects both the renewed ecclesiological imagination of the Church as God’s people on pilgrimage, in which the laity have full membership, and the liturgical renewal of active participation. Other, more secular influences contributing to the “Copernican revolution” that consider the Scripture and hearer as equals include philosophy, psychology, sociology, and the communication science.<sup>9</sup> More recent developments also confirm that context *and*

8 See e.g. G. DeBona, “Preaching after Vatican II”, in *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching*, 95-102. Cf. G. DeBona, *Fulfilled in Our Hearing. History and Method of Christian Preaching*, New York, 2005, especially the chapter “The New Homiletic”, 28-77. However, Gueric DeBona convincingly argues that a sensitivity for the hearer was not entirely absent prior to the council, referring amongst others to the so-called Crusade for Fruitful Preaching in the 1930s and the book *How to Make Us Want Your Sermon* from 1942, see G. DeBona, “Preaching before Vatican II”, in *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching*, 84-94.

9 See the previous footnote and E. Henau, *Inleiding tot de praktische homiletiek* (Averbode: Werkgroep voor levensverdieping, 1976), especially 9-25.

## ENCOUNTER OR PROCLAMATION?

hearers matter, such as the growing consciousness of the limited patriarchal, Western perspective and the digital culture in which hearers have great power to decide what they listen to, or not.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, modern homiletics implies two types of criticism of the Homiletic Directory. The first critique relates to the Directory's agenda "to assimilate the insights of the past fifty years, review them critically, help preachers appreciate the purpose of the homily, and offer them assistance in fulfilling a mission which is vital to the life of the Church" (HD 3). That sounds wonderful but is scarcely credible in the light of the absence of one of the most prominent insights of that period, *the turn to the hearers*. That leads directly to the second critique, namely that the preacher who sticks with the Directory's guidelines seriously risks talking over his audience's heads.<sup>11</sup> He may preach the gospel in its fullness, yet he will do so *in abstracto* rather than for people here and now.<sup>12</sup>

## VATICAN II: RESSOURCEMENT OR AGGIORNAMENTO?

My presupposition so far has been that both documents have made a homiletic choice. In fact, however, other factors may have played a role as well, especially the *interpretation* of the Second Vatican Council. There are good reasons for looking at the Council, as both documents owe their origin to the Council. The conciliar vision of Scripture and liturgy, which is rooted in the preconciliar liturgical and biblical renewal, stimulated homiletics. It seems that *Evangelii Gaudium* and the Homiletic Directory represent two different schools of Council interpretation.

Essential for the Council's dynamic were two ideals: *ressourcement* (going back to the sources) and *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date).<sup>13</sup> To make the treasure of the gospel shine and to restore faith as a radiant source of life, as John XXIII had wished, the Council fathers did essentially two things: they went back to old sources such as Scripture, liturgy and the Church

10 Cf. "Quand l'Afrique me réapprend à prêcher", in *Lumen vitae. Revue internationale de catéchèse et de pastorale* (2014/2), 213-220 and the contribution "Contextual Preaching" in *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching*, 233-243.

11 It is telling that the authors, while acknowledging that "the art of oratory or public speaking, including the appropriate use of the voice and even of gesture, is an ingredient of a successful homily", added that other things are "essential, however", namely to live the gospel, to know the people, to know the times, and to invite the Holy Spirit (HD 3).

12 E. Henau too criticized the Directory for failing to take into account "the results of the practical-theological reflection on the phenomenon of preaching during the past fifty years", see Henau, "Homiletisch Directorium", 161-162.

13 For some background, see the much-translated reflection by the Dutch Dominican Ted Schoof *Breakthrough. Beginnings of the New Catholic Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970), originally published in 1968, and J. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2008).

fathers, and they opened up to the signs of the times. Ideally, these two ideals correct and enrich one another. In fact, theologians had and have their preferences. For example, Karl Rahner, a Jesuit theologian with great influence during the Council, represented mainly *aggiornamento*, where the much younger yet equally influential Joseph Ratzinger tended more towards *ressourcement*. As Thomas Rausch stated in his introduction to Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's thinking: "his instinctive tendency is much more towards *ressourcement* than towards *aggiornamento*. ... he is well read in contemporary theology ... Yet his particular gift is to expound the tradition with a remarkable clarity rather than to reinterpret it creatively for new situations and problems".<sup>14</sup>

After the Council, the two ideals suggested divergent solutions to the various crisis that emerged. For example, although the use of the vernacular and the greater liturgical clarity were beneficial for active participation, knowledge of faith and Church participation went downhill. This crisis has been and still is being perceived differently, with some people concluding that we need to get back in touch with our sources and others proposing rather to demonstrate the relevance of faith for modern times.

While at this point one may immediately think of the New Translation of the missal as a case in point,<sup>15</sup> the same variety of perspectives can also be seen in homiletics, for example in two documents on preaching by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In their 1982 document on preaching *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, they highlighted the *importance of the hearer* on the basis of the conciliar ecclesiology.<sup>16</sup> In 2012, they revised this document and replaced it with *Preaching the Mystery of Faith*.<sup>17</sup> In the Introduction of the latter document, they spoke of the increased secularization and the need of a re-evangelization: "We believe that the current circumstances of our world and the call for a fresh spirit of evangelization provide a connection between *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* and the present document". Although they Bishops used the Emmaus story as a metaphor for preaching, the document in fact highlighted the *content of the faith*, not encounter. In terms that the Homiletic Directory could have used, they explained

14 T. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 62. Cf. the fascinating article by O. Putz, "«I Did Not Change; They Did!» Joseph Ratzinger, Karl Rahner and the Second Vatican Council", in *New Wineskins* 2 (2007), 11-30.

15 For a brief, critical introduction, see G. O'Collins and J. Wilkins, *Lost in Translation. The English Language and the Catholic Mass* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017).

16 USCCB, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, see 4-5. Available online at [http://www.usccb.org/cs\\_upload/8090\\_1.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/cs_upload/8090_1.pdf).

17 USCCB, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith. The Sunday Homily*. Available online at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/upload/usccb-preaching-document.pdf>.

that “the homilist of today must realize that he is addressing a congregation that is more culturally diverse than previously, one that is profoundly affected by the surrounding secular agenda and, in many instances, inadequately catechized. The Church’s rich theological, doctrinal, and catechetical tradition must therefore properly inform the preaching task in its liturgical setting”.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, this speaks of *ressourcement* rather than *aggiornamento*. For while *Evangelii Gaudium* also appreciated sources, both theologically and spiritually,<sup>19</sup> it stretched this to *include* the people: “Christian preaching thus finds in the heart of people and their culture a source of living water, which helps the preacher to know what must be said and how to say it” (EG 139). Pope Francis problematized the preaching of “detached ideas”, explaining that preaching is about “joining loving hearts, the hearts of the Lord and his people” (EG 143). All this recalls the double dialogue that we mentioned earlier and demonstrates that *Evangelii Gaudium* advocates openness to the times and to the gospel rather than a pure *ressourcement*.

How to improve the quality of preaching? Should preachers raise the theological content of their homilies or focus rather on encounter? While theological quality evidently matters, in the light of modern homiletics, what deserves most attention is the interplay between faith, the hearer and form. Therefore, *Evangelii Gaudium* offers more convincing, complete and useful guidelines than the Homiletic Directory. Or do the two documents represent two ways of receiving the Council? In that case, one’s preference for any of the documents depends on what one perceives as the more urgent need: *aggiornamento* or *ressourcement*.

18 *Preaching the Mystery of Faith*, 5.

19 As EG 11 stated: “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world”, cf. EG 3, “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day”.

# Martha and Mary: Rivals or Partners? A fresh look at Luke (10:38-42).<sup>1</sup>

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Luke Macnamara

The visit to the home of Martha and Mary is one of the better-known stories in Luke's Gospel. Mary sits passively by Jesus' feet and is praised, while Martha, weary from her multiple exertions, is left not only to do all the work but also to remonstrate and sulk. This peremptory summary reflects the common assumptions of a superficial reading. The depictions of the sisters through the ages in art often reinforces the distinction. Mary is often portrayed as a religious in a prayerful and attentive poise, while Martha has the full garb of a housewife – apron, keys and giant ladle or wooden spoon – and wears a scowl on her face often accompanied by gesticulating arms. The patristic tradition often elevates Mary as a model of contemplation and either overlooks Martha or cites her as a counter-example. However, popular tradition is more sympathetic to Martha. Many take the side of Martha, and even self-identify as a Martha figure.

## A STRIKING PRELUDE

The evangelist Luke is more subtle than might appear at first. The immediately preceding context can, in fact, give readers pause for thought (Luke 10:25-37).<sup>2</sup> Jesus encounters a lawyer who asks what it is necessary to *do* to gain eternal life. At the end of their dialogue after the parable of the Samaritan, the lawyer identifies the neighbour of the wounded man as the one who *did* act of mercy for him. Jesus concludes the dialogue by telling the lawyer to go and *do* likewise. While it is not said how the lawyer responds, the emphasis on *doing* is clear. Jesus is often identified with the Good Samaritan – a model of loving service. Martha in her loving service is in very good company!

1 This is an amended version of a talk given at a seminar on the “Women in Luke’s Gospel as Portrayed through Story and Art” at Glenstal Abbey on Saturday 7th September 2019.

2 As frequent reference will be made to the Gospel of Luke, henceforth, only the chapter and verse numbers will be used.

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## MARTHA AND MARY: RIVALS OR PARTNERS?

The wider context is that Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem, which also doubles as a period of instruction and formation for the disciples. The juxtaposition of the *two episodes* where Jesus emphasises first doing and then hearing suggests that *both* are important. Interestingly, the “doing” precedes the “hearing”, a rhetorical technique called *hysteron proteron* or in English idiom putting the cart before the horse. Hearing usually precedes doing and the unusual order draws readers’ attention to both episodes and the core teaching of each. Shortly after turning towards Jerusalem (9:51), Jesus sends out the seventy disciples (10:1-20). They are to go with no resources (10:4) and to rely on the hospitality of those to whom they are sent. A mixed response to the mission is expected. Some will welcome the disciples into their homes while others will refuse. If they encounter a person who shares in peace, the disciples’ peace will rest on that person, who reveals him or herself to be a child of peace (10:5-6).

### MARTHA’S HOSPITALITY

*Martha* models the positive response spoken of by Jesus and is, therefore, a child of peace: she goes out to meet the visitor as he enters her village and welcomes him into her home (10:38). Interestingly, Jesus is not named in this entire episode (10:38-42). For now, the visitor’s identity is withheld by the storyteller’s use of the personal pronoun “him”. *Martha* models a hospitality to a perfect stranger on the road which expects no return. This is what Jesus asked of the leader of the Pharisees who had invited him to a meal: “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (14:12-14) *Martha* emerges as an extremely positive figure of a model disciple. It is worth emphasising at this point that, but for *Martha*, the visitor might never have stopped in the village nor entered her house. The initial instrumental role of *Martha* in welcoming the visitor to her home is a necessary prelude for what follows.

### LISTENING AT THE FEET OF THE KYRIOS

Once inside the home, there is a description of the scene. A new character appears who is named *Mary* and is identified as a sister to *Martha*. She is now seated at the feet of the *Kyrios* and is listening to his word. The storyteller refers to the visitor as *Kyrios*, which may denote a common form of polite address such as “mister” or

## THE FURROW

may have a more weighty significance such as “Lord”. For the storyteller, it is the latter, but for Mary and Martha it is not yet clear. Readers recognise the gift that Jesus bequeaths in speaking his word and how blessed are those who see him and hear this word (10:23-24). For now, it is not yet clear whether either sister recognises fully who is in their midst.

Mary’s location at the *Kyrios*’ feet is a privileged position for potential disciples in the Gospel: Peter (5:8), the sinful woman (7:35-50), the Gerasene demoniac (8:28, 35), Jairus (8:41), the haemorrhagic woman (8:47), and the Samaritan leper (17:16). Her action of *listening* to the *Kyrios*’ word is a key foundational role for potential disciples (2:46-47, 5:1, 15; 6:18; 7:3, 22, 29; 8:8, 12-15, 18, 21; 9:35; 11:28, 31; 14:35; 15:1). There are a number of missing elements in the story. Nothing is said of the content of the *Kyrios*’ teaching, nor are the present whereabouts of Martha disclosed. The preceding text which speaks of Martha’s welcoming of the *Kyrios* into her home implies more than simply opening the door. The verb “to welcome” implies a constellation of hospitable activities, from meeting the guest’s needs for rest and refreshment to more personal attention such as listening and conversation. All these are implied. The stationary posture of Mary leads some to surmise that Martha must be exclusively engaged in active pursuits, but this is only one of many possible assumptions.<sup>3</sup>

### MARTHA’S SERVICE

The storyteller next notes that Martha is occupied with much service. The NRSV reads “distracted by many tasks”. While this translation both judges and convicts Martha of inattention, the Greek verb has a range of connotations ranging from being properly occupied with an important role to attempting too much at once and getting nothing done. Secondly the “many tasks” replace “much service” which has a much more positive resonance in the Gospel. When the disciples later dispute among themselves as to who is the greatest, Jesus redefines the greatest as the one who serves and points to his own example: “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.” (20:27) Martha not only serves *like* Jesus but serves much!

3 Interestingly many papyri and manuscripts for 10:39 include an additional relative pronoun which considerably alters the meaning. The text would read: “Mary was also seated at the *Kyrios*’ feet and listening to his word.” This implies that both sisters, Martha and Mary, were seated at the *Kyrios*’ feet. This adds greater complexity to the characterisation of Martha and avoids a *Punch and Judy* stereotyping of the two sisters.

## MARTHA AND MARY: RIVALS OR PARTNERS?

### MARTHA'S *QUESTION* AND *REQUEST*

After some time and much service, Martha comes up to the visitor and addresses him as *Kyrios*. Does Martha truly recognise the Lord, or does she use the term *Kyrios* in the weaker sense of an honorific title, such as “mister” or “sir”? The use here is ambiguous. Martha appears to acknowledge that Jesus has authority to adjudicate between her and her sister. Jesus elsewhere does not accept such a role. When someone from the crowd says to him: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” Jesus replies, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” (12:13-14) Jesus does not accept the role proposed by the anonymous person in the crowd, and thus is unlikely to accept it now.

Although Martha speaks in the presence of Mary, in her question she fails to mention her name which suggests a certain distance. Mary is referred to only as “my sister”. Martha’s question does not require a response, since she does not wait for one. Her speech suggests that she understands *Kyrios* at the more mundane level of a polite address: “Do you not care that my sister has abandoned me to serve all by myself? Tell her then to help me.” (10:40) This seems a reasonable request from an overworked Martha when she observes her idle sister by Jesus’ feet. Interestingly, no speech of Mary is recorded, and so readers only evaluate the situation from Martha’s point of view. This is reinforced by her use of the personal pronouns: my, me, myself. In addition, the social mores of New Testament times differ little from today with respect to layabouts. Many, then and now, would side with Martha. While that may well be the case, within the wider context of Luke-Acts, Martha’s question may have a deeper meaning. It echoes the dispute over the distribution to the Hebrew and Gentile widows in Acts 6 and the debate concerning service of word and table. The twelve say that: “It is not right that we should *abandon* the word of God in order to *serve* on tables.” (Acts 6:2) Martha’s question takes up the two key verbs (“abandon” and “serve”) of this sentence. The abandonment by Mary obliges Martha to fulfil the table service all by herself. Might Martha be concerned at her inability to perform the service of the word? If this be the case, then she is once again in good company – that of the twelve apostles (Acts 6:2)!

### THE *KYRIOS*' *RESPONSE*

The storyteller reports that the *Kyrios* answers her. Readers are thereby again alerted to the divine identity of the visitor. This connects back to the report of Mary at the *Kyrios*' feet, but more immediately to Martha’s address to Jesus as *Kyrios*. Does this

## THE FURROW

reinforce the sense that Martha has got it right, that Jesus is *Kyrios* - Lord, or does it show that her understanding of *Kyrios* falls short of the reality? This is the second time in quick succession and only the fifth time thus far in the Gospel, that Jesus is referred to as *Kyrios* by the storyteller, a statistic that takes on even greater significance since Jesus is only otherwise referred to in this passage by the personal pronouns (he, him, his). Although much speaking and listening has been going on in this home, it is only now that readers get to hear the *Kyrios* speak.

His first words are a double address: “Martha, Martha.” Names are important. When one uses a name, it signifies recognition of the other. The unusual duplication of the name hints at both an *intimacy* and an *urgency*, both giving her his full attention and drawing her attention to him. Jesus later uses such a double invocation, when he warns Peter about the imminent events of the passion and reverts to using his original name: “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (22:31-32).

The *Kyrios* recognises Martha’s overwrought status: “you are worried and disturbed by much.” (10:41) However the mention of service is dropped. Might he be suggesting that Martha is concerned with many things and not the service, or might readers understand service as implicitly included here? The mention that there is need of only one thing is ambiguous in that the referent could also be a form of service. Troublesome worries, that can choke the word, have been raised as a risk in the parable of the sower, but the object of such worries are riches and pleasures. Martha’s worries have a different focus. She is intent on providing hospitality to the *Kyrios* and / or getting the help of her sister in providing the hospitality.

The *Kyrios* continues: “Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken from her.” (10:42b) Again, names are important. Although she has been spoken about, this is the first time that Mary’s name is spoken. Interestingly, while the storyteller reveals the names of both sisters in the preamble to the dialogue, Martha twice (10:38, 40) and Mary once (10:39), it falls to the *Kyrios* to first speak the name of each, again Martha twice and Mary once. Here, the *Kyrios* affirms that Mary has chosen the better *part*, but not the whole. This part cannot be taken from Mary, as she is one who listens well to the word and to what she has more will be added. (8:18) However, there is, implicitly, *another part* for Martha which also will not be taken away. Later, in the parable of the wily steward, the *kyrios* hears reports that his steward was squandering his money and immediately summons him and decides to dismiss him (16:1-2). The *kyrios* of the parable decides based on

hearsay without even discussing the matter with his steward. In contrast, this *Kyrios* knows both Martha and Mary and cannot be confounded by rumours. The *Kyrios*' response to Mary is one of hope for both sisters. *Each* can have a part which will not be taken away.

In the previous episode centred on the parable of the Samaritan (10:25-37), there was no report on how the lawyer responded to Jesus' command to go and do likewise. The story of the *Kyrios* and the two sisters is also left open ended. While it may be presumed that Mary continues to listen to the *Kyrios*' word by his feet, there is no mention of Martha's response. Readers are invited once again to complete the story. Might Martha now listen to the *Kyrios*' word as Mary? Might she reconnect with the foundational relationship of listening to the *Kyrios*' word which is at the basis of all ministry? Listening however is only the first step for discipleship, for becoming part of the *Kyrios*' new family: "My mother and my brothers and sisters are those who *hear* the word of God and *do* it." (8:21) The juxtaposition of the episode with the parable of the Samaritan holds both elements in tension. The story requires completion not only for Martha but also for Mary. Both are no longer simply sisters of each other, but sisters of the *Kyrios*, and as such are invited to hear *and* do. The sisters' house is destined to become a home to the *Kyrios* and his family.

#### THE ARTISTIC TRADITION

Many paintings depict the story at various moments. Usually they show the contrast of Mary at the *Kyrios*' feet and Martha busy in a kitchen, but often they show the moment of dialogue between Martha and the *Kyrios*. The artistic tradition often conflates this episode with the raising of Lazarus and the anointing by Mary (John 11-12) or conflates the sisters with other women of the New Testament. This is especially the case for Mary who is linked with Mary Magdalene and various sinful women. It appears that the tradition has difficulty in dealing with so many women and so merges them! However, some of these expansions are interesting. Martha moves from being an intercessor on behalf of Mary Magdalene before Christ at her conversion in the painting of Veronese (1545-48) to taking the lead role in turning Mary from her life of pleasure to the life of virtue in Christ in Caravaggio's *Conversion of Mary Magdalene* (1598).

Few artists dare to complete the story. An exception is the *Brick Bible*, a children's bible which displays various scenes of this bible story constructed with Lego. At first Mary is sitting in rapt attention at Jesus' feet while Martha is busy with her housework. Later

## THE FURROW

Martha in quite a mood, while Mary remains placid, complains and gesticulates at Jesus. The series ends with Martha sitting alongside Mary, *both* attentive to Jesus as he speaks. While the series ends here, readers of Luke's Gospel intuit that these sisters will both move to the next stage of discipleship and respond actively. They are perhaps among those women who follow Jesus to Jerusalem (23:55), who observe his burial, who go to the tomb to anoint his body (24:1) and among the first to receive news of the resurrection. If so, they are to be included among the group of women who first witnessed the proclamation of the resurrection and in turn announced it to the apostles (24:10). The women's attention to the Lord's word is the fertile soil in which the resurrection can be truly understood and proclaimed. How many Christian homes have wives and mothers grounded in this soil who show their husbands and children the life that Christ brings?

Many modern feminist scholars balk at the idealised portrait of a woman, as one who sits submissively in silence to Jesus' every word. This is exacerbated by the apparent curt dismissal of Martha despite all that she has done. History, sadly, all too often attests to how this story has been abused to belittle women and keep them in their place. Far from silencing women or disempowering them, this subtle episode exerts a subversive function. Mary is in a privileged position and role for a disciple. She knows her place! Martha too fulfils many of the roles of a disciple. The presence of the Lord provokes each sister to respond, one by *listening*, the other by *doing* and so together they fulfil the criteria to become members of the Lord's family (8:21) and their house becomes a home of the Lord. Neither sister gets a raw deal. They are rather models to be imitated by the wider human family.

**Self-knowledge.** "What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves. The most important of all voyages of discovery." – *Thomas Merton*

– SISTER STAN AND SÍLE WALL, *The Sacred Life of Everything*. 2019. Dublin: Columba Books, p. 89.

# All Saints, All Souls

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Eamon Flanagan

There was the wonderment of winter's advent  
As the clocks had brought darkness early streaming; Leaves were  
bronze; some fell to give life in springtime, And people felt on  
urge to see lights gleaming.

All Saints Feast is heaven shining on earth,  
When the blessed, the most ordinary, or great  
Call our attention, and we thrill to desire  
Their aid, and their heroism to imitate.

All Souls Day of our departed loved ones,  
Following the Saints in Catholic story,  
Celebrated from earliest Church times,  
Breathes prayer-scent for spirits in Purgatory.

Here the dead touch Light, glory, joy, and hope;  
Respect and suffrages are woven round death.  
Goblins, witches, hexes, dark horror cloaks,  
Demonic masks are foreign to signs of Faith.

We must withstand such crude profanity,  
Hostile vulgarity, and base interest,  
That would rob these great days of their sanctity;  
Stop trickery! Treat well the Novemberfest!

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Eamon Flanagan a Vincentian priest, works in Dublin. This poem is from his latest book of poetry, *Proclaiming God's Name to Multitudes* (Cork: Kolbe Publications) ISBN 9-780952-962786.

# Silver Jubilee Reflections

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John Cummins

In reflecting on how I came to be a priest and still remain one, I'm surprised at how little has changed. While experience has tempered my idealism and some new factors, events and people have entered into the story, either challenging or sustaining me, much of what originally inspired me holds true. I'm very optimistic about priesthood. I like being a priest; I believe in the priesthood. In answering the call to priesthood, I believe that I am fulfilling God's plan for me, and as such, it is the most authentic way of life that I could possibly choose. But yet I wonder if that would be enough to keep someone else going; at the end of the day, it's a personal story, unique to every priest. St. Peter reminds us always to have a reason for the hope that is within you; in other words, know what it is that keeps you going. This essay offers me the opportunity to reflect on what keeps me going, on the reasons for the hope that is within me, that deep confidence in the love of God which never departs.

I was ordained on 16 June 1991, a day on which Kildare lost the National League Final Replay to Dublin. My first four years of ministry were spent in Naas where I learnt a huge amount and where my enthusiasm and idealism both grew and matured. 1995 took me to Rome and further studies. Life in the Eternal City was a joy, although I'm afraid I didn't develop anything like the inside track on the Vatican that many at home thought was a given. In fact, I had little interest in life across the Tiber; it was part of the broader picture, a privilege to be a spectator, but that was enough. Being in Rome opened my eyes to the limitations of our perspective in Ireland, both as Church and as society. But it also opened up a truly global city, a city with its finger on the pulse of the world. For the ancient Romans, Rome was the centre of civilisation; I didn't think that that had changed much. Back from Rome, I spent 5 years as chaplain in the Institute of Technology, Carlow. Here I encountered the semi-state structure and had the opportunity to compare that institution with the Church, which didn't fare badly in

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Father John Cummins, R.I.P., died tragically on 30 January 2019. He wrote this reflection following the celebration of his Silver Jubilee of ordination.

the comparison. I have many happy memories from the I.T. While there, I was appointed to work with Accord Carlow, the Catholic Marriage Care Service, and also took up a role with our diocesan services, later named the Faith Development Services. This offered great scope for involvement in pastoral initiatives in the diocese. In 2005, I was appointed curate in the Cathedral Parish, Carlow and in 2006 became administrator in that parish, where I'm constantly enthused by the deep faith and commitment of parishioners who seek to respond to the movement of God in their daily lives.

#### FAITH SUSTAINS

Faith itself has been the main sustaining factor of the last 25 years—the conviction that my life has meaning, that God has called me to something, even if it is not given to me to understand it. I've received immense strength from the Christian message itself, and so I have been surprised and disappointed at how people have rejected the Church because of the weakness and sinfulness of its leaders. Church leaders have always been weak and sinful - right from the time of Peter. The companions Christ chose abandoned him, and yet he sent these very people out after his resurrection to proclaim the good news.

While they were transformed by their encounter with the Risen Jesus and by the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, they still had to face the rest of the disciples, who knew that they had deserted Jesus in his need, who knew that Peter had denied him, who saw the disfunction of the 12 exposed in the betrayal and subsequent death of Judas. It can't have been easy. But the messenger is not the message. Society discredits the message because the credibility of the messenger is in doubt. The Church is not alone in this; it's how society works.

On the other hand, our message is about the Incarnation - the message takes flesh; it's meant to take flesh in us priests and in all Christians, so there's a validity in the criticism that points to the flaws in the messenger, for, like it or not, we embody the message. It makes you wonder about priests and our integrity as messengers of the gospel. What is our relationship with the message we bear? Is it clear? Do we value it? Is it real for us? If we don't value the message, how can we be messengers? Has our way of life lost its credibility? I remember years ago in seminary wondering if we were too comfortable, our lives not radical enough? In middle age, I'm much more comfortable than I was then, and Pope Francis, in his simplicity, challenges my middle-class comfort and lifestyle. As a seminarian, I remember a visiting priest, a Vocations Director from a diocese not my own, coming to Maynooth and asking the

## THE FURROW

seminarian from his diocese who had arranged the room for him, to make sure he had two pillows, because as he said “after all he’d given up, it was the least he deserved.” At the time, in my youthful idealism, I was horrified much to the amusement of the other seminarian, who still reminds me of it. I’ve always been of the view that because we have chosen this way of life, therefore we don’t deserve anything. We are servants called to do our duty. However I find that more and more I’m slipping into the “two pillow-priesthood” - both mine, I’d hasten to add! People tend to insulate themselves with the comforts of life - small though they may be, and while there’s nothing wrong with that and even the saints enjoyed their treats, we need to be careful that they do not insulate us from the radicalness of the call to discipleship and the mission that flows from it.

## WHAT KEEPS US GOING?

So coming back to that question, what keeps me going on the journey? Many priests find that what is life-giving is everyday parish life, the experiences of the women, men and children who are part of our communities, who offer friendship and support and are open to the message that we try to bring. In sharing their lives, with all the ups and downs, we priests live life at its fullest and most meaningful, touching the very mysteries of existence as they unfold in daily life. Someone asked me once what was the source of my joy? The question surprised me, and my immediate thought was of my family who have sustained me - sometimes unknowingly - at some of the darker moments of ministry, particularly during the days after the Murphy Report. But the presence of the Lord has been even stronger.

The Italians have a prayer “*May the joy of the Lord be your strength.*” It’s a phrase I keep coming back to, and at times I use it as a mantra, and find that it lifts the spirit immensely. I believe that the source of our joy lies in our relationship with God. We might find great satisfaction in the work we do, great life and great hope in the people we work with and minister to, and many times of celebration and happiness, but the real lasting joy comes from our relationship with God. For us celibates, that is the primary relationship in our lives, and not just in our lives, it is the primary relationship in everyone’s life. Our celibacy witnesses to that primacy in a unique way. But that witness means nothing if it is not real, if it is not lived, if the relationship that we claim to be the primary relationship is not in fact the primary relationship. May the joy of the Lord be your strength; it’s so much easier to rejoice in the Lord when we know him. This leads us to the place

that we give to our prayer. Prayer is about the time and space we give to God and that he gives to us. We preach about it to others; we sometimes struggle with it ourselves. Sometimes it's good, but many times nothing happens. Yet it has the power to sustain us, to give us nourishment and meaning, and to bring us into the presence of the one who is the origin of all life and all love. Prayer is the place of complete honesty, where, like Adam in the garden of Eden, we cannot hide before God. He knows us through and through, and so here we find the place where we are known completely and yet utterly loved and accepted.

Two other phrases summarise much of what has inspired and energised me over the years. These are like mantras or mottos, phrases that have given me comfort, courage, enthusiasm and peace as they were needed. One is a version of Luke 23:46, a paraphrase of Ps 30:5,15, "*Father, I place my life in your hands.*" This is the prayer of faith, of trust, of confidence in whatever God might have in store for me. Belief in God's plan for us, in his love for us, in his providence removes an awful lot of the stress from life.

The other phrase is from psalm 26: "*It is your face O Lord that I seek.*" This is about mission; it expresses the final destiny of humanity, to behold God face to face in the beatific vision, but it also expresses the mission to see the face of God in his people. It strikes me that our mission today is to be Veronica and to wash clean the face of Christ in today's world, to reveal the face of Christ in his body, the Church, where it has been sullied and is no longer visible to a lot of people. Here we are called to reveal Christ to the world in all his beauty and love. The call to seek the face of Christ in his people is a call to serve him in the people of our parishes and communities, and to seek him also beyond the safe confines of our churches, as Pope Francis reminds us. The good shepherd left the ninety-nine to seek the one who was lost; that one too bears the face of Christ that we seek.

#### HOLY ORDERS

All Christians are called to exercise leadership in the Church, but in very different ways. Our baptism establishes each one of us as members of the Christian family, called to follow Christ, called to witness to him. The baptismal call is coming more and more into its own, and the leadership of lay people is finding both a voice and a means of expression.

Holy Orders however, has always been seen as a particular gift that Christ has given, not to individuals, but to the Church. Priesthood is not simply about the priest, it's about the community he serves. A priest is one who answers the call of Christ in a

## THE FURROW

particular way, choosing to live the baptismal vocation, not in marriage or single life as most other people do, but in modelling his life on Christ and being united with him in a particular way of life, united with Christ through the sacrament of ordination, through a life of prayer, both personal and public, and through the ministry of service. I have always seen the priest as someone called to offer his life in union with Christ's; he is the one who says on behalf of Christ during the Eucharist "this is my body, given up for you." Saying these words at Mass challenges me to make them my own. While they echo the call of all Christians to give their lives for others in imitation of Christ, nonetheless it is the priest who follows the example of Christ in offering his life for all; it is the priest who says those words in the liturgy on behalf of Christ, and so is called to witness to them in a distinctive manner. Priestly celibacy is a particular expression of that offering, made not to one person, but for the community.

The task of proclaiming Christ is more urgent than ever before. Since the election of Pope Francis, whose patron was entrusted with the rebuilding of the Church during a mystical experience in Assisi, a new period in our history is beginning. Our world is crying out for hope and for meaning. Our Church needs new vision and energy. It still needs shepherds who will lead God's people into union with him, shepherds who will uncover the holiness of God's people and reveal the face of God. Jesus points towards his unique relationship with the Father when he says "The Father and I are one". But it is also the goal of our life in Christ. We are called to union with God, and there is a crying need for priests who will witness to that call in their own lives and lead people towards it in their ministry. Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" was very popular a few years ago.

One of the habits he suggested was to begin with the end in mind - in other words, have a goal and keep it in sight. In the busyness of life, we might forget that we're pilgrims on a journey and our journey has a destination. We're destined for union with God - that's the goal, the proclamation of it is our work and our life. In some measure, we seek to achieve and experience that union already in our communion with God and with one another. Evangelisation is part of the journey; the Kingdom of God is the goal. Keeping that goal in mind is important every day because not only does it remind me that I'm not alone, but it also allows me to keep a sense of perspective about my life and its relative unimportance - I'm part of the picture, not the whole picture - that's Christ. I don't always have to get it right - God will use our failures as well as our failures. For me, it's important just to be on the journey.

## EUCCHARIST AND OFFERING

When I was a child, my mother used to say our prayers with us in the mornings before going to school. She always began with the Morning Offering. She told us *not* to say “I offer you all *my* prayers, works and sufferings”, but rather “I offer you all *the* prayers, works and sufferings of this day” because then, not only were you offering your own life, but everyone else’s as well, so that everything you did and everyone else did would be a prayer. If you followed her logic, well then you might never need to utter another prayer for the rest of your life!

But I took to her logic pretty well, and that notion of offering the whole day, my whole life was part of the daily routine and fed in to my vocation as a priest. It was very eucharistic, and it made a big impact on me, firstly as a child, when I thought it was a great way of doing an awful lot of praying with very little effort. But as an adult, I found in it the roots of a Eucharistic spirituality, where in the bread and wine offered on the altar, we offer also all that they represent - fruits of creation representing the entire creation, work of human hands, telling of all that is human, so that the preparation of the gifts becomes something more than just the preparation of the bread and wine, but the presentation of life, creation and all that is human, in its joy and hope, anguish and sorrow. All of it is offered to Christ, all of it is transformed, all of it becomes a new creation, the sign of the transformation of all in Christ, when God will be all in all.

Here in the Eucharist, all of life comes together. Each person comes with an individual story; each comes to touch and to share the life of God. But God is not afraid to touch our lives and to share them. He knows our stories so we are not afraid to acknowledge our human frailty and to allow God to touch our vulnerability as we express our need of his loving kindness. Then as a people united in his presence, we take our part as the heavenly liturgy unfolds in our presence.

We are nourished, challenged, healed and uplifted by the proclamation of God’s word, through which Christ becomes present to us. We remember the offering of Christ in his death and resurrection, made present now in bread and wine. The new covenant breaks in among us, rupturing the heaven’s and disclosing Christ’s presence with us, while foretelling creation’s final union with God. Here in the gathering of the Christian people to celebrate the mystery of Christ’s love for us, everything comes together as one. This is the place of unity, the place of nourishment, the place where God’s people are fed on the journey even as they anticipate the banquet at journey’s end. I usually lose people when I start to

## THE FURROW

talk about the Eucharist, but I find that this approach helps me to make sense of life and faith, bringing them together in one place and one point. Writers such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Jean Corbon, Jeremy O’Driscoll and Paul McPartlan have coloured much of my thinking.

## EUCHARIST AND THE CROSS

We don’t talk much about the cross these days - I’m reminded of a bishop who visited the chapel of a diocesan seminary a few years back and as he looked at the books on the pews, saw the modern book covers of contemporary authors and he wondered at the spiritual reading of the seminarians and said: “Where’s John of the Cross? Where’s Teresa of Avila? All I see are sand-dunes and palm-trees!”

I’m all in favour of sand-dunes and palm-trees - but that’s for holidays. Real life is tough. A teacher in school used to say to us, as he piling on the homework, “Life is hard, lads!” I’ve haven’t forgotten that lesson: life is hard. The cross is part of life, whether we like it or not, and it’s part of the story of the Eucharist, present in the crushing of the grain and grains, present in the offering of Christ on the cross. I received an ordination invitation which had, on its cover, an image of the priest superimposed on the crucifix, sharing the cross with Christ. It spoke of a spirituality that isn’t too popular today. But we have to get to grips with the cross. We cannot put it to one side; we cannot avoid it; we cannot deny it. Because we know that we’ve been there too. We’ve been the body of Christ hanging on the cross, and we may well be in the future as well.

This really excites me about our worship. I’m convinced of Christianity and its truth because of the way that it faces the hard realities of life – suffering, evil, death. Without denying any of them, it offers a meaning and a way forward. God sent his Son among us, not to give us answers, but to be with us – he is Emmanuel, God with us. And God-With-Us lived with us, suffered with us, died with us, showing us that this is how life is. It’s tough and it’s rough, and we mightn’t understand it – and he didn’t seem to understand it very well either in Gethsemane – but we’re not alone. He is with us. Christ didn’t give us answers but he stood by us and suffered with us, and, in fact, went one step further than we do - he went beyond death and revealed to us the new life of the Resurrection. This undreamed of revelation transforms our approach to suffering, not by denying its reality, but through its transformation. Christ gives us no answers, but he showed us the way. Critics of Christianity would talk of the “pie in the sky when you die” spirituality, but it’s

more about solidarity while you live, knowing Christ is present with you in your suffering. Finding him, placing your hand in his and trusting in the darkness that he will guide you to the fullness of life. The resurrection may even, at times, seem like too much to hope for. But it is the ultimate affirmation and vindication both of the physical body and of human suffering. Created in God's image and likeness, our bodies are enfleshed spirit, and so are destined for life.

#### EUCCHARIST AND VOCATION

For me, the Eucharist is at the heart of priesthood. Here is where Christ offered his life, giving us a ritual so that we can participate in his gift of his life on the Cross. It's a privilege to say the words of Christ "take this, this is my body, which will be given up for you." I always feel these words are at the heart of all Christian vocation and all Christian life, where we are called to give our lives in love, as Christ gave his. In marriage, the husband and wife say these words to one another - "this is my body, my life which I give for you"; their life as a Christian married couple originates in this moment, as Christ gives his life to the wife and to the husband in and through each other, nourished and energised by the body of Christ whom they have received, living in them, giving in them, uniting in them. As priest, I say those words, not directly to anyone else, but in the person of Christ, who said them as he gave his life for all. As the person who says those words of Christ on his behalf, I have to make them my own by giving my life for all. My saying these words brings me right into the gift of my life that I am asked to make, the vocation that I am called to follow. These words inspire and nourish my life as a celibate, bringing that part of my life right into the heart of the Eucharist, endowing it a meaning and an energy which keep me going when the day to day living out of celibacy brings its challenges and struggles.

In giving our life, we imitate Christ who washed the feet of the disciples. This is the other great symbol of Eucharist, the *diakonia*, or service that is the essence of Christ's self-gift. This is my body *given for you*...it's for others, for their sake, for our sake, that Christ gave his life, and many beautiful things have been written about the washing of feet over the centuries. So much of our lives is given to the service of others; diocesan priesthood holds that balance between the service of washing feet and the more contemplative offering of bread and wine. The strength of priesthood is not in power, but in service; it lies in the washing of feet. The beauty of priesthood is the face of the Risen Christ revealed in us, for us, and through us. We've been formed to see

## THE FURROW

ourselves as *alter Christus*, ‘other Christs’, acting *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ. Along the line however, we may have forgotten that it is Christ whom we serve in his people. It is the face of Christ that we see in the faces of our parishioners and others. Often priests have been so preoccupied with their calling to be *alter Christus* that we have forgotten about the Christ whom we serve in the person of the other. Thus, as well as telling stories of generous self-sacrifice, genuine love and inspiring holiness, the history of the priesthood also tells a tale of arrogance and pride, self-absorption and resentment. Obviously these aren’t compatible with priesthood, but they are evidence of the ‘earthen vessels’ which God uses to hold his precious gifts.

Most of all in the Eucharist, I am sustained by the presence of Christ himself. In the frailty of bread, he gives himself, uniting himself to us in a way that is so simple, yet almost beyond belief. To carry within us the presence of God and act as his tabernacle – this is mind-blowing stuff. But when you consider that in receiving Eucharist, we are not simply Christ-bearers, but are united with him because we are fed with him, then we are truly in a space beyond human comprehension. At the end of life’s journey is the union with God, *theosis*, which we can only imagine. But it begins here, through the medium of bread and wine, as we are called into the communion of one body – communion with Christ and with one another, a union with the Church present at the Eucharistic celebration, a union with the Church of all ages, a union with the Church of heaven, a union with Christ, in his living, dying and rising. And so, the very mystery of Christ’s life becomes part of us and part of our lives, as we are caught up into the eternal presence of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

A description of the priest that has always made sense to me is *Interpreter of Life*. We are there to help people make sense of their lives, particularly at the key moments – birth, marriage, illness, death, bereavement, trauma, experiences of meaninglessness, hopelessness, poverty, need, but also helping them to understand and appreciate love, joy, hospitality, sharing, caring. We are interpreters of the mystery of life, helping people to get a glimpse of God’s presence, if not his plan, in their various life experiences. It’s our privilege as diocesan priests to be living at the frontiers of life, the places where life is on the edge, as we struggle to push the boundaries of meaning and belief, hope and love, courage and endurance, and lead our people into faith. We’re more than ministers of the rites of passage who provide a pleasant background

for secular celebrations; we endeavour to lead people into the heart of what those celebrations are truly about; to open their eyes to perceive God's presence; to open their hearts to welcome his love; to open their minds to the deeper wisdom and understanding of the Spirit of God at the critical junctures.

The Church faces many challenges in Ireland today; some of these are political, concerning the credibility of the Church in society etc, but the deeper crises are spiritual. Irish people still are deeply aware of God's presence but are not confident in responding to that awareness in the Church and so search for it elsewhere. Priests need to be sensitive to their searching, and aware too of the richness of the Christian tradition of meditation, mysticism, retreats and holistic spirituality. We need to enhance our ability to articulate that tradition. We also need to be confident in the message we proclaim, and to be able to sit with those who struggle with the Church and to dialogue with them. It's an exciting time to be a priest, a challenging time, one that offers new opportunities for mission and evangelisation. Hopefully we're neither too tired nor too demoralised to embrace these. Ultimately, it comes down to our confidence in God's ability to use us to achieve his purpose, whatever that purpose might be – to let go and to let God. In the words of St. Paul, *Glory be to him, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.* (Eph. 3:20)

While the history of the Church in Ireland over the past 25 years has been pretty dismal, consisting of revelations of scandals, depravity and mismanagement, one might be philosophical and observe that life has always been difficult. Each age brings its own challenges; that's life and the Christian life points to the cross as a constant presence, no matter when we may live. The challenges of our time are ugly, not just because of their unpleasantness, but because they reveal the presence of evil in the heart of the Church and because so many of them are largely of the Church's own making. The scandals of sexual abuse are part of a wider picture of abuse within society which society still fails to confront. Being a priest during the time when these scandals have been uncovered has not been easy and at times you want to escape from it, particularly when you are aware of unfair comment or clergy bashing. We're an easy target. But Christ came to suffer for the guilty and we must share that part of his mission too. So many innocent people suffer when someone commits a crime; the direct victim is not the only victim. Their family and friends are affected and so too is the circle which surrounds the perpetrator, his family, friends and colleagues, no matter what the crime.

I used to think that the Church influenced the culture and society of which it was part; now I wonder if the culture of the Church

## THE FURROW

stems, in fact, from the culture of the time, and if it is society which creates the dominant ambiance within the Church rather than vice versa. After all, Church people grow up in families and communities and are moulded in them before ever making an adult commitment to religious life. It's an interesting thought, but one that might too easily let the Church off the hook.

**Prayers of Petition.** When I was a youngster, my piano teacher once observed to me that God always answers our prayers; the only thing, she added, being that sometimes the answer is 'No'. That may seem a glib evasion, but it could have a point: it could be that what we are asking God for may not be good for us. Matthew closes Jesus's remarks about asking and always receiving by having him conclude, 'If you then, who are evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give *good things* to those who ask him' (Matthew 7:8). What people want is not always what is 'good' for them; and Jesus did not promise that God would always give us everything that we ask for. Discouraging though it may appear, God may know better sometimes, and may decide that what we need is something else rather than what we are begging him for. An old saying warns us, Take care what you pray for: you may get it.

— JACK MAHONEY, SJ, *Glimpses of the Gospels* (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p. 162.

# Disturbing Deacons: Upstanders Through Moral Resistance. *Towards a New Golden Age of Ministry*

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Glenn Morrison

In this article, I wish to explore the history and vocation of the deacon to highlight the hope for a new Golden Age of possessing a “thinking heart”<sup>1</sup> of a martyr to inspire trust, truth and the evidence of love for the Church. Accordingly, deacons are called to be upstanders in Christ even to the point of demonstrating the disturbing resistance and counterforce of disobedience that will in time be seen and understood as the ethical action and ministry of speaking frankly in the name of those who are most vulnerable within the Church.

Let us begin by asking some questions on the nature and identity of the deacon, the better to open up a lens of the charisms and gifts of deacons to the Church. What is a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church? Is he an image of “Christ the Servant”,<sup>2</sup> “a social intermediary among the people of God,”<sup>3</sup> or a missionary who resides on the “borderlands”<sup>4</sup> or margins of society to be with the poor? Can we envisage the identity of deacons as “serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money

- 1 The metaphor of a “thinking heart” comes from the writings of Etty Hillesum. During her incarceration at Westerbork Transit Camp before being transported to Auschwitz, she expresses, “The thinking heart of the barracks,” to summarise her search for “the great redeeming formula” that “sums up everything within” her of the “overflowing and rich sense of life”. In sum, to possess a thinking heart is to come near to the heart of poet reflecting on the mystery of life and the presence of God. See Etty Hillesum *An Interrupted Life. The Diaries, 1941-1943 and Letters From Westerbork* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 199.
- 2 See Tim O’Donnell, “Should Deacons Represent Christ the Servant?” *Theological Studies* 78 (4) (2017): 850–78.
- 3 Shawn W. McKnight, and David W. Fagerberg, “Chapter 5, Precedents for the Deacon as Social Intermediary,” in *Understanding the Diaconate: Historical, Theological, and Sociological Foundations* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 109.
- 4 O’Donnell, “Should Deacons Represent Christ the Servant?”, 852.

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[who] hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:8-9)? We learn from the Acts of the Apostles, that deacons were like busy table servers (6:2) who fulfil the ancient Israelite call to look after the welfare of widows (Deut 10:18; cf. Jas 1:27).

DEACONS IN THE TRADITION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In the Golden Age of Deacons from 100 CE to 325 CE, that is to say from the Age of the Apologists to the time of the Council of Nicea, the deacons worked as “church officials” in close relation and connection to the bishop (Phil 1:1).<sup>5</sup> At this time, deacons, being both servants of the Church and of the bishop,<sup>6</sup> developed important administrative tasks that brought together a good balance between the secular and sacred. They administered the finances, looked after the memorials after martyrs at cemeteries, took liturgical roles at the Eucharist, and engaged in the pastoral care of their fellow Christians. Accordingly, as the “primary intermediary between the bishop and the people,” the deacon became, as it were, the “‘hearing’, ‘mouth’, ‘heart,’ and ‘soul’ of the bishop”.<sup>7</sup> In effect, as servants of Christ, they were called to know the Gospel as much as the suffering of others.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising then in the Early Church (and even in the Middle Ages) that, “Frequently, deacons [such as St. Athanasius of Alexandria] were elected bishops because of their administrative capabilities and expertise”.<sup>9</sup>

The Second Vatican Council “revived” the hope for the permanent diaconate (proposed in *Lumen Gentium* no. 29) whereby Pope Paul VI gave “institutional sanction” on June 8, 1967 with his Apostolic Letter 1967, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* [General Norms For Restoring the Permanent Diaconate in the Latin Church].<sup>10</sup> Previously, over 1600 years before Vatican Council II, the first Ecumenical Council of the Church, the Council

5 McKnight, and Fagerberg, “Chapter 5, Precedents for the Deacon as Social Intermediary,” 122 and Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II Δ-H* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), 89.

6 Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II Δ-H*, 89.

7 McKnight, and Fagerberg, “Chapter 5, Precedents for the Deacon as Social Intermediary,” 132-138.

8 Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them* (Homebush NSW: St. Pauls, 1985), 42.

9 Shawn W. McKnight, and David W. Fagerberg, “Chapter 6, The Transformation and Decline of the Diaconate,” in *Understanding the Diaconate: Historical, Theological, and Sociological Foundations* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 146-147.

10 O’Donnell prefers to use the word, “revive” instead of “restore”. He points out: “restoration” implies that “an early church office had been dusted off and, substantially unchanged, put to use in the contemporary church. In contrast, the term, “revival,” “recognizes some continuity with the ancient office, but also allows for the differences in context and purpose we find in the contemporary diaconate.” See O’Donnell, “Should Deacons Represent Christ the Servant?”, 854 (especially footnote 11).

of Nicea in 325 CE, taking up the “Roman Apostolic Tradition” initiated the “erosion of the deacon’s influence in the governance of the Church” by articulating an overarching “distinction between and deacons and presbyters”.<sup>11</sup> In other words, deacons now became subordinate to presbyters. Hence, within a few decades after the Council of Nicea, the presbyters, primarily a college of “primary counsellors of bishops” [elders<sup>12</sup>], became “priests” assuming “offices of leadership in rural communities, presiding over the assemblies and fulfilling liturgical functions that had been associated with the bishops”.<sup>13</sup> The decline of the deacons was also due to the frustration of Bishops upset about deacons abusing their authority.<sup>14</sup>

#### ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH: LOOKING FOR EMBERS OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF DEACONS

In response to the decline of the deacon’s role and identity in the Church, there is a need today to develop hope for a new Golden Age of deacons. To begin to search for traces or embers of such hope for a new Golden Age, let us look then, for example, at St. Ignatius’ Letter to the Trallians (Ch.2:3-3:1), who relates 1 Timothy 3’s concern that “deacons be upright and respectable men”<sup>15</sup>:

And those likewise who are deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ must please all men in all ways. For they are not deacons of meats and drinks, but servants of the Church of God. It is right that they should beware of blame as of fire. In like manner let all men respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, even as they should respect the bishop as being a type of the Father and the presbyters as the council of God and as the college of Apostles. Apart from these there is not even the name of a church.<sup>16</sup>

St. Ignatius writes to the Trallians with “warm friendship and exhortation”<sup>17</sup> knowing also that his sacrifice of death could be

11 McKnight, and Fagerberg, “Chapter 6, The Transformation and Decline of the Diaconate,” 147.

12 Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1953), 583

13 McKnight, and Fagerberg, “Chapter 6, The Transformation and Decline of the Diaconate,” 147-148.

14 *Ibid*, 149.

15 McKnight, and Fagerberg, “Chapter 5, Precedents for the Deacon as Social Intermediary,” 120.

16 J. B. Lightfoot (text) and J. R. Harmer (ed.), *Apostolic Fathers*, (Macmillan and Co., 1891 translation), <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-trallians-lightfoot.html>.

17 Alexander N. Kirk, “Ignatius’ Statements of Self-Sacrifice: Intimations of an Atoning Death or Expressions of Exemplary Suffering” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 64, no. 1 (2013): 66-88.

## THE FURROW

soon where he writes at the end of his letter, “My spirit is offered up for you, not only now, but also when I shall attain unto God. For I am still in peril; but the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ to fulfil my petition and yours. May we be found unblameable in Him” (Trall. 13:3).<sup>18</sup> Taking on the lens of faith, let us imagine that St. Ignatius of Antioch’s paschal words as the warm embers of martyr to give direction and hope to point towards a revival of the role of deacons in the Roman Catholic Church.

We can learn from St. Ignatius that deacons, to be servants of God (and not mere “table servers”, cf. Acts 6:2), must model themselves on the paschal mystery and seek a life of goodness, truth and righteousness even to the point of taking up a spirituality of martyrdom as Pope St. John Paul II explains in *Fides et Ratio*:

“The martyrs know that they have found the truth about life in the encounter with Jesus Christ, and nothing and no-one could ever take this certainty from them. Neither suffering nor violent death could ever lead them to abandon the truth which they have discovered in the encounter with Christ. This is why to this day the witness of the martyrs continues to arouse such interest, to draw agreement, to win such a hearing and to invite emulation. This is why their word inspires such confidence: from the moment they speak to us of what we perceive deep down as the truth we have sought for so long, the martyrs provide evidence of a love that has no need of lengthy arguments in order to convince. The martyrs stir in us a profound trust because they give voice to what we already feel and they declare what we would like to have the strength to express.”<sup>19</sup>

Following in the tradition of St. Ignatius of Antioch’s devotion of living in the mystery of Christ, Pope St. John Paul II expresses the heart of the spirituality of the martyr as: (i) the self-discovery of truth through the personal encounter with Jesus the Christ; (ii) of love enabling the grace to take on the paschal road of faith; and (iii) of living out a stirring witness of “profound trust” in Jesus’ preaching of the newness and nearness of Kingdom of God. Hence, altogether, martyrs possess a spirituality and charism of becoming “thinking heart” archetypes of faith.

### THINKING HEART DEACONS: WITNESSING TO A NEW GOLDEN AGE

Taking on the “thinking heart” and spirituality of a martyr, together deacons may witness to a new Golden Age of courage and

18 See also, Kirk, “Ignatius’ Statements of Self-Sacrifice,” 81.

19 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (14 September, 1998), no. 32.

confidence. For their presence contains the possibility and, indeed, ability to “stir” “a profound trust” in people’s hearts. Accordingly, the deacons of the Church, I suggest, must look to what stirred Jesus’ ministry from the very start, namely “the Temple incident that provoked the Jewish authorities ... the first step to the trial of Jesus”.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, the Temple incident in John’s Gospel (Jn 2: 13-22) occurs “at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry”<sup>21</sup> just before the time of Passover. Jesus has found a specific and dramatic time to begin to reveal himself through an act of disturbance as the messiah and “messenger of the covenant” (Mal 3:1). He is consumed with “zeal” for God’s Temple (Jn 2:17). In other words, he is willing to take a stance of disobedience against “insults” (Ps. 69:9) so that, “All is Holy to the Lord” (Zech 14:20).

Here, deacons may learn from Jesus’ covenantal “*faithful human action to rage and protest*”<sup>22</sup> to incarnate a ministry of disturbance.<sup>23</sup> Such ministry can be seen as a liturgy of responsibility evoking a “difficult freedom” and “difficult adoration”<sup>24</sup> to make God’s temple (Church) a sacred place of worship and service. The idea of a difficult freedom speaks of being responsible for-the-other to the point of seeking a new Golden Age where deacons inspire peace, justice and mercy. Such seeking for the Kingdom of God portrays a difficult adoration or devotion towards the other’s pain, vulnerabilities and needs for healing and compassion. Here, the counterforce of disturbance and disobedience become the breakthrough of God’s grace to develop a “thinking of heart” of knowing the Gospel and the suffering of others.

Let us look further at the ethical and prophetic value of disobedience as a form of taking up a ministry (and theology) of disturbance and resistance. We can call this equally the resilience of possessing a “thinking heart” and spirituality of the martyr. What then is the context for the deacon to develop his mission and identity? Today, permanent deacons are primarily married men who work and live in a secular culture and serve within the Roman Catholic Church that has encountered a diminishing number of priests.<sup>25</sup> In a sense, deacons are close to the reality of living between a secular and sacred world. Such metaxic or Pauline existence (cf. 2 Cor 6: 1-10) produces a “profound turbulence”

20 Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Mahwah NJ, Paulist Press, 1976), 117.

21 Anthony J. Kelly and Francis J. Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 71.

22 Walter Brueggemann, “Covenanting as Human Vocation: A Discussion of the Relation of Bible and Pastoral Care,” *Interpretation* 33: 2 (April 1979): 123.

23 Anthony Gooley (Deacon, Archdiocese of Brisbane, QLD, Australia), *The Permanent Diaconate: A Ministry of Disturbance* (Unpublished Paper, 2019), 1-3.

24 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Séan Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 145, 272.

25 O’Donnell, “Should Deacons Represent Christ the Servant?”, 855.

## THE FURROW

of faith; a defining theological reality of living between Christ's resurrection and Parousia.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, of being close to the risen Jesus, deacons learn to share in the mystery of friendship where those on the margins of the society, "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:21) are the first to feast in the Kingdom of God. And in hoping for Parousia, the eternal moment of salvation, deacons are called to scrutinise the "signs of the times" and interpret "them in the light of the Gospel".<sup>27</sup> Deacons therefore are called to develop a sense of the poverty of riches and the riches of poverty: to develop a taste for the Gospel, to be poor in spirit, and to learn the bodiliness of compassion; to suffer through the sufferings of others and be wounded through the wounds of others.

Utilising a more sociological language, one could perhaps see the role of deacons as a function of resistance and rescue, of being an "upstander" rather than a "bystander" against processes and systems that dehumanise people to the point of taking away their dignity and rights. Pointing out the distinction between an "upstander" and a "bystander", Paul Bartrop writes:

"An upstander, it might be said, is the opposite of a bystander. For whatever reason, bystanders generally do not get involved in situations in which moral choices need to be made in relation to right and wrong. As a result, it is uncommon for them to take action when confronted with the persecution of abuse of another. Upstanders, on the other hand, will intervene in some way, choosing to take positive action in the face of injustice or in situations where others need assistance."<sup>28</sup>

Keeping this distinction in mind, one could imagine that deacons are called to be spontaneous and vigilant upstanders with a "thinking heart" of the Gospel against the forces of evil that poison the human soul. An important caveat here for deacons working towards the newness of the Kingdom of God, is that they are called first to be servants of "Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 3:13) and peacemakers (Mt 5:9) rather than "ethical fanatics"<sup>29</sup> who seek rebellion and protest for the sake of rebellion and protest. Ultimately the aim is to show that, "disobedience is necessary in order to show that ethical action is no longer disobedient".<sup>30</sup>

26 Anthony J. Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 95.

27 Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), no. 4.

28 Paul R. Bartrop, *Resisting the Holocaust: Upstanders, Partisans and Survivors* (Santa Barbara CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2016), xxiii.

29 Linus Vanlaere, Roger Burggrave and Laetus O.K. Lategan, *Vulnerable Responsibility: Small Vices For Caregivers* (Bloemfontein: Sun Press, 2019), 99.

30 *Ibid*, 99.

In terms of taking up “a ministry of disturbance” as the “thinking heart” of a martyr, let us look at the example then of the prophetic stance of disobedience, one that led Jesus himself on his collision course with the authorities of Israel and Rome. We have no doubt heard of “civil disobedience” in politics and society or even perhaps, “professional disobedience” in for example healthcare.<sup>31</sup> What about then, “*ministerial disobedience*”? One could immediately posit such disturbance as reckless or foolish. However, let us think of it as like the motivation of a vaccine to trigger an immune response. And therefore with the witness or “vaccine” of “ministerial disobedience”, the deacon may learn the value and “counterforce” of “moral indignation” as a means to “speak frankly in the name of the most vulnerable”, and hence “to create room for the little goodness”.<sup>32</sup>

The act of ministerial disobedience will begin for the deacon when he becomes aware of his own feelings. The deacons will experience feelings resonating inside such as hurt and frustration, anger and heartbreak in relation to the drama of situations, people, rules and systems. Facing “social pressure”<sup>33</sup> to do as others do can inhibit the gifts of spontaneity, endurance and vigilance to respond. Remembering that during the Golden Age (100 CE -325 CE), deacons were “a source of knowledge for the Bishop,”<sup>34</sup> their authority meant a freedom to know the concerns of the laity and of the local Church intimately. Accordingly today, deacons need to recover their authority by for example possessing the grace of moral indignation so that they may develop the sense of “moral resistance” to institutional and organisational wrongs.<sup>35</sup> In this way, deacons show that they take on a “difficult freedom” to live out a “thinking heart” of justice and mercy, and be vigilant upstanders to respond to issues arising in the Church and society. Hence, for example, in terms of considering the welfare of the poor, deacons can be the first to highlight the need to give them spiritual care, and hence to share the friendship of Jesus<sup>36</sup> with those living on the margins such as the poor and oppressed, the lonely and disabled, and strangers desolated by loss. The witness of faith and holiness of the deacon can then even become a vehicle to inspire “obedience to the faith” (Acts 6:7) for the whole Church, from laity to priests (Acts 6:7) and bishops.

31 Ibid, 94.

32 Ibid, 31-32, 68, 82, 93-107.

33 Ibid, 107.

34 McKnight, and Fagerberg, “Chapter 5, Precedents for the Deacon as Social Intermediary,” 125.

35 Vanlaere, Burggraeve and Letegan, *Vulnerable Responsibility*, 95.

36 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (24th November, 2013), no. 200.

## THE FURROW

If ministerial disobedience begins with feelings like frustration and develops through an intellectual understanding of the situation, there eventuates another key feeling: anger even to the point of rage. Now the situation touches one more spiritually and physically (like the incarnation of the soul into the body) to cause the stomach churn. Such affectivity animates the deacon to arrive at a decision not to remain silent or “indifferent” about what he sees.<sup>37</sup> Strength is then created for the deacon “to actually and actively bring about change”.<sup>38</sup> The mess and rot of a bent world must stop. The vulnerable ones must be first in a Church of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The deacon goes through a conversion of heart to realise that the situation of abuse or injustice for example is unacceptable. As such the deacon will make a stance to disturb, signifying, “I won’t be a part of it” any longer.<sup>39</sup> And so let us imagine that deacons, upstanders through moral resistance, embodying the “thinking heart” and spirituality of a martyr, begin to witness to a new Golden Age of being servants of Christ.

Ministerial disobedience now transforms into the testimony of “ethical action”,<sup>40</sup> a character that ensures that the behaviour of the deacon is no longer disobedient, but only disturbing. But the counterforce continues in the hope towards building a new world to correct structures, situations or even people that fall into patterns of bullying, exploitation and injustice. Taking on the “thinking heart” and spirituality of a martyr, the deacon further begins to speak frankly and tell the truth “without pretense”, masks or disguises.<sup>41</sup> And we must not forget that permanent deacons are mostly married men; they have much to learn from their wives about the grace of ministry, and in particular of the maternity of God such as the gift of tears, the first words of compassion. For did not the Mothers of Israel like Rachel (Mt 2:18) or Mary, the sister of Lazarus (Jn 11:33) weep bitterly in the hope for the resurrection of new life? Let then the tears of “disturbing” and “thinking heart” deacons be not only a sign of a healthy ministry and hope for a new Golden Age, but also the grace to enter the mysteries of Jesus, to behold, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

37 Vanlaere, Burggraeve and Letegan, *Vulnerable Responsibility*, 97.

38 *Ibid*, 98.

39 *Ibid*, 98.

40 *Ibid*, 99.

41 *Ibid*, 101.

# Homilies for December (A)

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Patrick Manning

**First Sunday of Advent**

*December 1*

Is. 2:1-2. Rom. 13:11-14. Mt. 24:37-44

It would not be inappropriate to say to all of you today, “Happy New Year.” It is the beginning of a new Church year. Advent represents the time of waiting and expectation of the Hebrew People for the coming, the Advent of the Messiah.

Advent, means to come or arrive – and in this season we prepare for the Advent of the Messiah Jesus Christ. Why does the Gospel refer to the Lord of the house returning at any moment or when the gate-keeper or servants least expect? – So that they may be not found sleeping but alert and ready.

Advent refers to three comings of the Lord. We recall that Jesus came as a little child. But that is only one of the “comings” or “advents” that Advent observes.

Advent is also a reminder that Jesus comes, every day, in many ways – and we ask ourselves are we ready? – prepared to welcome him? – will we know him and will he recognize us? Jesus comes to us in one another, in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist – and in the poor and needy.

And, there is a 3rd advent – the coming of Jesus at the end of time. The question is will we be ready or, will we be caught by surprise – much like the characters in our Gospel?

The readings and the season are not intended to frighten or scare us – they are to encourage us. We should never – ever, in our lives be doing anything that, should the Lord come instantly upon us, would cause us embarrassment, guilt or shame. We should simply do what Jesus asked – for we have nothing to fear – in fact we would welcome Jesus’ Advent, his return. Let us be prepared for his return by throwing off the works of darkness. Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh. Remaining firm in our faith, so as to be found irreproachable and blameless at the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Isaiah reminds us: “Come, walk in the light of the Lord.”

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**Second Sunday of Advent**

*December 8*

Is. 11:1-10. Rom. 15:4-9. Mt. 3:1-12

You don't find John the Baptist's picture on Christmas cards. John prepares the way for the Lord with his preaching and baptizing. His food and dress echo the prophet Elijah calling the people to repentance. John is not a very "Christmasy" figure, nor holiday time attractive: "Christmasy" he is not, but Adventish he is. John was prophet who called people to prepare, to ask forgiveness of their sins, to reassess their values, to change their hearts and lives and to turn to the things of God.

Without proper preparation, John's hearers would miss the significance of the event about to happen; without preparation, they would miss the one who is to come, who is stronger than he, whose sandal straps he is unfit to tie, who will baptize in water and the Holy Spirit; they would miss the advent of the Messiah.

Look around this church. You do not yet see the signs of Christmas. We properly prepare, not with the consumerism and commercialism dictated by the culture, but with prayer. John summons in us a desire to change, to prepare, to reorder our priorities. John is not Christmasy because he, like the church, is counter-cultural. The Church asks a special, spiritual preparation -- changing the way we live, re-evaluating our priorities, preparing for the Incarnation in a counter-cultural way.

Johns being in the wilderness is significant. His and Isaiah's words of joy cannot penetrate our lives when we are drowning in tinsel. In Advent, we invite God into our personal wildernesses. We may be recently divorced, a single parent struggling, mourning the loss of a loved one, the person wounded from a recently ended or an unhealthy relationship; our wilderness may be unemployment, fears about our job, a serious illness or family problems, anxiety about the future or concerns about schoolwork. Our own wildernesses, the places where we are called to prepare, are the broken spots where God can enter in.

Advent is not for warm fuzzy feelings; it is a reminder of why God came to save us. Let us properly prepare this Advent so we won't miss the meaning of Jesus' advent -- when he comes now, and at Christmas and at the end of time, when he comes again to accompany us to the Kingdom.

**Third Sunday of Advent**

*December 15*

Is. 35:1-6a. James 5:7-10. Mt. 11:2-11

We have all spent time waiting. We've been put on hold, waited in a doctor's office, we wait for a raise or a promotion -- we wait

## HOMILIES FOR DECEMBER (C)

for Christmas, or a birthday. We also may wait for redundancy, or medical tests that might confirm a frightening diagnosis, or even death. Nobody likes to wait. Waiting seems so unproductive. We read a magazine at the doctor's, chat while waiting on food, count ceiling tiles –all too often, it's just filling in time.

Waiting makes us feel powerless and trapped – without control! We are in the hands of someone else's whimsy or decision – we like control, not having to be dependent on someone else to bring about what it is we await or want.

Our readings challenge to us to wait and remember that God, in all things, is in control. Isaiah offers a beautiful vision of what the Kingdom will be like when God is finally in control. James reminds us that, just as a farmer is not in control of the rains, the Kingdom initiated with Jesus' coming is God's undertaking, God's project, God's gift. We live in a culture of instant gratification – computers, ATMs, fast food, microwave meals – we are not accustomed to being patient. Being gifted people – many of us are sorely tempted to impatience with people who are less gifted and less enthusiastic for those things we consider important.

If you are disheartened or discouraged, today's Scriptures are for you. God is in control and will come with vindication and salvation. Some things are worth waiting for. We are called to healthy, productive, patient waiting; in doing so we will not be disappointed, as Isaiah promises. He who has come will come again in glory – then will feeble hands be strengthened, the lame will leap like stags; the tongues of the dumb will sing for joy and who among us is not deaf, blind, lame or dumb in some way or another? We will meet God with joy and gladness; and all sorrow, mourning, tears, pain, disappointment, and waiting will be no more. Lord help us to productively and patiently wait. History has not known a man born of woman greater than John the Baptist – but we who faithfully wait are blessed, for by Jesus' advent, we are born into the Kingdom of God.

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent**

*December 22*

Is. 7:10-1. Rom. 1:1-7. Mt. 1:18-24

In our Gospel, the angel of the Lord visits Joseph and he agrees to do what God asks of him – and more, he has already done so when he took Mary into his home as God had asked. The angel asks Joseph, even though he is not the baby's father, to take care of Him, even hide out in a foreign land for two years. God asks Joseph to trust – and he does.

One reason we might be joyful and thankful is that these two, Mary and Joseph, decided to say yes, to trust in God, to set aside

## THE FURROW

the plans they may have had for their lives and embrace the plans God has for their lives.

We should be joyful and thankful – not simply because two special humans trusted God, for the real power of the story is about God trusting humans.

Perhaps you have said, or heard it said: “Fool me once, shame on you; Fool me twice, shame on me!” Perhaps we forget that God put his trust in humans once before – and did he ever get burned! God, in love, created Adam and Eve and trusted they would do what He asked – well...we certainly know how that story ends.

You’ve trusted people before and got burned – it is no surprise that it is difficult to trust them again – and the more you loved the one who broke your trust, the more it hurt; moreover, the harder it is to forgive – to try to trust again. Ask anyone who has experienced infidelity in marriage.

God could have simply said – “I tried trusting humans once, and I got scorched.” God could have said: “Fool me once, shame on you; Fool me twice, shame on me.”

Adam and Eve made God look silly. Mary and Joseph could have made God look silly too. Like the Lord, we are called to give people another chance – what a wonderful Christmas gift! God gave us humans another (undeserved) chance –to trust in Him and do His will. Let us give thanks for Joseph and Mary who said “yes” – and let us say “yes” -- not to what we want, but to what God wants of us. Let us rejoice that God actually said “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice – well, that’s a risk I took to show how much I love you.”

### **Feast of the Holy Family**

*December 29*

Sir. 3:2-7, 12-14. Col. 3:12-21. Mt. 2:13-15, 19-23

Espying all the poverty Mother Theresa encountered, a cynic once said to her: “Mother, you don’t seem to be very successful.” She responded: “God did not call me to be successful, God called me to be faithful.” So too, on this feast of the Holy Family we recall that God did not call us to be perfect, he called us to be holy – they are not the same.

One dynamic in this enterprise of holiness is acceptance— not of all behaviors, but of our differences and idiosyncrasies -- even within a family. We don’t choose our family, but we can choose to cherish the family of which God has made us a part.

Patience, a virtue aimed at holiness, can never be only about ourselves, our needs. We need to be patient with the short comings of others, especially our family members. We can also ask – “What am I doing to make my family holy?”

## HOMILIES FOR DECEMBER (C)

Forgiveness is foundational to holiness. We forgive (extended) family members NOT because they deserve it, but precisely because they don't (and never will). If they deserved it, it would be called justice. God forgives us undeservingly and we don't deserve forgiveness. There were tensions in the Holy Family, even though Jesus and Mary were sinless. Parents age and change and often don't feel well, siblings argue, hardships arise. Jesus, Mary and Joseph knew the challenges of family life.

Another element foundational to holiness is gratitude – counting our blessings instead of our trials because thankfulness is pivotal for holiness; for at the bottom of all existence is God's undeserved gifts and grace.

Certainly the most important element for a family to be holy is prayer – something too many families simply neglect – even prayer before meals – how hard is that? Holiness comes from practicing the virtues but also practicing prayer. Times can be hard for families, and sometimes we feel abandon by God in the midst of family trials. At such times, we should persevere in our prayers of petition, praise and thanks.

**Kings and Kingdoms.** Moreover, describing God in human terms as a king is not a practice that appeals to everyone today, when monarchy has become a less popular institution, or is less acceptable as a form of government. If one strips the metaphor away, the basic idea that emerges is that God is ultimately in charge of everything and everyone, and should be recognised as such. Today it might be more meaningful and positive to adopt a more social metaphor and to consider the kingdom of God as a people imbued with godly values, values that, importantly, include justice resulting in peace and mercy inspired by concern.

– JACK MAHONEY, SJ, *Glimpses of the Gospels* (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p. 30.

# Chronicle

## *Pass it on!\**

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Michael Mullaney

Reverend Professor Ronan Drury was Professor of Homiletics at the Pontifical University and the National Seminary for almost sixty-years, reluctantly retiring early at the age of 87. Ronan loved this College. It wasn't just his home but also his life. For seven decades as student, staff member, senior priest of a sort, he was a valued and vibrant presence in the College community. He mixed humour and wisdom, fun and purpose, but above all, he is remembered for his unfailing kindness to staff and student, especially a student who struggled in his time here.

And there was also Mullagh, his home parish, another community to which he kept a life-long loyalty with family, neighbours and friends. He is famous for celebrating 68 consecutive Christmas midnight Masses there, even rising from his sick bed in the Mater to travel down to Mullagh for the last time. To know how embedded he was in Mullagh you only have to recall his remark during his interview on local radio to mark his sixty-seventh Christmas Mass: "As I am giving communion, I know that I don't recognise all the people coming up but I recognise them out of their parents and grandparents."

While Ronan loved company, enjoying good repartee and banter, engaging conversation and keeping himself well informed on news from the dioceses, he was behind it all publicly shy. He didn't seek the limelight, whether in *The Furrow* or in preaching he never drew attention to himself. He would be probably embarrassed that this private collection of his homilies and notebooks has even seen the light of day. I am sure, however, he would have displayed sufficient self-deprecating pleasure at this evening gathering of friends; an

\* This is the text of the speech given at the launch of the book *Pass it on!, Ronan Drury 1924-2017 Selected Writings*, compiled by Paul Clayton-Lea and Maria Flood. Price €15.00 (plus €5 for P&P).

Available from: [furrow.office@spcm.ie](mailto:furrow.office@spcm.ie). Local bookshops and *The Furrow* office.

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Michael Mullaney is a priest of the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly and President of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

expression of the esteem so many held him in. Shortly after Ronan's death, I found some handwritten notebooks among his books. They revealed a youthful poetic sensibility, giving a glimpse into the private depths of this young seminarian's soul. Maria Flood and Paul Clayton-Lea had discovered similar treasures. Slowly they retrieved more of his surviving reflections, homilies and Stations of the Cross—the fruit of which we enjoy in the launch of this book. But this is more than a collection homilies and reflections. I believe this collection diaries Ronan's own vocational lifelong journey and quest of a priest with a poet's heart, a preacher with a prophet's vision.

One reliable way to gauge how important a subject is to someone is by looking at the role it plays in the things that individuals truly care about, their passions, the apples of their eye. If that's the measure, there's no doubt at all that the Word of God was the defining preoccupation of Ronan Drury. And he engaged it as the positive starting point in the desire to do justice to our human hungers.

This priest's words which are placed before us in this compilation tonight are an extraordinarily lucid attempt over nine decades to distil the written and spoken Word of God and to open up new understanding and hope. On the surface, Ronan seemed to have a grace in his skill and style in breaking open the Word of God. However, he would be the first to acknowledge the enormous challenge it proposes and the seeming inadequacy of his attempts. Homilies generally don't age well, yet in this publication Ronan's homilies still have a freshness and newness to them.

In *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis wrote of the preacher's task to understand and speak in the 'mother tongue', the 'native language', the 'mother culture' of his congregation. He was taking a leaf from Ronan's book. This had been Ronan's mantra for decades. For Ronan was a polyglot when preaching to the various congregations and constituencies in the pew. This is evident in his homilies in this publication. Whether it was at a Novena in Navan, the wedding of friends or the St Joseph's Young Priests Society he spoke in their language. He had, in musical terms, perfect pitch when communicating the Word of God to the discerning students in the College Chapel or at a cemetery Mass in Mullagh, as you will discover when you read them.

On a personal note, there are two qualities of Ronan's style as a preacher that have stayed with me. The first, so evident that ironically you could miss it, is his humility. There is no ego, no vanity in his preaching or reflections. He always draws the listener to the beauty and mystery of God at the heart of life and love. Secondly, his humanity and his understanding of the fragility of

## THE FURROW

our human nature. He cultivated in us the pastoral sensitivity of gentleness in preaching – a quality of his own: a good preacher does not tie up heavy burdens, hard to carry, and lay them on peoples shoulders. For Ronan, preaching the Gospel was about liberating people, lifting up their hearts and minds.

It is delightfully evident from these pages that Ronan had learning and scholarship in him which he sometimes tried to hide with humour and the pithy remark. He had wide reading, a retentive memory and a fluent pen. This is clearly revealed in the essays on Shakespeare, Keats and Tennyson, and the indicators they provide of the literary sensitivity and knowledge he commanded from a young age. Like Kavanagh, Ronan had a sacramentalising imagination which saw the Incarnation everywhere, particularly in his much anticipated annual Stations of the Cross on Good Friday evening in the College Chapel. In every station he brought alive in contemporary human suffering the Christ who, as he wrote himself: ‘comes looking for us in his agony in the countless Gethsemanes and Golgothas that are not in Jerusalem.’ We are fortunate that because of the mindfulness of Maria and Paul these thoughtful and reflective gems will now reach a wider audience. But what cannot be recaptured in this work, regretfully, is his linguistic power, his soulful delivery, his well-timed pause that left you pondering or waiting.

This compilation will gently reveal to the reader that although Ronan was first and last a priest of God, he did not cease the questioning of his student days. He did not easily walk the straight tramlines of abstract doctrinal definition. Not because he was unorthodox but because he was a man of imagination and not afraid to question. This is no more evident in his expansive and fearless work with *The Furrow*. During his almost seventy-years as Review Editor and Editor there seemed to emerge for Ronan a kind of personal credo: people are hungry for a different space of self-hearing and self-healing. New furrows. And in *The Furrow* Ronan created such a space. He somehow enabled the poetry of good theology grow within the concrete experience of people, where both the benedictions and burdens of life could be explored. It can be said of Ronan what Denis Meehan said of J.G. McGarry: ‘*The Furrow* review of which he was editor and single-handedly carried to prestige, was by any standards a remarkable achievement. He accomplished all this in the teeth of apathy, faint praise or frank opposition.’

For a man who spent so much of his life enabling others to express themselves in *The Furrow*, this is another reason why this excellent production of a selection of Ronan’s own work is most welcome.

While there is no doubt that Ronan was troubled and concerned about the challenges, changes and crises that the Church faced in these times, he still managed not to lose his sense of inner joy. For despite it all, he was a happy priest. He radiated this joy in his smile, his warmth, his humour and his interest in people.

Before I conclude, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge another quality of Ronan that these pages can never fully capture: his generosity. Ronan gave generously of his time to struggling students—I know, I was one of them. I know over the years of his generosity to students, former students, priests, colleagues, contributors to *The Furrow*. I wish to publicly thank Ronan for his generous legacy to this College, his *alma mater*. His generosity did make a difference.

The furrow of Ronan's energy, enthusiasm and efforts has ended, his plough is still, but there is now the promise of harvest. *Pass it On!* is a portion of that harvest.

I congratulate you Paul and Maria for bringing this great work to fruition. This book is a tribute not only to Ronan but to both of you. I congratulate Naas Printing for the excellent quality of the production. And what a wonderful tribute to Ronan that so many of you should be present tonight to celebrate his memory and his legacy.

**Looking for God in the unusual.** If we cannot see God's signature in a sunset, if we cannot hear his voice in the laughter of a child, if we cannot sense his faithfulness in the steady cycles of the seasons, if we cannot find him in the life and message of Jesus then no amount of evidence would ever open our hearts or change our minds. It is a real mistake to search for God in the unusual when he stands revealed year in and year out in the everyday things of life.

- PAUL CLAYTON-LEA AND MARIA FLOOD, *Pass it on!, Ronan Drury 1924-2017 Selected Writings*. 2019. Naas Printing Ltd. p. 89.

## New Books

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**The Mystical Imagination of Patrick Kavanagh.** *A Buttonhole in Heaven?* Una Agnew Dublin: Verita. ISBN 978-1-84730-882-5.

This book is proof that tough love can be tender. What is meant here is that Una Agnew shows in this re-issue of a book that first appeared in 1998 that rigorous research and critical rigour do not prevent an evident love for the work of the subject of this study, Patrick Kavanagh, from shimmering through every line. The author has the good fortune of seeing her original conclusions bolstered and her questions achieve even greater relevance by the passage of time. Consequently, this second edition requires no significant changes to its first incarnation. To lovers of Kavanagh, Agnew's work will remain the gold-standard against which other studies will be measured. Why this reviewer – admittedly more an historian than a literary academic – believes this to be so is bolstered by the personal experience of discovering Kavanagh at the age of fourteen. To a gently-raised middle-class boy, Kavanagh's television interviews – or was there just one? – in the early days of the then Telefis Éireann – were profoundly shocking. Not only was there the apparent rudeness and iconoclastic frankness, but there was also the accent! Antitheses of all that one had been raised to hold proper and acceptable. But yet, there was something subtly attractive and subversive that prompted the toffeenosed viewer to find, take up and read the *Collected Poems* that had just appeared. With the reading of those poems began a liberating love-affair that has lasted to this day. Some years later deepest mourning followed the announcement that the Department of Education, in its wisdom, was to include the poet in the Leaving Certificate syllabus. It was like a secret love betrayed.

This edition contains a gracious and restrained foreword (p. ix ff.) by the poet Mary O'Donnell, the title, 'Kavanagh, Our Own Poet' revealing O'Donnell's own geographical origins but also in a canny use of 'our', hinting at a God-constituency that is parochial in the best rooted sense and with, or because of that, uncircumscribed by institutional provincialisms or imperialistic hegemonies. The author herself gets a 'second go' in an elegant introduction (p. 19 ff.). In this she reveals her own rootedness in the landscape and language of Co. Monaghan, an almost connatural grasp of what made Kavanagh what he was, made his poetry what it is. Allied with this, as is evident throughout the body of the book, is a thorough familiarity with the Irish literary corpus as with the mystical tradition, particularly in its Christian manifestation.

At no stage does the author make any secret of the fact that this book started life as a doctoral dissertation. The academically finnickier may seize on this – and did so in the past, if one remembers some reviews

of the first edition – and question the use of Evelyn Underhill's four stages of mystical development, *Awakening, Purification, Illumination* and *Transformation*. But this book does not reek of dissertation. With great dexterity it balances biography, chronology, even topography while maintaining and acute ear for Kavanagh's development as a person and, inseparable from this, as a poet.

It is probably a commonplace that most lovers of Kavanagh, in particular those of a religious disposition, tend to prefer his later poems, that is those from the so-called 'Canal Poems' and later. One of the services Angew provides is to devote equal attention to all of Kavanagh's output, treating with the same sympathy and love even the poems he himself later disowned. All that went before helped to make what came later. It is, perhaps, not an exaggeration to say that Kavanagh's hour has now really come. The Catholic Ireland that bred him, formed and even deformed him, is but a defamed memory for many of a certain vintage and an enigma for the young. But the subversive liberation of Kavanagh's vision, his eloquent railing against all forms of slavery remains an articulation of a prophetic ideal and invitation to the spiritual wanderer. In the words of the author, 'Ultimately it is Kavanagh's relentless fascination with God and his celebration of the miracle of creation that command ongoing study of his work....As a significant contributor to Irish literature, [he] deserves to be studied at all levels of education.' (p.27). Even one supposes, alas, for the Leaving Certificate.

The book is enhanced by the inclusion of illustrations, all photographs of significant persons or places. The selected bibliography contains few additions to that of the original edition, itself perhaps an indication of the thoroughness of the work accomplished the first time round, but invaluable for any future scholar.

*Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick*

HENRY O'SHEA, OSB

**A Poetic Christ.** Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality. Olivier-Thomas Venard, O.P., Translated by Kenneth Oakes and Francesca Aran Murphy. London: T.& T. Clark, 2019. ISBN 978-0-5676-8469-1.

In their preface (p. xix) the translators describe this book as an anthology or reader of Olivier-Thomas Venard's project-trilogy *Thomas d'Aquin poète théologien*, which consists in three volumes: *Littérature et théologie: Une saison en enfer* (2002); *La langue de l'ineffable: Essai sur le fondement théologique de la métaphysique* (2004) and *Pagina sacra: le passage de l'Écriture sainte à l'écriture théologique* (2009). Faced with the mammoth task of translating all three volumes, the translators, in consultation with the author, selected material from each volume and they estimate that the resulting volume in English contains about one third of the content of the trilogy. Helpfully, in an appendix (p.451f.) the translator-editors indicate the origins of the chapters presented in the English volume.

This prosaic introduction by a hapless reviewer cannot begin to do justice to the sheer excitement of the book under review. In an interview in 1999, the Russo-French novelist Andreï Makine asserted that monolingualism produces a totalitarian vision of the world. Subjecting this assertion to

all the necessary therapies, one of the great achievements of Venard's work is that his intellectual multilingualism shatters a galaxy of academic monolingualisms. This reviewer sees Venard's multilingualism in his mastery not only of most theological idioms along with an encyclopedic familiarity with the various sects of philosophy, with literature and art, linguistics and even the so-called natural sciences. As the title of the trilogy suggests, central to this *tour-de-force* is a creative rereading of Thomas Aquinas. This re-reading is infinitely more than an attempt to re-habilitate a – by and for some – de-throned oracle, but a successful exploration of the explosive-integrative potential of one of the greatest minds ever given to the Church – to the world? Such is the author's familiarity with the mindsets and works of those of whom he approves and disapproves that he has no need to destroy in order to make his case. This is a truly refreshing example of the Catholic 'and-and' rather than a Kirkegaardian 'either/or', if one is permitted slightly to caricature the Dane. Thus, to mention only one example, the laming deficiencies of a blanket, almost ideological, application of the historical-critical method are avoided by its integration into a wider epistemological horizon. Further, the centrality of literature – in its widest compass – and what it might mean and be and do is an essential creative aspect of this study.

The book's fourteen chapters are presented in five parts: 1) *Scripture*; 2) *Theology and Literature*; 3) *Language as a theological question*; 4) *Word, Cross, Eucharist* and 5) *Conclusion*. The titles of the chapters give a flavour of the delights they contain: *Towards a Poetic Christology* (Ch 2 p.64); *To contemplate and to hand on*: *The Literary Drama of the theologian's vocation* (Ch 4 p.148); *Language that wanted to make Itself as strong as the Word* (Ch 6 p.184); *Little Thomasian Semiology* (Ch 8 p.229); *The Cross of Jesus: The source of Theological Speech* (Ch 12 p.366).

The present reviewer is certain that the human race, at least that part of it that reads, is divided into those who read introductions and forewords to books and those who do not. In the case of this book, it would be an enormous loss not to read the masterly foreword (p. xiii ff.) by Cyril O'Regan, Huisiking Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. This foreword is simply indispensable. In five-and-a-half pages, O'Regan places Venard's work in the context of a wider, multilingual, awakening to the French voice in theology after what may appear to some as almost two generations of Anglophone/German hegemony. The expression 'to some' is used advisedly because at no time was the French theological voice smothered, the French theological mind unengaged – not to mention the Italian and Spanish voices and minds, the latter perhaps less heard because of linguistic hurdles. O'Regan provides a major service in explaining with great elegance and eloquence the main thrust of Venard's *projet*, by outlining his sources and method and by placing the *projet* in a wider ecclesial-cultural context and indicating the challenges this *projet* presents to the theologically literate and semi-literate alike. In one sentence, O'Regan succinctly presents what this book is about, '...Venard's reflection on the Word as given to us in Scripture frames this volume which also includes Venard's exciting exploration of the

relation between the biblical Word and modern literature and the thought of Aquinas that centrally involves his theology of the Word, his reading of Scripture, his understanding of Sacrament, and crucially his Christology and Trinitarian theology.' (p. xiif.). Indeed, it can be said of Venard himself what he says of Aquinas, 'He knows the Word as the basis and horizon of all thought and of all speech.' (p. 421).

The sparkling surgically precise French of the original is more than hinted at by the excellence of the English translation. The book includes a substantial bibliography and useful index of names.

*Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick*

HENRY O'SHEA, OS

**Poverty in the Early Church and Today.** A Conversation. Steve Walton and Hannah Swithinbank (eds.). London: T. & T. Clark. ISBN 978-0-5676-7776-1.

The genesis of this book is a conference, 'Engaging with Poverty in the Early Church and Today', held at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London, in December 2015. The book intends to be more than a simple reportage of what was discussed at this conference but, as the editors say in a brief but useful introduction headed 'How this Book Works', (p. vii) aims at coming to grips with the full complexity of the realities of poverty, in order to inform and engage the readers, '...whom we hope will include church leaders, people working in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with poverty and thoughtful people both Christian and not'.

Contributors to the conversation (cf. list on p. xvi f.) range from a bishop, through a former U.K. ambassador to the Holy See, to Members of Parliament, academics from a range of disciplines mostly, but not all, connected with religion in its various manifestations, to persons actively involved in tackling poverty in its diverse forms. The book and the conference from which it grew represent an attempt to communicate the fruits of one conversation while at the same time stimulating a continuation of this conversation, '... a space for critical thought' (p.vii). This continuing conversation, the editors hope, will take place not just among experts but also among those who do not have formal training in the technical areas that address the phenomenon of poverty.

This aim determines the structure of the book. Forewords from Graham Tomlin, Anglican Bishop of Kensington and Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, are followed by Part One, titled *Poverty Then and Now*, by far the larger part of the book. This is introduced by a reflection from Justin Thacker, Lecturer in Practical and Public Theology at Cliff College, Calver, Derbyshire, UK, on the ways by which poverty is identified and offers a theological assessment. In the following 29 contributions, an expert in a topic under discussion writing from knowledge of early Christianity in its Jewish and Graeco-Roman contexts is responded to by an expert in what the editors describe as, '... strategies for addressing poverty and benefaction.' (p. vii). This response is in turn replied to by the original essayist. Such a schematic approach may appear at first sight unpromising and, indeed not all contributions

## THE FURROW

are of the same calibre, but the book provides not only a treasure of information but is a genuine contribution to an examination of mindsets, ideologies – some unacknowledged – and structures that both cause and perpetuate systemic injustice and its attendant evils, poverty being only one of these. Innovative is the attempt to examine the foregoing through the prism of history. Allowing history to be history, for the most part the contributions do not attempt to instrumentalize history anachronistically to bolster a contemporary agenda, but to demonstrate that the main theme of the conversation was never far from the consciousness of the Christian community, even if its evaluation, articulation and, more importantly, concrete responses, varied throughout the centuries – as they continue to do so to this day.

A second and shorter part of the book, under the title ‘Responding and Reflecting’, attempts to draw together the threads of the conversation and indicate how the conversation might be continued. In ‘Review: Responding and Summarizing’ (p. 197 ff.), Craig L. Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, sums up very effectively the content of contributions and manages, at least for this reader, to capture the spirit, the energy, of the conversation. Rather subversively, one might suggest that a reader could cheat and having read the introduction she or he then read Blomberg’s summary before returning to the body of the text to which this summary can be seen as a kind of advanced organizer – even if this was not the author’s intention. In the final chapter, ‘Between Today and Yesterday: Evidence, Complexity, Poverty and the “Body” of Christ.’, Francis Davis, Professor of Religion and Public Policy, University of Birmingham, and Fellow of the Helen Suzman Foundation, South Africa, attempts to sketch a way towards a development of the conversation. This contribution is both sober and sobering in its analysis of the terminology of any discourse concerning poverty as well as the growing complexity of ‘...the social challenges and contexts which poor people face.’ (p. 206). That complexity itself provides immense challenges for Christian paradigms. The author attempts to articulate these challenges and to suggest some areas of research that might contribute to a development of the conversation begun by this book.

An excellent select bibliography supplies referential back-up to much of the material in the book while providing a stimulus for further reflection and research. Unusually for a book of this kind, an extremely useful index is appended.

*Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick*

HENRY O’SHEA, OSB

**A perfect Peace. Newman: Saint for Our Time.** Bishop Fintan Monahan. Dublin: Veritas, 2019. ISBN 978-1-84730-934-1

In recent months much has been written about the most recent Saint from these isles. Saint John Henry Newman has, of course, been the subject of much scholarly research for well over a century and his influence on Christendom has been readily acknowledged and recorded. This latest volume from Bishop Monaghan, a self-proclaimed admirer of Newman, is directed towards a non-specialist audience and presents Newman’s

person and legacy with clarity, thoroughness and enthusiasm. The slim volume of just over a hundred pages is replete with the details of Newman's contribution and his abiding relevance for twenty first century followers of the Gospel.

The authors love and interest in Newman was inspired by two of his teachers in Maynooth, Professors Tom Corbett and Tom Norris, and was deepened during his postgraduate studies. Bishop Monahan, currently Bishop of Killaloe, proudly reveals that his diocese had some links to our new Saint. A Killaloe priest, later Bishop, Michael Flannery was Dean of the Catholic University. The important link between Dr Russell of Maynooth and Newman is also chronicled. In his *Apologia* Newman says of Russell: 'He had perhaps, more to do with my conversion than anyone else.'

The volume is presented in a style that is very accessible and is divided into five parts. The first part deals with Newman prior to his conversion in 1845 and includes an overview of his interest and involvement in the early Church Fathers and the Oxford Movement. The second part covers his life after ordination including his years in Ireland as rector of the Catholic University [1851-1858]. Part three, entitled Snatches of Newman, dips into 'various pools of Newman's work and life that appeal to me --.' These include Newman's scholarly work on the role of the laity and the nature and scope of conscience. Part four includes an assessment of Newman's influence on ecumenism and on the debates and decisions of the Second Vatican Council. The last part, Some Sainly Gems, includes a wide ranging selection of prayers, hymns and reflections from the writings of Newman that made a lasting impact on the author. He presents them to the reader as sources of nourishment and spiritual growth. This is a very readable and upbeat account of the life and abiding relevance of Saint John Henry Newman that deserves a wide audience.

Cork

P.J. McAULIFFE

**Climate Generation: Awakening to Our Children's Future.** Lorna Gold. 2018. (Dublin: Veritas) ISBN 978-1-84730-841-2.

At the moment there is no shortage of books and articles on climate change and its impact on the planet. The author, Lorna Good, is a mother, an environmentalist and one who has worked for many years with *Trócaire* in parts of the world where climate change has already impacted profoundly on the lives of ordinary people. While the book is underpinned with the latest scientific data on climate change and its impacts on the environment, what sets it apart is the realism and passion of the author. She begins with a powerful maternal image, from an experience in Tanzania, where she was part of tour group visiting the Ngorongoro conservation area. They came upon a lioness with a young cub. As they edged closer to the lioness she growled and then made a mighty roar that roused the rest of the pride and suddenly the whole place reverberated with this primeval and protective warning that bid the intruders to beat a very hasty retreat. Years later the author found herself responding with a similar kind of instinct when her young son was careering towards a river bank on his bicycle. It is these

## THE FURROW

images of a mother instinctively anxious to protect her children that runs through the text with a power that is as persuasive as the science which it accompanies. Her concern is that we protect our planet so that our children can have a future. Their future is dependent on how we now act. The response to the current crisis demands a response that is as visceral as that of a mother protecting her young – it demands love, not a word one normally associates with debates around climate change, nor is her use of the word romantic or sentimental. The challenge to exercise love means that there is an intimate, personal dimension to the response being called for. There is need for changes in public policy, in lifestyle options, for a greater awareness of how climate change is already impacting on millions of people in vulnerable locations around the globe. Above all there is a need for all of us to show our love for Mother Earth and her children. She finds inspiration and encouragement from Pope Francis who urges us ‘to speak truth to power – but do so from a place of love’.

The book outlines clearly the impact of: fossil fuels and the strength of the fossil fuel lobby in delaying governmental action; intensive farming methods, especially beef production (and consumption); the dominant economic system that generates more and more unnecessary *wants*; half of the global emissions being generated by 10% of the world’s population. While we know some of the facts and are being constantly reminded of the danger to which we are exposing the planet, somehow the reality of it all has not sufficiently impacted on us to rouse us from our sleepwalk. Continuing education about the facts is vital.

Despite the threatening scenarios which she portrays, she offers hope and positive ways for us to move forward. Progress begins with a contemplative stance, by acknowledging with Pope Francis: ‘Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.’ Therefore, we begin with a disposition of gratitude for the wonderful world of which we are a part. Then we can move to see what personal changes we can make to show greater respect for our common home. We can look at our food consumption and our transport choices, with which the Ecological Footprint Calculator can help. Beyond the domestic level, we need to engage in conversations which tell the stories of climate change, solidly grounded in the available science. These can lead to action at local, national and international levels, and the author cites inspiring examples of this happening already in Ireland and around the world.

This is a book that can be highly recommended. It is written in a very engaging style, it is passionate, honest and hopeful. It is a good resource for teachers, preachers, parish groups and a general readership.

*Mary Immaculate College, Limerick*

EUGENE DUFFY

**Mystery and the Culture of Science.** *Personal Insights for the 21st Century.* Jim Malone and John McEvoy. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISBN 978-1-5275-2034-9.

This is a work of combined authorship by two scientists, one internationally known and both theologically very competent. Their individual

contributions throughout are not identified, in fact sentences beginning with 'We' are almost non-existent, yet the tenor of the main part of the book is one of personal impassioned plea that the church would learn from scientific method. Church teaching needs to adopt the approach of critical realism characteristic of good science. Critical realism in science is well explained and the authors hold that there has been a failure on the part of the church 'to adopt a vibrant critical realist approach to its theology and subsequent teachings'.(p.14) Failure to adopt this standard in all disciplines has led to the well-known polarising of positions, whether in the area of science - as in the case of global warming - or in theology, and here the example is given of the reaction to the post-Synod exhortation, 'The Joy of Love'.

But signs of progress are seen in increasing awareness of the importance of the *sensus fidei* in the life of the church as a guiding force for change. At the same time, a model for progress could be provided by familiarity with the chaotic situations which arise with fundamental change. There is reference here to *chaos theory* in physics, which recognises that initial ordered conditions in physical systems may lead to successive conditions of disorder and order, making long-term prediction of their behaviour impossible. All of this implies the uncertainty of what may occur in the church if it reaches out to 'the other' and something new is created. The theologian, Elizabeth Johnson is quoted: 'which do we love better: the little island of our own certitude or the ocean of incomprehensible mystery?' (p.31).

The 'comfort of polarisation' is examined in relation to the history of the dogma of infallibility. As this was a major issue in the seventies with such books as that of Hans Kung, at first, attention to it may seem outdated, but the authors make the forceful if not happily articulated point that 'the real problem is not specific "dogmas" but the dogmatic nature of the dogma. Surprisingly, modern physics and the arts seem to allow more room for the movement of the spirit (*sic*) than the approach taken by popes and the *magisteria* of many churches' (p.58).

There is a long chapter on the power and efficacy of prayer for others (Remote Intercessory Prayer – RIP), with reports on scientific experiments. This topic is worthy of inclusion in a wide-ranging book such as this, as it has frequently figured in works on the science-religion dialogue – the authors quote John Polkinghorne's comment to that effect p.(85). The conclusion from these studies is that what happens as a result of RIP is 'very little if anything – an answer that many find challenging and uncomfortable'(p.83).

Chapter Five is devoted to 'Mystery and Creativity in Science; Reflection on and Revelation in a Painting', a long title for a comprehensive reflection on the importance of a contemplative spirit in science that leaves it open to mystery. The painting is *Schrödinger in the Hand of God* by John Synge. Its relevance is that Erwin Schrödinger belonged to the early twentieth-century group of scientists who had quasi-mystical insights into the nature of the physical world. His case offers an interesting example of how exposure to the mystical shows that the hard boundary between science and religion need not obtain. The chapter has much on

## THE FURROW

both theoretical physics and microbiology which will be of interest even to the amateur scientifically literate person, while those more interested in art should find the details of the painting and its history absorbing.

The identified author of the chapter, Jim Malone, concludes that a contemplative spirit in science carries with its openness to truth an inevitable risk – one always ignored by the non-conformist Schrödinger. In science there is the pressure to conform to the expectations of sponsors in relation to methods of research and targets; in religion, ‘support, recognition and career rewards may encourage a scholarly theologian to find what his or her church views as acceptable, or avoid topics that need investigation, but are steeped in controversy’ (p.103).

The final chapter, on *Evolution and Incarnation*, a favourite topic in the science and religion dialogue, is headed by an extract from a letter written by Pope John Paul in the 1980s to George Coyne S.J., the then Director of the Vatican Observatory (a somewhat modified version of the letter which Coyne actually wrote for the pope, as he once told this reviewer). The letter asked if an evolutionary perspective can have an influence on the meaning of the human person as *imago Dei* and hinted at a positive possibility. The literature on this subject since the 1980s is reviewed in the chapter along with its foundation in the writings of the Fathers, especially Augustine and Anselm of Canterbury, with Original Sin as the neurotic issue. Among the moderns, Teilhard de Chardin’s Christogenesis, his theological perspective on evolution, is given a sympathetic treatment, while Jack Mahoney’s controversial *Christianity and Evolution* is quoted, though not considered in detail. The vision of the authors of this book is clearly aligned with the traditional Franciscan spirituality of the Cosmic Christ expressed in St Francis’ *Canticle of the Sun*, with which the book concludes.

It is worth persevering with the reading of a book which is the result of much research (one small error detected – Innocent III died in 1216 not 1226!) and demands close attention throughout, covering, as it does, many different scientific and theological topics in detail. There is an extensive bibliography. It is a little unusual in the science and religion genre in its combination of objective scholarship and passionate campaigning for church renewal – it does have ‘personal’ in its title - but is all the more refreshing for that.

*Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick*

FINTAN LYONS, OSB



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