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# FURROW

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A JOURNAL FOR THE  
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

*Philipp W. Rosemann*  
The Holy Well

*Aidan Ryan*  
First Eucharist Revisited

*Luke Macnamara*  
Jesus in the Desert

*Neil Xavier O'Donoghue*  
The Paul VI Roman Missal  
at 50

*Richard Buck*  
Community and the Holy  
Trinity

*Patrick H. Daly*  
The Renewal of Priestly  
Promises

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# The Furrow

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# 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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# The Holy Well as a Window onto Irish Life – Pre-Christian, Christian and Post-Christian (Part 1)\*

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Philipp W. Rosemann

## INTRODUCTION

The modern human being who lives in a technologically advanced society no longer has an intuitive reverence for water. We take it for granted that it comes out of the tap at our command. We have no sense that its supply may be limited. Indeed, in Ireland households receive it free of charge.

This having been said, Irish people are less removed from their water supply than people in more heavily urbanized countries. In the countryside, people operate private wells or are part of community water schemes with small distribution networks. This means that the population remains more aware of where their water comes from – such as a spring in a hill overlooking the village. Disruptions are more frequent than in the city; to remedy them, one phones not a national ‘LoCall’ number, but the neighbour who has assumed the part-time job of operating the pumping station. Since the water supply is less mediated in the country than in urban areas – there are fewer steps from well or spring to tap – water is less taken for granted. The contemporary rural experience of water still shares some traits with the human experience which gave rise to holy wells: an intuitive gratitude and reverence.

There is one important exception to this claim. We no longer regard water as a miracle – the kind of miracle which occurred when the Israelites ran out of water in the desert and challenged Moses, ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?’ (Exodus 17:3). When Moses despairs and asks God for assistance, the Lord instructs him to strike a rock with his staff; this makes the rock give water. Modern man is incredulous at such stories because we know too much about water. The spring that wells up in the field or emerges

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\* The second part of this article will be published in next month’s issue.

Philipp W. Rosemann is Professor and Chair of Philosophy at Maynooth University.

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from the rocks of a mountain is no longer mysterious to us in its origins. We know exactly – or at least we know that geologists know exactly – why the spring appears where it does. It has to do with watersheds, rock formations, groundwater levels, rainfall, and many other factors which modern scientists study and for which they are able to account.

Before the rise of modern science, however, every spring – not just the water-giving rock in the desert – was a small miracle. Because man was not in a position to understand (and master) the mechanisms at work behind the appearance of the spring, he attributed its appearance to higher forces. This is why even such a sophisticated civilization as the Roman one – with its aqueducts and public toilets – worshipped Fons, the water god. Each year, the *fontinalia* were celebrated, a festival in honour of Fons, to acknowledge the god's gift of water.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, water worship appears to be a universal aspect of pre-historic and ancient religions.<sup>2</sup>

## HOLY WELLS IN PRE-CHRISTIAN IRELAND

In Ireland, too, holy wells predate the Christianization of the island. This does not mean that each and every well has Celtic origins, nor that the rituals which have come to be associated with holy wells all go back to the Iron Age. It does mean, in the words of Celeste Ray, that '[f]inds from the few excavated sites and the recurrent motif of supernatural wells in the early medieval literature describing pre-Christian Ireland affirm that the sacrality of springs and wells preceded the Iron Age to Christian era transition'.<sup>3</sup>

There is quite a bit of uncertainty regarding pre-Christian holy wells. This is because, on the one hand, archaeological evidence is scant: most of the offerings which could help the archaeologist understand how the wells functioned have perished, and the wells themselves have over the centuries undergone significant changes, having been cleaned, deepened, lined, or even moved. The literary evidence, on the other hand, is problematic because the sagas from pre-Christian Ireland were recorded retrospectively by Christian monks, and hence from a Christian perspective. The Maynooth scholar Kim McCone has described this operation as an 'ideological mixer', which produced the consequence that 'the modern scholar

1 See Claudius Vaillat, *Le culte des sources dans la Gaule antique* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1932), p. 10.

2 Janet and Colin Bord emphasize this point in *Sacred Waters: Holy Wells and Water Lore in Britain and Ireland* (London: Granada, 1985), pp. 1–3. The authors' reflections on the role of technology in displacing reverence for water are incisive as well.

3 Celeste Ray, *The Origins of Ireland's Holy Wells* (Oxford: Archeopress, 2014), p. 9. Also cf. pp. 23 and 62.

## THE HOLY WELL AS A WINDOW ONTO IRISH LIFE (PART 1)

is hard put to separate pagan and Christian ingredients out of the resultant blend'.<sup>4</sup>

Still, what emerges from the literary evidence is fascinating. In many sagas, water from holy wells conveys supernatural knowledge. In one story, we hear of a fabulous creature called the Salmon of Knowledge, which was flushed from the holy well of Segais into the Boyne. Mere contact with the salmon bestows omniscience.<sup>5</sup> The reason why holy wells were seen as sources of wisdom is that their dark mouths connect this world to the otherworld. This origin bestows supernatural powers upon their waters: powers to convey omniscience and to heal, but also powers to wreak destruction. This is why holy wells had to be carefully guarded by holy men: druids. To be contained, they had to be covered with heavy rocks, lest they exploded and swallowed up their surrounding communities.

### THE CONVERSION OF HOLY WELLS TO CHRISTIAN USE

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus famously declares that he has not 'come to abolish the law or the prophets', but to 'fulfil' them. Thus, one of the major driving forces of the Christian faith, which we still see at work in the daily liturgy, is the way in which God's promises to the people of Israel are fully realized in his Son. The Old Testament, therefore, has to be read in the light of the New.

The idea of a Christian fulfilment can be extended to cultures outside ancient Israel. The Irish monastic writers of the early Middle Ages regarded the wisdom of their forefathers as already pointing to the truths more fully revealed in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>6</sup> On this reading, 'Patrick's fifth-century mission to Ireland' could, in the words of Kim McCone, be understood 'as a small-scale reenactment of Christ's appearance in the world to bring the Old Testament law and prophets, including history, to fulfilment in the New'.<sup>7</sup> This view entailed that the culture of pre-Christian Ireland did not have to be abolished in the course of the island's Christianization, but could be refined and appropriated for Christian purposes.

And so, despite the association of holy wells with pagan rituals, the arrival of the Christian faith in Ireland did not bring their destruction, but rather their conversion to Christian use. Early Irish literature contains many stories describing such conversions. They typically feature a saint – often St Patrick himself – who

4 Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990), pp. 256–57.

5 Ray recounts this tale in *Origins*, p. 76.

6 This is McCone's argument in *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, p. 73.

7 McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, p. 256.

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breaks the spell of a pagan divinity believed to live in the well or to be associated with it. Thus, Bishop Tirechán's seventh-century *Collectanea* recount a story about St Patrick's conversion of the well of Findmag in Co. Mayo. Druids believed that the well harboured a god, hidden under a large rock. So Patrick miraculously moved the heavy rock, revealing nothing under it but water. The supernatural relocation of the rock, in turn, proved Patrick's own connection with the true God, the landscape itself becoming a memorial to God's power and the authority of his saints.<sup>8</sup> Other conversion stories involve wells whose dangerously cursed waters saintly action turns into waters of healing. Such transformations demonstrated God's power over the forces of evil. Finally, Tirechán has St Patrick call up new wells where there were none before, especially when a well was needed for the baptism of fresh converts.

What, essentially, is the difference between the pagan and the Christian understanding of holy wells? In pre-Christian times, the well water itself was regarded as possessing divine powers and venerated as such; a water-god or water-spirit was associated with it. From a Christian perspective, wells and their water are not divine; nor are there any water gods. This having been said, in the Eucharist bread and wine serve as the forms in which God unites us with himself; and in baptism, water in conjunction with the appropriate words performs a sacramental function, just as does oil in confirmation and in the anointing of the sick. In other words, in the Eucharist bread and wine literally become God, whereas water and oil (again, as part of a particular rite) confer divine grace. In yet other contexts, like the sprinkling of holy water on the congregation or the use of holy water in making the sign of the cross, water functions as a sacramental – a sign of God's grace which is not as such efficacious but, in the words of the Catechism, 'prepare[s] us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it'.<sup>9</sup> This means that there is a place in Christian practice for something like holy water. Yet the water from a holy well possesses no miraculous qualities; mechanically applying this water to a sick limb or a wound will produce no effect. Treating the water as a sign of God's grace while praying for healing is what sets Christian practice apart from superstition. Whereas the one who prays for God's grace acknowledges the freedom of the divine persons to act in inscrutable ways, water administered as a 'miracle cure' amounts to a vain and idolatrous attempt to subject transcendent forces to human control.

8 See Ray, *Origins*, pp. 79–80.

9 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), no. 1670.



## THE HOLY WELL AS A WINDOW ONTO IRISH LIFE (PART 1)

### STAGES IN THE HISTORY OF HOLY WELLS IN CHRISTIAN IRELAND

Before delving further into the theological significance of holy wells and of the practices associated with them in Christian Ireland, a caveat is necessary. Speaking about holy wells in general can be misleading, suggesting that throughout the history of Christian Ireland, holy wells functioned in the same way. This is not the case. Rather, the holy wells and their place in popular devotion underwent several stages of development.

Most importantly, recent scholarship has distinguished two ‘devotional revolutions’ in Irish history. The first such revolution occurred in the post-Reformation period, towards the beginning of the seventeenth century. This is when, according to Michael P. Carroll, ‘holy wells, rounding rituals, and patterns became central to the experience of “being Catholic”’ in Ireland.<sup>10</sup> There is – so to speak – negative testimony to this development in the fact that, in 1703, the British rulers of the country enacted a Penal Law punishing anyone who ‘attend[ed] or [was] present at any Pilgrimage, or meeting held at any Holy Well, or reputed Holy Well’. The punishment consisted in the payment of a fine of ten shillings or, for those unable to pay, a whipping.<sup>11</sup>

Carroll is not arguing that holy wells attracted no devotional practices before the seventeenth century. His point is that devotions at holy wells intensified and acquired a more formal structure. He is also convinced that ‘the great majority of holy well cults found in post-Reformation Ireland were new creations’; in other words, ‘that most of these cults sprang into existence in association with springs that had not previously been the focus of cultic rituals’.<sup>12</sup> The explanation Carroll offers is that in the post-Tridentine period, Catholic clergy and lay people in the heart of Ireland renewed and reinvigorated the Church by combining indigenous Irish traditions with aspects of post-Reformation Catholicism which were imported from the European Continent. This fusion led to an upsurge in traditional devotions, but such that these devotions now followed the more standardized patterns promoted by the Roman hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> This is the time when Stations of the Cross appeared at holy wells and when priests started guiding the devotions by saying Mass, giving sermons, or leading the people in prayer.<sup>14</sup>

10 Michael P. Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage: Holy Wells and Popular Catholic Devotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 135.

11 The relevant statute is quoted, with commentary, in Denys Scully, *Statement of the Penal Laws, Which Aggrieve the Catholics of Ireland: With Commentaries* (Dublin: H. Fitzpatrick, 1812), pp. 253–56.

12 Carroll, *Pilgrimage*, p. 102.

13 See Carroll, *Pilgrimage*, p. 105.

14 See Carroll, *Pilgrimage*, p. 114.

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What is interesting is that, in this first devotional revolution, the more affluent people from the towns acted in concert with the poorer peasant population.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, there was no tension between popular devotional practices and orthodoxy, the latter being ensured by the frequent presence of priests.

This situation changed in the course of a second devotional revolution, this one occurring in the early nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> At this point, the organized Church left the countryside, so to speak, and moved into the villages and towns – that is to say, into the local parish churches. It is in the parish, led by the clergy, that ‘proper’ rituals like confession and Mass were performed, while holy wells began to be regarded with a measure of suspicion for the disorderly religious and non-religious practices associated with them. We will return to this point later. One can regard the second devotional revolution as a continuation of the first – or at least an aspect of the first, namely, the standardization of religious practice in an effort on the part of the Church hierarchy to ensure orthodoxy as defined by the Roman ‘centre’.

The objectives of the second devotional revolution were complicated by yet a third ‘revolution’, or at least development in Irish history: namely, the nationalist revival of the end of the nineteenth century. The renewed appreciation of Ireland’s Gaelic past, together with the elements of popular culture associated with it, changed attitudes towards the wells once again as pilgrimages, patterns, and circumambulations came to be regarded as expressions of an authentically Irish spirituality.<sup>17</sup> Yet what happened in the course of this rediscovery of the past was not a simple return to pre-nineteenth-century practices. Many wells underwent significant iconographic modifications in that statues of the Virgin Mary were added to them, so that devotion to local or national saints found itself taken up into devotional practices of the universal Church. In this way, the wells could function as symbols both of a locally rooted spirituality and of its place within the universal Church.<sup>18</sup>

15 See Carroll, *Pilgrimage*, p. 115.

16 This devotional revolution was first described by Emmet Larkin, ‘The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75’, *American Historical Review*, 77:3 (1972), 625–52.

17 On this point, see Lawrence J. Taylor, *Occasions of Faith: An Anthropology of Irish Catholics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 64–65.

18 The shift towards dedicating wells to the Blessed Virgin is one of the main points which the Brennemens argue in Walter L. Brenneman, Jr., and Mary G. Brenneman, *Crossing the Circle at the Holy Wells of Ireland* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), esp. chap. 5: ‘From Brigid to Mary’ (pp. 88–109).

# First Eucharist Revisited

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Aidan Ryan

The weekends of May each year in Ireland bring with them a burst of celebration centered on children aged about 8 receiving the Eucharist for the first time – and for some, it seems, possibly the last time until Confirmation four years down the road. The hotels are full of family groups of parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and in-laws, some of whom are well under the weather by the time the day is over. Large bouncing castles, festooned with bouncing children, can be seen in many gardens, often with relatives relaxing nearby on garden furniture and consuming quantities of tasty finger food and cholesterol-packed desserts.

Earlier in the day, there will have been a liturgy in the local church, marked by maximum participation by the children concerned, with a ‘job’ or role for as many as 25 or 30 children, all carefully drilled to almost military perfection by the teachers in their local Catholic primary school. The church will be decorated with elegant art-work done in school, the school choir will put in an impressive performance, and people will comment on how lovely it all was. The occasion is an opportunity for the school to display its work in a variety of ways, and there is some resistance to change in this regard, even from teachers who are a bit ‘iffy’ both in their personal faith and in their teaching of religion.

## AN EMPTY RITUAL?

But lurking underneath all of this, there will be a question. What does it all mean? Given the undeniable fact that hardly any of these children or their families will be at Mass the following Sunday, or are likely to be, at best, sporadic attenders in the years ahead, is it all a meaningless show, an empty ritual with nothing much at its core, a pretence of faith that in fact is non-existent? There is the related issue of the place of money in the celebration of the day. There are two aspects of this. Firstly, there is the expense of the

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Aidan Ryan is a priest of the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois. He is Spiritual Director at the Irish College in Rome.

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day and the pressure put on some families who can ill afford it to spend large amounts in relation to the days. Secondly, the amounts of money collected by the children from relatives and neighbours, with comparisons of total 'takings' in classrooms the following week. This, and the more basic issues of the link (missing?) between faith and the days celebrations are questions that preoccupy many priests, some teachers and an occasional reflective parent, evoking disappointment, annoyance and some cynicism. They wonder is there any way we can do better than this.

The *roots* of the problem are deep, and they are at least *three-fold*. The three underlying issues are ; the cultural reality of a widespread forgetfulness of God, the continuance in Ireland of at least nominally Catholic schools that cater for the large majority of the population, and the decision of Pope St. Pius X in 1908, with the decree 'Quam Singulari', to lower the age for First Eucharist thus changing the traditional order for the sacraments of initiation, with Eucharist now coming before Confirmation. The interplay of these three factors lie at the root of the ever-increasing gap between the faith –vision of what the Eucharist is about, and the manner in which first participation in it has been surrounded in the culture of 21st century Ireland. Finding a way forward on this issue will involve addressing each of these issues and this will not be easy, nor will it be done swiftly – it may well take decades.

### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS?

In the meantime, it would be a lazy option just to sit back and wait for a long term solution to be found (presumably by somebody other than ourselves). The following is the reflection of one recently retired rural pastor about this question.

The first thing I wonder is – if we could find someone well versed in the art or science of evangelization, or someone who really has a thorough understanding of how the good news of the gospel is most effectively shared, what would such a person have to say about the opportunities and possibilities offered by the present situation in Ireland regarding the preparation and celebration of First Eucharist?

As I understand it at present, there at least four basic elements in evangelization – *firstly*, there is friendship or the creation, maintenance and deepening of warm personal relationships between the subjects and objects of evangelization. *Secondly*, service, meaning an attentive listening to the culture in which those to be evangelized are living, and which forms minds and attitudes. *Thirdly*, there is the gospel message, and an ability to communicate it in a language and manner which is both easily

understandable and attractive. *Fourthly*, there is the sacramental life of the church, in an atmosphere of thanksgiving and prayer. Effective evangelizers, if we could find them, would be able to help us greatly in finding ways to interweave these four elements in our approach to preparing families, not just children, for participation in the Eucharist and in the sacramental life of the church

First of all, they would want to know what we have been doing up to now. In this context we would look at the 'Do this in Memory' program, in use in some form or other in most Irish parishes for some years now. The experience has been somewhat uneven – in some places it has worked well, in others less so. It can achieve its stated aim, which is to familiarize children with the church and the faith community, in a worship setting as part of the parish element in preparation for the sacramental celebration. It can invite parents and families who are not usually church-going to at least some level of participation in the faith and worship of the parish community. However, one comment that one often hears is that many parents see it as another series of church-imposed hoops through which they must jump in order for their child to be part of the all-important Big Day in May.

It seems desirable that we be more invitational in our approach to all this. For example, what if we were able to invite parents of prospective First Communicants to a series of one-hour gatherings (e.g. once a month from September to Easter) in which the content of the *Grow in Love* program being covered in school – or sometimes not covered - that month would be explained and explored, with a view to the parents covering the material at home with their children. This might help parents to become familiar (again?) with some basic elements of Catholic faith. If they were genuine in their efforts to communicate this to their children it would certainly have an effect on their own faith. Ideally, these monthly gatherings would be more than just instructional lectures or classes. They would be interactive, having elements of dialogue between parents and those leading the gatherings, and among parents themselves. They would be relaxed, informal and enjoyable in a manner that parents would be happy to participate in regularly. They would, in fact, be an exercise in community building and friendship. Above all they would be optional, although a good effort would be made to invite warmly, without any element of coercion. For all of this a fairly high level of skill in adult catechetical methodologies would be needed.

Another form of the same basic approach might be provided by the *Alpha programs* that are now a familiar element in the life of some Irish parishes. This would have the advantage of a clear proven structure, clear content, and the addition of a social

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element involving the sharing of food. Parents would have the Alpha program introduced and explained to them at the customary September meeting held in most parishes to initiate the school year of preparation for First Communion, and they would be invited to consider doing this program later in the year (e.g. during Lent). A warmly phrased letter of invitation could be issued some weeks prior to the program, encouraging them to participate, but without any suggestion of coercion. This more invitational approach might be difficult for priests, since we have been able to ‘call the shots’ for so long. But in different times, different methodologies and mind-sets are needed.

One way of encouraging continued attendance after First Eucharist might be to invite the children, in the September following the ‘Big Day’, to become altar-servers. If some effort could be made to make the Mass-serving experience a happy one, with a tolerance for sporadic attendance and for some moments of minor liturgical chaos, then it might be an encouragement for some children and their families to come to Mass more often than they might otherwise do. In some parishes, especially in towns or cities, a special ‘Children’s Mass’ tries to go some way towards encouraging attendance in the years immediately after First Communion.

## TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES

However, none of these possible approaches will really address the three underlying issues outlined above i.e cultural forgetfulness of God, the continuation of nominally Catholic schools where ‘making First Communion’ is considered the norm in second class, and the detaching of the Eucharist from the traditional stages of Christian initiation, which saw it as the culmination of that process. So how might these issues be addressed in the longer term.?

The *first issue* – the widespread forgetfulness of God now prevalent in the popular culture of western Europe and now pervading Irish culture also – raises what is really the core question for the church at present in Ireland and further afield. How can we best proclaim the gospel in a way that has good chance of being heard? How can we communicate the message of Jesus to the people of this time and place? How can we create the conditions and contexts in which the seed of the gospel message can find receptive and fertile soil? This is a huge question but one thing at least seems clear. In the dominant culture, where God is missing but not missed, we need to find ways to create sub-cultures of intentional Catholicism into which people opt freely, and within which they find the support of people who share their faith, their

values and their hopes for the handing on of a spiritual heritage to their children.

The *second big issue* is the continued predominance of at least nominally Catholic schools in the Irish educational landscape at primary level. There are strong indications that the present situation cannot, and will not, continue much longer but it is not at all clear what kind of arrangement might be sustainable and agreeable to both church and state in the future. The ideal is that there would be much more choice for parents. That parents who wish a genuinely Catholic education for their children will have their rights as parents respected, while equal respect is given to those whose wish is for an alternative form and philosophy of education. This will be difficult and tortuous to work out in practice and will inevitable have an effect on the way First Communion (and Confirmation) is celebrated.

During 2019, a landmark decision was made in the Archdiocese of Dublin regarding preparation of children for First Penance and First Eucharist. In principle it is envisaged that responsibility for the preparation and celebration of these sacramental moments will be taken on by the *parishes* rather than by the schools (even the Catholic schools) in the future. Presumably the Catholic schools will continue to teach the Catholic religious education curriculum as heretofore, including the sections in the Second Class program that deal with Reconciliation and the Eucharist. But the specific preparation for the celebration of the two sacraments will be undertaken by the parish. It would be desirable, in this context, that parents themselves would decide when their child is ready for each sacrament and that arrangements would be made for children to celebrate them with their families. Parents would bring their child to any weekend or weekday Mass in the parish at any time after Easter of the year in which their child is in Second Class, having celebrated Reconciliation in somewhat the same way sometime previously. One effect of such an approach would be to eliminate the ‘Big Day’ when the children are marshalled together for a school-based and school-organized liturgy on May weekends and about which there is such increasing scepticism. Much of the desire for First Communion among families that are not in touch with the life of the church is the desire to have the child participate in the ‘Big Day’ and not to have them excluded from a big moment in the life of the school and of their particular class. It is not uncommon, in many Catholic schools, to have parents, especially those who are recent immigrants to Ireland, requesting to have their 7 or 8 year old child baptized with the main (or even sole) motive of enabling him/her to participate in the ‘Big Day’ with their classmates. This is surely a most unsatisfactory way to approach any sacrament. A

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move away from the 'Big Day' will surely meet with opposition from several quarters. But a move *towards* an approach which brings the sacraments more into the mainstream life of the parish community and more into the circle of family life is surely a step in the right direction

The *third issue* is the order and process of sacramental initiation. Some dioceses e.g. in the USA and the UK, have found ways to restore the age-old practice of the church in which the Eucharist is seen as the *culmination* and completion of the process of initiation into Christian discipleship. It usually involves celebrating Confirmation and First Eucharist in the same ceremony. This has involved moving away from thinking of Confirmation as a sacrament of Christian maturity and more as a part of the process of initiation into Christian life. In Ireland little thought has been given to the way in which this process works out in practice in our faith communities and parishes. We need to think long and hard about what exactly we wish to achieve regarding the faith and discipleship of the children and young people growing up among us and about the methodologies that might better achieve this.

## CONCLUSION

While we await the addressing of these issues, the 'Big Day' will continue be part of the Irish landscape every May. The families will gather, the young faces will shine with innocence, the photographs will capture those happy young faces, there will be a lot of family love around, the children will enjoy the bouncing castles, and the adults will enjoy the tasty food. And what's so bad about that? Can God be present there, too, as well as in the heart-warming ritual of the morning? This raises the whole issue of the influence and presence of the Holy Spirit outside the parameters of the explicit faith community and what happens when we gather in our churches to celebrate our rituals. There is also the related question about the criteria by which we might assess the success or failure of our efforts to communicate our faith. Is regular Mass attendance the only yardstick or might our efforts to share the joy of the gospel have other less measurable effects? But perhaps these are questions for another day and another context.



# Do Not Lead Us Into Temptation – Jesus in the Desert (Matt 4:1-11)<sup>1</sup>

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Luke Macnamara

Matthew's temptation account is otherworldly. Satan and Jesus meet in three staged encounters that occur outside the normal run of the Gospel story. Interpreters are aware that the temptation account is not intended to be a literal report, but a narrative that functions symbolically and metaphorically to reflect upon a very difficult subject.

The account begins in an unsettling fashion: "Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil" (4:1).<sup>2</sup> Later when Jesus teaches the disciples to pray the "Our Father", the penultimate petition will be: "lead us not into temptation" (6:13). It seems that Jesus' own prayer is unanswered here. This petition has caused interpreters difficulty for the past 2,000 years and is currently the subject of revisions in several languages to lessen the theological shock that God would somehow lead us into temptation. At Jesus' temptation, the shock cannot be mitigated since God's own Spirit leads him into the desert. However, while the Spirit leads, it is the devil who tempts. Temptation does not come from God. The Spirit leads Jesus into the zone of temptation to do battle with the devil.

## JESUS AND GOD'S SPIRIT

The reference to the Spirit recalls the preceding account of Jesus' baptism. After overcoming John's protestations of unworthiness, Jesus is baptised by him (3:13-15). This is followed by the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Spirit of God in the form of a dove coming to rest upon Jesus (3:16). Jesus, who was conceived in his mother Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit (1:18, 20), is now publicly invested with the Spirit of God at the start of

1 A modified version of this article was delivered on March 1st 2020 at Glenstal Abbey.

2 Only chapter and verse numbers will be indicated for references to the Gospel of Matthew.

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Luke Macnamara, OSB, is a lecturer in Sacred Scripture at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

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his adult ministry. It is interesting that the title Spirit is qualified as the Spirit of God and not the Holy Spirit as heretofore (1:18, 20; 3:11). Matthew's insistence on the link between the Spirit and God is further supported by the mention of the Spirit coming from God's habitation in the heavens. From the moment of his baptism Jesus is intimately associated with God's Spirit. There is no surprise, therefore, that he would be led by the Spirit in his future ministry. However, it is unexpected that the Spirit should lead Jesus to be tempted by the devil. Nevertheless, Jesus is not alone in this combat. Although the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted, he also accompanies Jesus in that temptation, as he will do throughout his life and ministry.

### JESUS' DIVINE SONSHIP AND THE DISCIPLES' STATUS AS CHILDREN OF GOD

The baptism account contains another important divine manifestation: "There is a voice from heaven which says: 'this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'" (4:17). The voice acclaiming Jesus as Son, thereby identifying itself as the voice of Jesus' Father, whose home is in heaven. Jesus is not only acclaimed as Son, but also as one in whom the Father delights. The investing of the Son with God's Spirit tightens the bond between Father and Son. Jesus' close relationship to God is repeated throughout the Gospel. While Jesus addresses God as "my Father" (7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 19, 35; 20:23; 26:29, 39, 42, 53), the Father again proclaims him "my beloved son" before the disciples at the Transfiguration (17:5). Jesus extends this filial language to include his disciples. The peacemakers (5:7) and those who love their enemies (5:45) will become children of God.

When Jesus speaks of the Father to his disciples, he refers to him as "my Father" and "your heavenly Father" (5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 18, 26, 32). Jesus has a unique relationship with God and only he employs the singular possessive pronoun "my". When Jesus prays to his Father, he addresses him as "my Father" (26:29, 39, 42) but when he teaches his disciples to pray, he has them address God as "Our Father" (6:9). Jesus' relationship with God is unique as Son. However, the disciples are to *participate* in this intimate relationship as children of the Father through prayer (6:9-13) and following Jesus' teaching: "whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (12:50).

### FIRST TEMPTATION – THE LIFE-GIVING POWER OF THE WORD

The confirmation of Jesus' status as Son of God at the baptism is an important prelude to the temptation narrative. The devil does

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not question Jesus' divine sonship but openly attests it and seeks to persuade Jesus to avail of his power as Son: "Since you are the Son of God tell these stones to become bread" (4:3); "Since you are the Son of God throw yourself down" (4:6). The dispute with the devil is not whether Jesus is Son of God, but *how* Jesus is Son of God. The devil seeks to persuade Jesus to avail of God's power for himself, to take God's place and in effect separate himself from God. Jesus remains closely bound to the Father in the Spirit and refuses to comply with the devil's suggestions. Jesus *models* the way for other children of the Father to deal with the temptations they experience.

Jesus spends 40 days and 40 nights fasting in the desert, after which he is tired and hungry. The tempter's suggestion of a ready-made meal through turning stones into bread is indeed tempting. Jesus answers with a *scriptural* quotation: "one does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (4:4). This verse refers both to Deuteronomy and Wisdom, but implicitly also to Genesis. While the temptation account evokes the first temptation of Adam and Eve involving desirable food (Gen 3:6), it also, through this verse, recalls creation: God spoke, and things came to be. The phrase "and God said" occurs ten times in the first account of creation (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). The world and all its constituent elements, humankind's home, is created by God's word. Life begins for humanity through God's word: "Let us make humankind in our image" (Gen 1:26) and is sustained by God's word: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). While the serpent succeeded in deceiving Adam and Eve, Jesus remembers the life-giving and life-sustaining word that comes from God's mouth.

Jesus' response to the tempter also evokes the use of bread as a metaphor for the teaching of God in wisdom literature: "so that your children, whom you loved, O Lord, might learn that it is not the production of crops that feeds humankind but that your word sustains those who trust in you" (Wis 16:26). It is the bread which comes from God that Jesus desires over and above any other food. Lastly, by using a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 in his response to the tempter, Jesus employs God's own word, further indicating the enduring relationship between Father and Son.

### SECOND TEMPTATION – OBEDIENCE TO GOD

The tempter first approached Jesus in the desert, but the devil now takes Jesus to the Holy City (Jerusalem) and places him on the pinnacle of the Temple. He again affirms Jesus' divine sonship, ("Since you are the Son of God" [4:6a]), before asking him to

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throw himself down and quotes scripture to say that he will be rescued by angels (4:6b). Jesus is in effect being asked for a *sign*, as he will also be later in the Gospel. To the scribes and Pharisees' repeated demands for a sign, he replies that they will get no sign other than that of Jonah (12:38-39; 16:1). Jesus speaks of the Son of Man who will spend three nights in the heart of the earth as Jonah did in the belly of the sea monster. The Son of Man has no miraculous rescue from contact with the ground but is to be buried in the heart of the earth. Jesus doesn't avoid death but will defeat it. At his arrest, Jesus shows that he can call upon God to send angels: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (26:53) However, Jesus refuses to invoke this help, so that the scriptures may be fulfilled (26:54).

The closest parallel with this temptation occurs at Jesus' crucifixion, where first bystanders and then the high priests, scribes and elders repeatedly call for Jesus to come down from the cross. The bystanders' words closely echo those of the devil: "Since you are the Son of God come down from the cross" (27:40). Jesus gives no answer, but readers of the Gospel recall his earlier answer to the devil in the desert that he will not put God to the test. The mockers at the cross paradoxically speak the truth: "he trusts in God, let God deliver him now" (27:43). Jesus trusts that his Father will save him and does not usurp his Father's role.

Jesus responds to the devil once again using God's own words from *scripture*: "You will not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deut 6:16). The words can be taken in two ways. Jesus directly rebukes the devil who, although he acknowledges Jesus' divine Sonship, seeks to test him. Jesus also makes these words his own in his refusal to cast himself down to precipitate the intervention of angels. Jesus' trust and obedience are in God's word and not the devil's word.

## THIRD TEMPTATION – TRUE WORSHIP

The devil now takes Jesus up a high mountain and having shown him the world's kingdoms and their glory, offers all to Jesus if he but falls down and worships him (4:8-9). Throughout the Ancient Near East, mountains are understood to be liminal zones at the intersection of divine and human habitation, where encounters with the divine are more likely to occur. Jewish kings were not averse to building sanctuaries to pagan gods on mountains. The elderly King Solomon erected altars to Chemosh the god of Moab and Molech the god of the Ammonites on the mountain east of Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7), while Jeroboam erected temples at

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Bethel and Dan and other sanctuaries at high places (1 Kings 12:27-32). The ideal however is expressed in the developed Sinai-Horeb and Mount Zion traditions. These locations represent highpoints of God's relationship with Israel through the prophets Moses and Elijah and through the Jerusalem Temple. Although Israel often fell short of this ideal, God kept calling from on high. While the devil's temptation holds out the option of idolatry – into which humanity had so often fallen – Jesus' refusal reaffirms humanity's relationship with God.

The devil draws Jesus into this liminal space where all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, the whole creation, come into view. The devil wishes Jesus to claim the glory that belongs to God and then worship him. Jesus refuses outright. There is an interesting distinction in the use of the verbs “to worship” and “to glorify” in the Gospel of Matthew. The verb “to worship” occurs thirteen times and apart from here Jesus is nearly always the object of the worship. The Magi (2:2, 11), various suppliants who encounter Jesus (the leper [8:2]; leader of the synagogue [9:18]; Canaanite woman [15:24]; mother of sons of Zebedee [20:20]) and the disciples at the calming of the storm (14:33) and when meeting the Risen Lord (28:9, 17) all worship him. Herod is the only character in the narrative who falsely proclaims his intended worship of Jesus (2:8). It is striking that in Jesus' answer to the devil he quotes scripture “you will worship the Lord God and him alone you will serve” (Deut 6:13). This begs the question why Jesus accepts the worship of the suppliants and of his disciples. The other verb “to glorify” provides a corrective. The good works of the disciples are to be made manifest so that God may be glorified (5:16). At Jesus' healing of the paralytic the crowds give glory to God that he has given such power to humankind (9:8). Later when he heals the lame, the maimed, the blind and the mute, the crowd again give glory to God (15:31). Although Jesus is worshipped, ultimately God is glorified through his actions and those of his disciples. The honour shown to Jesus is therefore *redirected* to God.

This is the climax of the temptations, where Jesus is challenged to choose the devil over God. He prefaces his final Deuteronomy quotation with a rebuke to the devil: “Go away Satan” and the devil abandons the scene, leaving Jesus in the presence of angels. Later in the Gospel, when Jesus predicts his forthcoming passion, death and resurrection, Peter rebukes him. Jesus in turn remonstrates with Peter in much the same words as with the devil: “Go behind me Satan” (16:23). Suffering and self-sacrifice are part of Jesus' mission but will also be part of the disciple' missions (16:24-25). Temptations come through Satan and many whom he uses as

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his agents. As seen above at the cross, temptations follow Jesus throughout his ministry.

### DEUTERONOMY AND THE *SHEMA ISRAEL*

Jesus has responded to each of the temptations with quotations from scripture. All three quotations come from Deuteronomy, just after the *Shema Israel* (Hear O Israel) section which is prayed daily by Jews (Deut 6:4-9). The prayer affirms that Israel is to love the Lord her God exclusively, with all her heart, with all her soul and with all her strength. This precept is to be remembered at all times through the regular daily activities and by being fastened to hands and foreheads, door posts and gates of the home. The command to love God exclusively is to be a protective shadow for all Israelites at all moments and places where they live. Jesus as a Jew would have prayed this prayer daily. It is the equivalent of the “Our Father” for his disciples. During these great temptations Jesus does not call upon legions of angels but employs the regular words of his daily Jewish *prayer* to fend off the devil. Jesus undergoes temptation, refusing to avail of divine privilege. Instead, submitting to it as one of the human family, Jesus makes the word of God his own and shapes his discourse through this word.

### THE “OUR FATHER” — A PRAYER FOR ALL TIMES

Jesus endured temptation endowed with God’s Spirit, trusting in his relationship with the Father and *equipped* with God’s word. Disciples often face temptation and might see the fabulous account of Jesus’ triumph through his temptations as beyond them. Nevertheless, they are endowed with the Holy Spirit (3:11; 28:19), which is also described as the Spirit of the Father who will come to their assistance in times of trial and tribulation (10:20). Disciples are also beloved children of the Father and are *gifted* with God’s word, especially through the teaching of Jesus. They, therefore, possess the vocabulary to hear and to speak God’s word in a dialogical relationship with the Father through life and particularly in times of trial. The recent institution of the *Sunday of the Word of God* has been explicitly designed so that disciples “appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people.” (*Aperuit Illis* no. 2)

Preeminent in this teaching of the word is the prayer of the “Our Father” which is a veritable manual for disciples facing the daily challenges and temptations of life. This prayer recalls the disciples’ status: they are beloved children. This metaphor is powerful as a child always retains its relationship with the parent. There is no

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doubting one's position as a child of God. In times of trial it is good to recall the benevolent gaze of the Father who looks on his own at all times, especially during times of temptation.

### GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

Jesus' first temptation is visible *today* in the constant tussle to have more. The signs of greed are evident as the *Celtic Tiger* economy roars again. Yet such greed breeds dissatisfaction. People seek security, but enough is never enough. Jesus could change the stones into bread and satisfy his desire, but he trusts in God's word and invites his disciples to share in this trust: "their heavenly Father, who knows of what they have need, will provide for them (6:32-33). The disciples are not to worry about what they will have to eat or drink or how they might be clothed (6:25). While the devil offers bread from stones, and there is no greater symbol of death than an inanimate stone, the Father generously feeds the birds of heaven every day and gives us our daily bread (6:11). Jesus asks if anyone's child looks for bread, who would give him a stone? (7:9) Disciples may be confident that their Father in heaven will give good things to those who ask him (7:11). Petitioning for daily bread is a sure path to receiving *correct nourishment*. In place of the struggle and strife for more, this petition of the "Our Father" breeds filial trust and brings peace to the disciple.

### THY WILL BE DONE

The devil's invitation to leap from the parapet seems distant from any temptation that a disciple might encounter. Both in this temptation and at the cross Jesus' response of acting within human limitations is *instructive* for every disciple. There is a real challenge to accept the limitations that ebb and flow through the stages and illnesses of life. While many spend fortunes on cosmetics or surgery to maintain an illusion of youth, Jesus reminds his disciples that they cannot make one hair white or black (5:36) and yet all hairs are counted by God (10:30). By vain attempts to take complete control of their life, disciples risk shutting out the One who knows them better than they do themselves. In addition, the drive for autonomy often comes at others' expense. Children in families and at school, spouses in marriage, friends, work colleagues all share the same environment and must cultivate mutual obedience and acceptance rather than struggle for domination with winners and losers. Sadly, this dynamic is seen at a global level through the squandering of natural resources to great cost for future generations. The beautiful creation bequeathed by God (6:28-30) is being disfigured by human

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exploitation. The third petition of the “Our Father”, namely “thy will be done” (6:10b), is an effective way to avoid the *illusions* of self-will and autocracy. By adopting the Father’s will, the disciple aligns with the Father’s desire for the full flowering of creation, humanity and each individual disciple. The Father desires nothing less than that all humanity be fruitful (Gen 1:28) and it is his will that is the surest guide for this.

## THY KINGDOM COME

At the third temptation, in exchange for the kingdoms of the world and their glory, Jesus is incited to practice idolatry by worshipping the devil (4:8-9). Jesus refuses, in obedience to the commandments (Deut 6:13). Although the allure of transient kingdoms is manifest in the world, only the glory of God’s kingdom endures. Many are drawn in by the *bling* society of ostentatious wealth, popularity and reputation, exchanging God for mammon and its attributes (6:24). These treasures are confined to earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, rather than heaven, where neither moth nor rust can harm or thieves steal (6:19-20). Earthly kingdoms are a poor investment. The second petition of the “Our Father”, that the Father’s kingdom come, places present kingdoms and powers in the right *perspective*. They possess glory but will come to an end. The true glory will be revealed at the coming of the Son of Man and the renewal of all things (16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31). This is the glory that God intends disciples to share and so they all the more eagerly pray, “thy kingdom come”.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus undergoes temptation exercising no divine privilege. He does not defeat the devil with signs and wonders or with legions of angels but with the word of God which is accessible to every disciple. The specific words are drawn from Jesus’ most familiar daily prayers. The disciples are *not* left bereft in the face of temptation. Jesus has equipped them with a special prayer, the “Our Father”. Disciples might say this prayer to keep the devil at bay and to correct the distorted visions of reality that he proffers. More positively, the regular repetition of this prayer shapes disciples’ thoughts, words and imagination, aligning all with those of their Father. The prayer both assures disciples of their status as beloved children of God and provides the words for conversation with their Father. During Lent, disciples might say this special prayer more often and so open a dialogue through the Spirit with their loving Father who wants so much for them.



# The Paul VI Roman Missal at 50: *'Redeemably Awful'*

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Neil Xavier O'Donoghue

Some momentous events have clear anniversaries, others are more difficult to pin down. The adoption of the current form of the Roman Missal, promulgated by Pope St. Paul VI, belongs to the second category. While there are multiple possible dates that could be chosen, such as the adoption of the new *ordo missae* (1969), the publication of Latin typical edition (1970) or of the first full English translation (1973), we are now at a distance of about fifty years since the adoption of the current missal and thus at an opportune time to take a few moments and examine the results. Therefore, I have decided to write a series of uncomfortable articles to help us take stock of the manner in which the liturgy is celebrated in many Irish parishes. My premise is that there is still a lot of work that we need to do to bring our liturgies into line with the vision of a liturgy that facilitates the active participation of the faithful as proposed by the Council. Indeed, taking inspiration from a speech of the recently-departed American liturgist I entitle the series "redeemably awful,"<sup>1</sup> as I believe that many of our liturgies leave a lot to be desired, but on the other hand many of the issues can be resolved by simply celebrating the liturgical rites as they were designed to be celebrated.

In 1963, during the Second Vatican Council, the world's bishops decided that:

'The rite of the Mass is to be revised in such a way that the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them, may be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved.

For this purpose the rites are to be simplified, due care being

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1 Robert Taft, "Response to the Berakah Award: Anamnesis" in *Beyond East and West. Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Rome: P.I.O. Press, 1997), 303.

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Neil Xavier O'Donoghue is a Lecturer in Systematic Theology at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare

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taken to preserve their substance; elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigour which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary (Sacrosanctum Concilium 50).’

Almost immediately a team working under the direction of Pope St. Paul VI began working on a new edition of the Roman Missal that would update it in light of the contemporary needs of the Church and with the ultimate goal of facilitating the active participation of every member of the People of God in the Eucharist.

### A SUCCESS STORY?

Many people would consider the current Missal to be a success story (perhaps only noting some issues with its latest translation). Whatever else the Church should be doing today, they say, we needn’t worry too much about liturgy. In Church circles liturgists are more often considered the butt of jokes than as prophets that can offer a solution to the many challenges facing the church.

However, I would contend that there is a massive problem in the *manner* that the celebration of the Mass is carried out in the typical Irish parish. The root of many of our contemporary problems is in the fact that we did not take the liturgical reforms seriously. We have domesticated the Eucharist. St. Ephrem the Syrian uses the image of fire when speaking of the Eucharist (Hymn *De Fide* 10). But all too often we have turned this blazing fire into a night light!

We can see how serious the Eucharist ought to be from a story from the early Irish Church. In the early 800’s Tírechán tells the story of how Patrick initiated the two daughters of King Loíguire. After their Baptism they asked Patrick to receive Communion. “Give us the sacrament so that we may see the Son, our bridegroom,” they begged. Then the instant that Patrick gave them the Eucharist they “fell asleep in death.”<sup>2</sup> These early Irish princesses understood how important the Eucharist was, receiving it was more important than their very lives.

The Eucharist is perhaps the most important thing in this world. But the sacrament is not something magical. It needs to be accompanied by faith, understanding and an openness to receiving its grace. While it is certain that most of what happens in

2 Tírechán 3.26 in Ludwig Bieler, ed., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*. With a contribution by Fergus Kelly. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* Vol. 10 (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), 144-145.

the Eucharist is beyond our control, there remains something that we have a lot of influence over, the manner of its celebration. An infinity of grace is given each time the Sacrament is celebrated. Yet our poor souls can only receive a small amount of the grace that is so generously imparted. There are many facets that contribute to the worthiness of the individual liturgical participant. Yet one vital insight of the twentieth century's Liturgical Movement is that the grace given by the sacraments is not enough in and off itself. We cannot leave everything to sacramental grace. But the manner of the celebration of the sacraments can help the participants to appropriate more of the grace given. This is how the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* puts it:

'The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration will be greatly increased if the texts of the readings, the prayers, and the liturgical songs correspond as closely as possible to the needs, spiritual preparation, and culture of those taking part. This is achieved by appropriate use of the wide options described below.

The priest, therefore, in planning the celebration of Mass, should have in mind the common spiritual good of the people of God, rather than his own inclinations. He should, moreover, remember that the selection of different parts is to be made in agreement with those who have some role in the celebration, including the faithful, in regard to the parts that more directly pertain to each.

Since, indeed, a variety of options is provided for the different parts of the Mass, it is necessary for the deacon, the lectors, the psalmist, the cantor, the commentator, and the choir to be completely sure before the celebration about those texts for which each is responsible is to be used and that nothing be improvised. Harmonious planning and carrying out of the rites will be of great assistance in disposing the faithful to participate in the Eucharist' (#352).

#### THE MANNER OF CELEBRATION

The understanding that the manner of celebration, or *ars celebrandi* as it is often called, can have such importance is often overlooked. This is one of the main areas that we have to work at. If we can improve the way we celebrate, then our liturgies will be more effective and will help people more. And here I propose that the most important step we can take is to celebrate the liturgical rites in the manner that they were designed to be celebrated. It is not the case that the current *Roman Missal* is simply unfit for purpose.

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We do not have to somehow or other invent some way to make it relevant. In a similar vein it is not that we have to put brackets around the last fifty years and go back to the “old Mass” (or more properly the Extraordinary Form). Our current problems can’t be blamed on Vatican II. In fact, I would propose that the numbers of people still frequenting our parishes are *because of* the reforms of the Council and not *in spite of* them. The Church today cannot look simply towards Trent or some hypothetical Vatican III, we need to live in the present. However, in my opinion, the key intuition of the liturgical movement that was active in the Church before the Council is often forgotten today. Although from a strict theological point of view grace is always given if the bare minimum has been reached and a sacrament is validly celebrated. Yet if the liturgy is celebrated well and the various liturgical signs are given their proper importance and the liturgy is done well, then the celebration of the liturgy in and of itself can help the members of the assembly to appropriate more of the sacramental grace. Obviously this not the only factor involved in the appropriation of grace, but generally the other factors (such as the interior disposition of the soul or the personal holiness of the person in question) is not obvious and is usually hidden from those involved in the preparation and celebration of the liturgy in a given parish. This means that while we cannot enter the internal forum of someone’s soul to better prepare them to participate in the liturgy, our manner of celebration remains perhaps the most important forum for us to help our assemblies to meet the saving grace of Christ.

This article serves as the introduction to a new series on how to improve our celebration of the Eucharist. I will cover such topics as the centrality of the altar, the role of the different liturgical ministers and the manner in which music ought to be integrated into our celebrations, starting *next month* with an article on the importance of the *altar*. While I hope nobody will be offended, these articles will not be self-congratulatory. My goal is not to tell readers that everything is “grand” and that we are in a much better place than once upon a time. My contention is that the Sunday liturgies in many of our parishes are, to put it bluntly, awful. This series aims to annoy readers and get under your skin as a form of liturgical examination of conscience. Those among us who are priests need to answer the simple question, “If I wasn’t a priest would I go to a Sunday Mass like the one in my parish?” Or to phrase it in a different way, why do less than one quarter of our young people attend Mass on a weekly basis?

I do not pretend to have a vast experience. Many readers will remember the pre-Conciliar liturgy. I was born in 1972 and I have only experienced the current Missal. I was formed in the United

States where I spent the first thirteen years of my priestly ministry. I returned to Ireland seven years ago. I have studied the liturgy in depth and have written academic articles and books on it. However, most of my ministry has been in the context of seminary formation (even though I have always helped out on Sundays in different parishes from the South Bronx to South Armagh) and I have had the privilege of teaching future priests how to preside over the Eucharistic Liturgy and helping them develop an *ars celebrandi*. I propose over the coming months to write this series as a sort of examination of conscience. I strongly believe in the liturgical renewal that was undertaken under the guidance of Pope St. Paul VI. I believe that while the current parochial situation may be awful, it is *redeemable* and that the current liturgical books are the best option for our time and place. Perhaps I have a tendency to be melodramatic, but allow me to finish this introduction by making my own the words of Alexander Schmemmann, the great Orthodox liturgical theologian:

'It suddenly became clear to me that ultimately, deeply, deeply, there is a demonic fight in our Church with the Eucharist—and it is not by chance! Without putting the Eucharist at the very center, the church is a 'religious phenomenon,' but not the Church of Christ, the pillar and bulwark of the Truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The whole history of the Church has been marked by pious attempts to reduce the Eucharist, to make it 'safe,' to dilute it in piety, to reduce it to fasting and preparation, to tear it away from the church (ecclesiology), from the world (cosmology, history), from the Kingdom (eschatology). And it became clear to me that if I had a vocation, it is here, in the fight for the Eucharist, against this reduction, against the de-churching of the Church—which happened through clericalization on one hand, and through worldliness on the other.'<sup>3</sup>

3 Alexander Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann, 1973-1983*, trans. Juliana Schmemmann (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 2000), 310.

# Community and the Holy Trinity

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Richard Buck

Michael Conway in his article in the September 2019 issue of *The Furrow* (“Building Christian Community in Contemporary Culture”) made important observations about how to rebuild the Catholic community, which inspires me to offer some ideas about looking to the Holy Trinity as the *model* for human communities.

Father Conway concludes that rebuilding Catholic communities requires a significant departure from the way the communities are structured today. In many cases, the renewed communities may not be centered on the parish priest; they may consist of small groups (building the community from the bottom up); people may relate more to spiritual and interpersonal experiences than to doctrine, liturgy, or sacraments; and the renewed communities may need to accommodate diverse ways of life and of thinking. Father Conway envisions the possibility of “a new form of institution (-ality)” emerging “to support the life of faith” (p. 465). He suggests that the early church may be a better model for the renewed community than the Church as it exists to today.

## ANAM CARA

I propose an approach to building spiritual communities that would foster the renewal of the Catholic community along the lines discussed by Father Conway. My approach calls for building communities through close one-on-one relationships between people and turning to the Holy Trinity as the model for human communities. John O’Donohue commends to our attention the Irish words *anam cara*, which he defines as “soul friend.”<sup>1</sup> This is a sharing between souls, “an act of recognition and belonging,” and an infinite commitment of one to another. Further, according to O’Donohue, *anam cara*, is the very nature of God: “the Christian concept of God as Trinity is the most sublime articulation of

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1 J. O’Donohue. *Anam Cara*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999, p.13.

Richard Buck is an independent scholar of consciousness and spirit, who lived for a time in Galway, but now resides at 1260 NW Naito PKWY, Unit 207, Portland, Oregon 97209, USA.

## COMMUNITY AND THE HOLY TRINITY

otherness and intimacy, an eternal interflow of friendship.”<sup>2</sup> *Anam cara* not only names the intimate connection of one human to another, but also is the connection binding the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and all of us together. With *anam cara*, the human relationship is at the level of the soul. It is not a relationship built on sensual appeal, intellectual compatibility, or family connection. All of these may be factors in attaining *anam cara*, but they are not the thing itself. *Anam cara* places us in contact with the Holy Spirit, who then guides us in building relationships together; that is, initiating community with fellow humans and with God.

### HOLY TRINITY

The Holy Trinity, which John O’Donohue observes is held together by *anam cara*, is the perfect community. Leonardo Boff, a leading thinker in liberation theology, believes that this community of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit should be the model for human communities.<sup>3</sup> Not only is the Trinity composed of separate Persons, Boff points out that each Person of the Trinity is substantially different in terms of relationships with each other and with humanity. Yet each Person is God, and the community of Persons (the Trinity) is God. They are separate, yet inseparable. The lesson for humans is that we can be diverse individually and at the same time be completely intertwined with each other in a community. Boff argues that diversity and mutual acceptance of diversity by the Trinity sets the example for human relationships. Nothing in human relationships is perfect, but people should try accepting each other as they are, be open to each other, and be willing to give their best to the relationship.

How can we imperfect humans achieve community based on the model of the Trinity? We do this by starting with one-on-one *anam cara* relationships, and expanding them into the multiple relationships of community. Jewish theologian Martin Buber works with the same type of relationship as O’Donohue’s *anam cara*, which he names *Ich und Du*, translated as I-You or I-Thou.<sup>4</sup> There is an intense mutual focus of attention between two people, a complete involvement of one with another. It is intimately personal, going beyond reason or understanding. The I-You relationship fulfills a fundamental yearning that every human has from infancy. This intense connection with another person or other persons comes *prior to* and is a requirement for forming a relationship

2 Ibid., p. 15.

3 Boff, L. *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (J. Smith, Trans.). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, (2000), p. 14.

4 Buber, M. *I and Thou: A New Translation with a Prologue “I and You” and Notes* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York: Simon & Schuster. (1970).

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with the ultimate You: God. *Anam cara* and the I-You relationship are like the friendships of excellence described by Aristotle.<sup>5</sup> By excellence, Aristotle means that the friendship is one in which each party endeavors to bring out the best in the other person; rather than seeking to get something out of the relationship individually. With both seeking the excellence of the other, both become better people. In friendships of excellence, each sees in the other a model for him or herself. Unlike other types of friendship, there are no demands on the other. There is no yearning for individual self-sufficiency; rather, self-sufficiency is conceived as something shared with the other.

Buber sees community as formed from the collection of I-You relationships in which the participants also relate to *God* as the community *centre*: “Not the periphery, not the community comes first, but the radii, the common relation to the *centre*. That alone assures the genuine existence of a community.”<sup>6</sup> Community in the sense used here is *not* a collection of individuals who have an abstract commonality of interests or beliefs. It is a community in which everyone thoroughly knows everyone else, and where the experience of God is shared. The early Christian communities were like this.

## NEW COMMUNITIES

Communities modeled on the Trinity may be the new “institution (ality)” that Father Conway suggests is needed to revitalize Catholic community. Rather than a world of individuals increasingly unconnected to family and other institutions, it would be a world of persons intimately tied to their communities and to God. What we have known as the parish community in this scenario would become a collection of small communities of persons intensely involved with one another. *Anam cara* would unite the souls of everyone in each community. And, as in Aristotle’s friendships of excellence, people would be more concerned with helping others be better people than concerned with themselves. In helping each other the entire community comes into harmony with the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. The focus would not be on individuality separated from all others, but would be on personhood defined by relationships with others in the community. *Mutuality*, not hierarchy, would be the rule. People would deal with one another as equals in terms of dignity and respect. There would be an openness to diversity and a desire to be inclusive. Each community would be

5 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* (Second ed.) (T. Irwin, Trans.). Indianapolis, Hackett, (1999).

6 Buber, op. cit., p. 163.



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numerically small of necessity, because *anam cara* is an intensely personal relationship that can only exist among people who have a direct relationship with each other; indeed, it presupposes one-on-one personal contact on a frequent basis. A number of about 150 is often cited as the maximum for a stable group held together in harmony by close personal relationships.

### ROLE OF THE CHURCH?

What is the role of the Catholic Church in this collection of small spiritual communities, which may be quite diverse in terms of world views, ethnicity, economic status, education, and religious orientation? In the etymological background of the English word “religion” is the Latin term *religare* (to bind), and religion would be needed to bind the small communities with the larger Christian community and with God. *Anam cara* works well for face-to-face relationships, but a collection of communities needs an overarching tie that spans the differences and the commonalities of the people and the groups. Father Conway observes a “diversity of belonging” among Catholics today; that is, there are differing views of the place of doctrine, liturgy and sacraments in the lives of people and, perhaps, a commitment to Christianity that is open to a variety of ways of connecting to God. The role of the Church in this new circumstance may *primarily* be one of community support and teaching. The Bible and Catholic theology would be guides for this loosely organized collection of communities and the clergy would be teachers and advisors. The experience of the clergy and the body of learning based on the Holy Bible are powerful tools for shepherding and comforting people and their communities. There would still be a role for sacraments and liturgy although they would have to change – transforming to fit the current needs of Catholics, other Christians, non-Christians and even non-believers in the small communities.

# The Renewal of Priestly Promises

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Patrick H. Daly

Each year at the Chrism Mass, celebrated in cathedral churches across the world on the occasion of Holy Thursday, priests come together at the invitation of the diocesan ordinary, their bishop, to concelebrate the Mass with him and, in his presence and that of the lay faithful, renew their priestly promises. There is every reason to believe that many priests make what is often a long journey to the cathedral precisely to renew the commitment to the priesthood first undertaken on the day they were ordained.

The Chrism Mass itself is a unique expression of priestly solidarity between the diocesan bishop and his clergy. It gathers together in the mother church, just once in the year, the diocesan family and is a corporate expression of its unity in its diversity of ministries (ordained and lay). It links the specific ministry of those ordained to the Last Supper, at which the Eucharist and the priesthood were instituted by the Lord, and to the life of the local church. There could be no more fitting nor apposite context in which priests could renew the promises they made on the day of their ordination.

This year there will be an appreciation of the fact that in 2019 on the occasion of the feast day of the patron of the diocesan clergy, St. John Marie Vianney (the *curé* of Ars), Pope Francis addressed all of us who exercise that particular pastoral/parochial ministry. In his address he saw that service in terms of commitment and fidelity. It is precisely in those terms that our bishop addresses us, his priests, at the Chrism Mass.

## THE DAY OF ORDINATION

Those being ordained to the Latin Rite priesthood (the majority of the world's Roman Catholic priests) will have already made two of the promises that impact most significantly on their lives in the ministry and one which shapes their spiritual lives on becoming

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Patrick H. Daly is parish priest of Our Lady & St. Anne, Caversham, RG4 5AB in the Diocese of Birmingham

## THE RENEWAL OF PRIESTLY PROMISES

deacons. They will have made a solemn promise to observe lifelong celibacy and to be obedient to their local ordinary/bishop; they will also have pledged themselves to recite the Liturgy of the Hours in full every day. Only those who have made these solemn promises in public during their ordination to the diaconate qualify to be ordained as priests.

It is common for a bishop to outline what the Church expects of its priests and the duties incumbent on those in Holy Orders during his homily following the guarantee provided by those responsible for preparing the candidates that they are worthy to receive the Sacrament and discharge the duties involved in the priesthood. One can sum up the promises that these celibate men, their philosophical, theological and pastoral formation behind them, make to their bishop as follows.

The future priests promise to faithfully do what the Church expects and demands of its priests as co-workers of the bishops. They promise to preach and teach the word of God, the Good News, and explain Christian doctrine to their flocks as the Church understands it. They will celebrate the liturgy, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and they will pray daily for the people entrusted to their care and for the universal Church by fidelity to the Liturgy of the Hours. They promise to draw ever closer to Jesus Christ. The lynch-pin of this litany of promises is the pledge they undertake, their hand firmly in the bishop's hands, of respect and obedience to him and to his successors.

These, therefore, are the promises the priest renews each year at the Chrism Mass.

### CELEBRATING AND ACKNOWLEDGING YEARS OF MINISTRY

The bishop frequently uses this yearly gathering of his clergy and this one Mass they all concelebrate together *d'office* as an occasion to congratulate the Diamond, Golden and Silver jubilarians in the ranks and salute their respective years of their ministry. At last year's Chrism Mass in St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham (the one the present author attended), Archbishop Bernard Longley reflected in his homily on the way the promises each year may be couched in the same words but how for priests with such a variety of years of ministry under their belts the implications of the promises will differ widely across the diocesan presbyterate and how experiences, pastoral or personal – some of them life-changing – radically alter the individual priest's understanding of the promises he is making in unison with his brother priests *anno 2019*.

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Married couples frequently avail of a Silver or Golden Wedding to renew the vows they made to one another when they celebrated the Sacrament of Matrimony. Many of them will have recognised even then that there were many ways the wheel of fortune or the design of providence could turn: sickness/health, poverty/wealth, children and family. The knowledge, experience and circumstances prevailing at the time of the Silver or Golden Wedding will affect the implications of the renewal of promises and the understanding of how they can be implemented with integrity.

The situation of the celibate priest in the context of the spousal relationship with the Church, the custodial relationship with his flock, the fraternal relationship with his brother priests and the paternal relationship with his bishop is analogous to that of spouses renewing their marriage vows. The Sacrament of Matrimony and the Sacrament of Holy Orders, profoundly incarnational in their theology as well as in their ecclesial standing, have evolved at a breath-taking speed in the half-century since Vatican II; preparation for both sacraments and the way in which we conceive how they fit into the universal call to holiness, one of the key insights of *Lumen Gentium*, have altered radically since Popes Pius XI and Pius XII taught definitively on these subjects before the Council.

Just as our understanding of contemporary marriage is deepened by reflection on what the nuptial vows imply in a changing world, so too our insight into what it is today's priest is promising at the Chrism Mass can only but help our understanding of the opportunities, challenges and disappointments involved in the priesthood today, especially as seen by those very priests who at the Chrism Mass are so determined to re-commit themselves to the ministry with the same enthusiasm they experienced on the day of their ordination. It might be instructive to look at what those who taught philosophy and theology in the Scholastic tradition were fond of doing, deductive analysis of the *cas d'école*. A closer look at those vows as renewed by Golden and Silver Jubilarians at the Chrism Masses of 2020 might enable us to understand how the priests of today view themselves, consider the demands of their specific ecclesial calling and shed light on *what it is* they are promising in terms of service to the contemporary Church and to the people of God in the fractured post-modern world of today.

## THE GOLDEN JUBILIARIANS

This year's Golden Jubilarians were ordained priests in 1970. Many of those reading this article will have been ordained by Dr. McQuaid. They will have entered the seminary as Vatican II opened, yet the Church in which they grew up, the liturgy they

## THE RENEWAL OF PRIESTLY PROMISES

were familiar with as altar boys and later as seminarians will have been what we now call the Tridentine Mass, they will have come from a Catholic world of universal practice and – an important point to emphasise in the present climate – they will have enjoyed the support of their families and the esteem of their peers. Their enthusiasm for the priesthood and what it promised them in terms of personal fulfilment and social relevance will have been boosted by Pope John XXIII's forecast of the Council heralding "*a springtime in the Church.*"

At the time of their ordination in 1970 new priests in the English-speaking world were looking forward to a new Roman Missal, a hugely expanded lectionary drawing on the Jerusalem Bible translation and a new Liturgy of the Hours, adapted particularly to the time-table of the secular clergy but one which was designed so that lay Catholics too could join in the Church's prayer. They were to be the generation which would usher in the reformed, vernacular liturgy into the lives of parish communities. They too would be the first to preach homilies. Those who were ordained to the priesthood in continental Europe in 1970 belonged to the first generation of priests since Napoleon's time who would not wear the soutane all day, in church and in the street. Fatefully too, they were the first battalion of new priests to be ordained after the publication of *Humanae Vitae*.

Five pontificates later (one of them being exceptionally long); five if not more episcopates later in most dioceses; five if not more assignments, ministries, promotions later in many cases; and all having reached the normal retiring age in civvy street, the Golden Jubilarians of 2020 are using the identical words to make the same promises they made on the day of their ordination and at every Chrism Mass in the intervening fifty years. Those fifty years witnessed the enlargement of the European Union from six to twenty-seven/eight member states, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Iron Curtain, divorce, abortion and same-sex marriage in virtually every country in the Western world and, among other world-changing developments, the mobile phone and the internet.

In terms of the Church to which the Jubilarians have given their lives, those same years have seen it racked by the scandal of child-abuse, its mismanagement and the affront to Gospel values it has entailed. The public profile of the Church has been severely discredited and that weakening of its moral authority has directly impacted on the day-to-day lives of those in front-line ministry. The world the priest inhabits in the West of today is unrecognisable when compared with the world he entered as newly-ordained at the end of the 1960's.

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When the Golden Jubilarian promises continual commitment to his spiritual life focused on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, of whom he is the iconic presence at the altar and in the chancel, to what does he engage himself in practical terms? He undertakes to pray for the Church the Liturgy of the Hours, to nourish himself on the scriptures he continually proclaims in the liturgical assembly and elucidates for his people, and – supported and fortified by an annual/biennial retreat – to be that *alter Christus* which the Church expects from him. When he undertakes to celebrate the liturgy according to the rites of the Roman Church, he may still be ill at ease with the language of the 2011 Missal and apprehensive about the new lectionary which is in the pipeline, and again there may be reluctance to abandon the tried and tested for yet another reform which threatens considerable upheaval. When he pledges himself to have as his unique motivation in his ministry the zeal for souls, he may ask where have all those for whose spiritual welfare he summoned up so much zeal over the years gone.

The soft footfall of those who have walked away, not to return, during his years of ministry may haunt him. His lay contemporaries are grandparents, they have retired, they winter on the Costa del Sol, and their pensions are fat. Many of those to whom he is most attached have parted company with the Church. And yet the rewards of his ministry over half a century and the perpetual yearnings of the human spirit to which he believes Jesus Christ, as celebrated and proclaimed in his Church, provides the unique answer encourage him to renew the promises he made fifty years ago.

## THE SILVER JUBILARIANS

Younger men, fewer in number year on year, with a quarter century of ministry behind them and a longer life expectancy than their older confrères, also renew their priestly vows. They were ordained with a vision of Jesus shaped by the Christology of Walter Kasper. Their concept of the Church, will have been formed above all by coping with the pastoral and organisational challenges of decline and/or down-sizing. The modern world and, at a stretch one can also say the virtual world, is the one they have inhabited throughout their adult lives and it is precisely there that they set out to preach the Good News and bear witness to gospel values.

The identity with Jesus Christ which the Church expects of its priests is also an ideal to which younger priests aspire. The retreat opportunities, the culture of spiritual direction and the priestly support groups (Jesus-Caritas, Sacerdotal Society of the Holy Cross, Ministry to Priests, etc.) all suggest that younger priests

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take very seriously that relationship with the Lord with which they re-engage at the Chrism Mass. The only liturgy they have known is the *Novus Ordo* and perhaps their commitment is to celebrate with greater fidelity the Mass and sacraments as the rules the Church prescribes dictate. The “new” Mass deserves to be celebrated with dignity, decorum and style.

The egalitarian culture of today, the privatisation of personal belief and the heightened awareness of freedom when it comes to matters of choice in the areas of conviction, may temper a little the priest’s zeal for souls and certainly suggest alternative strategies in making his ministry to people effective. The Silver Jubilarians will be particularly aware of just how radically the mobile phone, the internet and social media have altered the context within which news – be it Good, bad or indifferent – is communicated and shifted out of all recognition the parameters within which community is created. Church is, after all, family; it is community; it is people and the priest is father, builder, friend and leader. Commitment to those identities in 2020 presents many challenges.

### THE ENTIRE PRESBYTERATE

The ideas that will run through the heads of the jubilarians and the challenges their renewal of promises present them will apply *mutatis mutandis* to all diocesan clergy, regardless of age, diocese, ecclesial setting or country, concelebrating at the Chrism Mass.

Many will contextualise their own vocations and their on-going commitment to a life of priestly ministry in a wider ecclesial and social setting. The shifting priorities of the current Holy Father in his sense of the Church’s mission, his desire to reach out to those on the margins and his understanding of the relationship between Church and society in light of insights adumbrated in *Lumen Gentium* – not least our collective responsibility for creation and “our shared home” in the light of climate change - combine to situate priestly service in a setting which is new and hitherto unexplored by those in ordained ministry in the Catholic Church.

Many too, renewing their own vows, will think of and pray for the not inconsiderable number of their confrères who have either voluntarily left priestly ministry – some to embrace the more arduous sacramental commitment of Matrimony – or have been removed from ministry, in some cases very unjustly. The words so many heard chanted during the liturgy of Ordination when the bishop laid hands on them and they were welcomed into the fraternity of the priesthood, *tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisidech*, can have an uncomfortable and disquieting ring when confrères who have left the ministry or been removed

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from the priestly ranks are air-brushed out of the collective memory.

The Chrism Mass, celebrated on the occasion of Holy Thursday each year, offers diocesan priests an annual opportunity to commit themselves as celibate men to support with joy and serenity the sacrifices the priestly life in the age-old tradition of the Latin Church ask of them. They undertake, supported by the prayers of the laity specifically requested by the bishop as part of the renewal ceremony, to configure themselves ever more closely to Jesus Christ, Saviour and Lord. They pledge themselves to minister to the people confided to their care through the celebration of the Mass and sacraments in the way that the Church intends, and to continue to support the fundamental mission of the Church which defines all others, the salvation of souls. The priests might remember too at the moment of renewal of promises that their bishop is a fellow-priest, only that what the promises imply for him might well involve an even heavier burden than they, his priests, are asked to carry.

**Towards Healing.** Our three spiritual principles of healing can be summed up simply: First, we recognize our powerlessness over the loss of our loved one and the effects of grief upon us. Second, we pass over the “bridge of trust” in Jesus the Divine Mercy, to the shore of hope that Jesus can restore manageability in our lives. Third, given this assurance of hope, we make a decision to entrust our will, and our loved one to Christ, the Divine Mercy.

– CHRIS ALAR, MIC and JASON LEWIS, MIC, *After Suicide* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press) p.142.



# Homilies for April (A)

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Edmond Cullinan

## **Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday)**

*April 5*

Mt 21:1-11. Mass: Is 50:4-7; Ps 21; Phil 2:6-11; Mt 26:14-27:66

The last time we heard of the King of the Jews was at Epiphany when the wise men from the East came in search of the newborn Messiah. What they found was the epitome of vulnerability, a helpless infant. Vulnerability is still the unlikely characteristic when the King of the Jews is finally proclaimed on the cross. We see the vulnerability particularly in the scene in the garden, when Jesus says that his soul is sorrowful to the point of death and asks his friends to stay with him. We see it also in his cry of anguish on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And yet there is strength as well. Up to now Jesus had always avoided being recognised as the Messiah, because of the political implications even his followers attached to the idea of a Messiah. When he entered Jerusalem for the last time, however, he allowed his followers to acclaim him as the son of David, the one who comes in the name of the Lord. He entered in the traditional guise of the King of Israel in peace time: “Behold, your king comes to you; he is lowly, riding on a donkey.” Jesus is King, but his authority comes, not from worldly power, but from within.

Our liturgy today consists of two parts. First, we have the procession with palm branches in which we acclaim Christ as our king: “You are the King of Israel and David’s royal son.” This part of the liturgy is joyful and exuberant. But then when we enter the church there is a change of mood. The mood becomes sombre as we reflect on the Passion of the Lord. This second part of the liturgy tells us what kind of king Jesus is. He is the Servant of the Lord who gives himself up for the people. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Just as the second part of the liturgy helps us to understand the meaning of the first part, this is also true the other way around. The grimness of the Passion is shot through with a note of triumph.

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Edmond Cullinan is a priest of the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore, where he serves as Administrator of the Cathedral.

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Christ will triumph over death. He will overcome through the cross. This day next week we will be celebrating the resurrection.

### **Holy Thursday**

*April 9*

Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; Ps 115; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Jn 13:1-15

Last Christmas Dublin Airport had the busiest few days in its history, with people coming home for Christmas. In Ireland Christmas is especially a family time and everyone wants to be at home for the occasion. The centre of the family celebration is the Christmas dinner. This meal is highly ritualised: the same foods, the same decorations, even the same seating arrangements. Every year it is the same and it is a time for memories, especially of those who are no longer with us.

Why am I talking about Christmas when we are in Holy Week? Have I mixed up Christmas and Easter? No. I am talking about Christmas, because the Irish Christmas is the nearest thing in our experience to the Jewish Passover. The first night of Passover was, and is, a time for families to be together and to celebrate a highly ritualised meal full of memories. The place to celebrate it was, if possible, in Jerusalem.

Jesus, being an observant Jew, always celebrated the Passover. This particular year he did not celebrate it with his natural family. There is no mention of Mary or other relatives being present. Instead, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his closest disciples, the Twelve. This was, in a sense, the new family that he had chosen, as he reminded them, "You did not choose me. It is I who chose you." During the meal he gave them the gift of the Eucharist. For all time this would be the special meal that would unite his followers to him and to one another.

The Eucharist would, in fact, create a new family, including but transcending the natural family. It would create a new humanity. When Jesus gave the Eucharist to his apostles and told them, "Do this in memory of me." He also gave them the new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you." The Eucharist is the sign of his love and it also enables us to make his love present in the world. During the Last Supper Jesus also demonstrated what love entails. He got up from the table, got down on his knees and washed his disciples' feet. Love is expressed in service.

Two millennia later we are celebrating that special meal which brings us together and makes us a family, the family we call the Church. At least we have been faithful to his mandate "Do this in memory of me." For our celebration to be authentic, we must also try to respond to the command that goes with it: "Love one another as I have loved you."

**Easter Vigil***April 11*

Gen 1:1-2:2; Ps 103; Ex 14:15-15:1; Ps Ex 15; Is 55:1-11;  
Ps Is 12; Rom 6:3-11; Ps 117: Mt 28: 1-10

Why are we here tonight? Because the impossible has happened. Our faith is based on this one event, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. We have followed the last days of the life of Jesus over the past week. Yesterday we followed him on the way to his execution, to an unspeakably inhuman and cruel death. The fact that we remember it year after year, and indeed, weekly and even daily, has anaesthetised us to the sheer horror of it. To say that his followers and friends were “devastated,” to use that over-used expression, would be an understatement. At least he was given a decent burial through the charity of Joseph of Arimathea.

It should have ended there. After a week of mourning, his mother and relatives, his disillusioned followers should have gone back home to Galilee. There would have been no question of his movement continuing. He had manifestly failed to convince the authorities that he was the Messiah. His closest followers had run away on the night of his arrest. The one who was supposed to be the leader, the “Rock,” had even denied that he knew him. In the normal course of events, Jesus of Nazareth should have been forgotten.

But something happened, something extraordinary, that overturned completely the normal course of events. That something was the resurrection. That changed everything. That event turned the disciples into apostles. The resurrection of Jesus was the message that they proclaimed, first in Jerusalem, then in the towns of Judaea and Samaria and then throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would have been no Christianity, no Church, no conversion of Saul of Tarsus, no mission to the Gentiles, no New Testament. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would have been no good news to proclaim, no faith to pass on and we would not be here tonight. But we are here tonight. Christ is risen. That makes sense of everything else.

**Easter Sunday***April 12*

Acts 10:34, 37-43; Ps 117; Col 3:1-4; Jn 20: 1-9

When Pompey conquered Jerusalem, he and his soldiers went to the Temple and strode boldly into the Holy of Holies. He wanted to see what was in that place, so revered by the Jews that no one entered it, not even the Temple priests. Only the High Priest was permitted to enter the place of the Divine Presence and even then,

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only once a year. Pompey was disappointed. What he found was a dark empty room. It told him nothing.

In this morning's gospel the disciples also enter a dark empty room. It is empty except for some linen cloths. They have different reactions to it. Mary Magdalen's is: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him." Her reaction is to find a logical explanation. Peter's reaction seems to be one of bewilderment. The other disciple, who is not named, but usually presumed to be John, has a reaction at a different level altogether. We are told: "He saw, and he believed."

What the disciple saw was the same as what the others saw. The tomb was empty. He had approached it with reverence, and in some mysterious way, it spoke to him. I think, perhaps, at that moment he experienced a deep peace which dispelled all his doubts. He knew that everything was going to be all right. All he had to do was wait and God would reveal the meaning. That evening the Lord appeared in the Upper Room and confirmed that he was risen.

Pompey had approached the mystery of God's presence simply with curiosity. He was not even aware that there was a mystery to be discovered. The disciple approached the empty tomb with faith and love, in a spirit of reverence, and the mystery was revealed to him. We are like that disciple. Often all we see is evidence of God's absence. But if we approach the mystery of life, of our own lives and of the world around us with reverence, then we become aware that Christ is with us.

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis of our faith. Something so fundamental cannot just be taken simply on the word of another. It is true that the apostles and first disciples are credible witnesses. After the horrors of Good Friday, they had to be convinced that Jesus was alive. It is true that this faith has been handed down to us through believers over two millennia. But it is something in our own experience that makes us continue to believe and base our lives on the fact that Christ is risen. Like the disciple at the empty tomb, Christ himself, in some mysterious way that we cannot articulate, has made known to us that he is risen and that he is with us.

**Second Sunday of Easter** (Divine Mercy Sunday) *April 19*  
Acts 2:42-27; Ps 117; 1 Pt 1:3-9; Jn 20: 19-31

It is a pity we don't know more about the individual apostles. Peter gets prominence in the Gospels and in Acts. James and John get a few mentions. Matthew's call is dramatic, but then we hear no more about him. The others only get a brief mention here and there. Thomas, however, is centre stage in today's gospel. We already got

some insight into his personality when he asked the question at the Last Supper. Jesus says, “You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas objects, “We do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Thomas is a person who wants things spelt out clearly. He is practical and not very imaginative. His reaction to being told about the resurrection of Jesus is consistent with this. He cannot get his head around it. He needs to see, to feel, to touch. In his questioning, Thomas has done us a great service. But for Thomas, we would not know that the body of the risen Jesus still bears the wounds of the crucifixion. The Risen One is also the Crucified One. The Resurrection was arrived at only through great suffering. The wounds of Jesus remind us of this. They remind us that Jesus endured the Passion for love of us.

The wounds of Jesus testify to his love. He is the Lamb that was slain. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In the first scene of today’s gospel Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the apostles and sends them to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. From his wounded side flowed blood and water, an ocean of mercy in which our sins are drowned.

Thomas is often referred to as “Doubting Thomas.” This is very unfair. His act of faith, “My Lord and my God,” is the climax of St John’s Gospel. If our faith is to grow, it must include questioning and even moments of doubt. This is especially the case in an age when the culture in which we live is not supportive of faith. Thomas questions, but he shows an openness to really appreciate who Jesus is. He leads us to the wound in Christ’s side, the wound that leads to his heart, the heart that was pierced so that the ocean of God’s mercy could flow to us in the sacraments.

### **Third Sunday of Easter**

*April 26*

Acts 2: 14, 22-33; Ps 15; 1 Pt 1:17-21; Lk 24: 13-35

In recent years the Camino de Santiago has become very popular. This is the pilgrimage undertaken on foot to the shrine of St James in Compostela, Spain. The full camino involves a trek of about 200 km. Shorter walking pilgrimages have been developed in Ireland in recent years, such as Tóchar Phádraig from Ballintubber to Croagh Patrick and Bóthar na Naomh from Cashel to Ardmore. In all of these pilgrimages the essential thing is the journey. The people met along the way, the conversations and the things that happen are what people remember and find significant.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus could be said to be on a kind of pilgrimage in reverse, as they are going away from Jerusalem, the goal of pilgrimage. They are not in a happy frame of

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mind. Their hopes have been dashed and they are perplexed. Into this situation comes Jesus, though, of course, they do not recognise him. With the help of the Scriptures he enables them to see their experience in a new light.

Jesus is the stranger who draws near and walks with us on the journey of life. When we are despondent and tempted to give up, his word, the word of Scripture, encourages us to see things in a new light. When everything seems to have gone wrong, he enables us to look at the bigger picture which is God's plan for our lives. God's plan is always a loving plan and his purpose will be achieved. Jesus comes to us in moments of perplexity through the word of a friend or in a quiet moment when we turn to him in prayer.

When the disciples arrive at their destination, they are in a much better frame of mind and they invite Jesus to stay with them. And then we have the wonderful turn-around where, suddenly, he becomes the host and they, the guests. They recognise him in the breaking of the bread. This is where he will be present for them from now on: in the Eucharist. As St Leo the Great put it, "The visible presence of Christ has passed into the sacraments."

This is not the end of the incident. The disciples set out immediately and go all the way back to Jerusalem. They want to share their experience with the others. Good news must be shared. At the end of Mass, we too are sent out to share what we have experienced. We have, in fact, experienced what the disciples on the road to Emmaus experienced. We have had the Scriptures explained to us in the Liturgy of the Word and we have met the Risen Jesus in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Our hearts also have burned within us and we have recognised him in the Breaking of the Bread.

**Engagement.** Scripture and science, i.e. *The Book of Revelation* and *The Book of Nature*, cannot be opposed. Ultimately both have the same author. Our knowledge of *The Book of Nature* continuously evolves, and cannot leave theology untouched. Concepts such as irreformability are untenable in this context. Theology, to be vital and meaningful, must consider what *The Book of Nature* is revealing as it will inevitably impact Church teaching.

– JIM MALONE and JOHN MCEVOY, *Mystery and the Culture of Science* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing) p.9.

# News and Views

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**Touch in Catholic Culture.** *Fr. Tom Grufferty, 13 Halsey Close, Alverstoke Godport, Hampshire PO12 2PJ, England writes:*

I was very taken with Chris Monaghan's "Wrestling for a blessing – is there a place for touch in the Church today?"

I was beautifully challenged by this question recently. The Apostleship of the Sea asked me to be Chaplain on the P&O Cruise Ship *Ventura* for Christmas, the New Year and the Feast of the Epiphany.

The Apostleship of the Sea is a charity formed in Glasgow 100 years ago to look after seafarers. It is now a worldwide organisation with a great missionary purpose of looking after those who go down to the sea in ships.

My brief was to minister to the crew, most of whom come from the Philippines, Kerala and Gozo. There are 1100 crew of all ranks on board the *Ventura* and many of them are Catholics. The reason the Chaplain is on board for so long is that the Feast of St. Stephen, New Year's Day, and especially Epiphany are significant days for these communities.

In the dining room where the crew eat is a Holy Shrine, which contains many different religious objects. It is very noticeable that when the Catholics come to eat, they first reverence the Shrine by bowing, and then they touch different parts of it. It is obvious that the touch itself is a prayer, as it is done with such dedication and reverence. Considering that these lovely people only have Mass a few weeks each year, this prayer of touching is what sustains their faith, empowers their spiritual wellbeing and sustains them on their journey through the High Seas.

The Parish of the High Seas is like no other on Terra Firma and the ministry of the Priest is also very different. One major difference is touch.

On those significant days mentioned above, the crew have Mass at 11:30 pm, after a full day's work. There are always people on board who call the community together by putting notices everywhere throughout the ship announcing that there will be Mass in the Crew Mess. There are people who lead the singing, with spirit and devotion. There is never a problem about getting readers. But when it comes to the sign of peace the touch exchanged between them is electric. The sign of peace with the Priest takes on a new

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dimension; not only is it firm and genuine, but it is done with a reverential bow of the head as they take your hand to lift it to their forehead. It is a gesture that is deeply spiritual, holy and natural.

Flexibility is the essence of chaplaincy ministry on a cruise ship because if you miss an opportunity the occasion may never come again, especially if you are coming to the end of the trip. This is just one example. As I left the self-service dining room after dinner one evening, the young man whose job was to welcome diners asked me to give him the Sacrament of the Sick. I was surprised because he looked the picture of health and vibrancy. I thought very quickly, and I suggested that we could do it then and there if he could get olive oil from the chef. Immediately he disappeared into the kitchen, which gave me time to think about the order of the ritual of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Fortunately, it took the young man longer than expected, so that I was ready when he returned. At the entrance to the dining room, we confessed our sins, and I recalled as best I could the instructions of St. James. Again, from memory, I recalled the invitation of Jesus to come to him with our heavy burdens and he will refresh us. I invited the young man to accept Jesus as gentle and humble of heart. All the while he held the small container of oil with reverence and great dignity. I laid hands on his head and prayed spontaneously, and then I anointed him, again using the words of the Rite from memory. We said the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be. The young man held my hands with great reverence and again he lowered his forehead in blessing. He thanked me with enthusiasm and returned to the kitchen with the oil before he resumed his ministry of hospitality with the greatest smile I have ever seen.

But even in western Christianity we need to be aware of the crucial part touch plays in our lives.

After Midnight Mass in the Theatre of the *Ventura*, a young couple approached me to request a simple ceremony to commemorate their daughter, who was killed on December 27th, 2018. She was a highly motivated student at one of our great universities when she decided to travel to a foreign country on her own for the Christmas Holidays. Shortly after Christmas Day 2018 somebody suggested that she should go down to the shore to view the enormous waves early in the morning. She did this exact thing on December 27th. As she viewed the enormous waves, she turned around briefly and a freak wave came and took her out to sea where she was lost. Her family were completely distraught, and the parents had to collect her body and take it back to the UK.

They had come on the cruise in order to be at sea on the first anniversary of her death, to commemorate their loved one. They had in mind to light a lantern and let it waft over the waves



created by the *Ventura*. Fortunately, I checked with the Reception Desk who firmly told me that this was highly dangerous and was completely forbidden.

We had to rethink the ritual, and the Mother suggested using roses which could be easily scattered over the waves. So, the three of us gathered on the balcony deck over the waves. The Holy Spirit prompted me to ask the couple about the last year. Out came the most powerful expression of grief I have ever encountered. They spoke in turn about what they had experienced during those 365 days, each day bringing a new aspect of pain, guilt, or remorse. They expressed regrets for allowing their daughter to travel alone. They were distressed that they had not been there to comfort her in the final moments of her life. All the while they were gentle and calm in their profound sorrow.

As I listened to these remarkable people, I became aware that some of the people sitting round the deck had joined us. Total strangers surrounded us, and listened. Eventually I spoke spontaneously about their love for each other, their love for their daughter and their two other children. We placed our hands on each other's heads and I blessed them with generous words. The bystanders joined in the embrace and touched the grieving couple and each other.

Then the wife took a red rose petal and cast it overboard into the waves, and husband and wife did this in turn until all the rose petals were gone. I looked around to see several people in tears. But more importantly this young couple released their own personal pain, suffering, sorrow and grief into the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. This ceremony could only be done at sea and it was emotionally symbolic because this young student had been taken by the sea.

If only we observe with keen eyes we are "being touched by the very life of God."

**Saintliness and Politics – Pius XII and Gandhi.** *Reg Naulty, 114 Murray Street, Hawker, ACT 2614, Australia, writes:*

In 1929 the Vatican signed with The Lateran Treaty with Mussolini, in which the Vatican undertook to withdraw the Catholic Church from politics. [There had been a Catholic political party, the Partito Popolare in pre-Fascist Italy.] In 1933 there was a Vatican Concordat with Germany in which Eugenio Pacelli [later Pius XII] had been heavily involved, which withdrew Catholics from political activity in Germany. [There had been a Catholic political party in Germany, the Centre Party.]

What the Vatican hoped to gain by those concessions was a

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guarantee of non-interference in the church from both Mussolini and Hitler. In other words, it would continue to maintain control of its own affairs. And that mattered, because it was not happening everywhere then. For example, there was a Catholic diocese in Bolshevik Russia which had been savaged by the authorities, and there had been severe persecutions by the government in Mexico. Moreover, after 1933, communist and anarchist armies in Spain had attacked the church.

In particular, the Church wanted freedom to implement The Code Of Canon Law which Pacelli had written and completed in 1917, and which would be the operations manual for the modern church. Pacelli came from a strong legal background. His father had been a lawyer working for the Vatican, and so had one of his uncles. Moreover, Pacelli had written his doctoral thesis on concordats. He must have thought that he had the right skills and policies for the time. He believed that the Italian and German Concordats would bind those governments to a legal instrument which would guarantee the freedom of the Church.

There is no doubt that personal sanctification was high on Pacelli's list of priorities. However, spirituality in the church at that time concentrated on the devotional life of the individual and was weak on social outreach. To illustrate, in 1937, Pacelli was at Lisieux in France to consecrate a basilica built above the tomb of St. Therese, who had been a member of an enclosed order of nuns. John Cornwell comments;

‘The act was a significant endorsement of a spirituality that emphasized interiority over community, submission over social action, silence over speaking out.’<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, Pius XII's own sanctity seems to have been publicly apparent. Harold MacMillan, who had been wounded three times on the Western Front in World War I, and who would have witnessed humanity in a richer diversity than most of us, met him towards the end of World War II, remarked;

‘a saintly man, rather worried, obviously quite selfless and holy - at once a pathetic and tremendous figure.’<sup>2</sup>

Other visitors commented on his evident saintliness.

In 1954, when he was 78, Pius XII released an encyclical letter on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the death of St. Bernard

1 John Cornwell. *Hitler's Pope. The Secret History Of Pius XII.* Penguin. London. 2000. p. 174.

2 Ibid.p.323

of Clairvaux. He is full of enthusiasm about St. Bernard's writing. It contains "not a few pages redolent of heaven and breathing forth the fire of piety."<sup>3</sup> From St. Bernard's work "a new and heavenly force can pour forth into both individual and social life,"<sup>4</sup> he wrote. Unfortunately, the penny never seems to have dropped that the force can pour into political life as well.

There has been bitter dispute over whether Pius XII's actions during World War II are consistent with sanctity. Once he had signed the concordant with Germany, the Church was legally obliged to withdraw from political activity there. Whether the enormity of that country's crimes against the Jews cancelled that obligation is a good question, but the Nazi's response to the Dutch Bishop's protest in 1942, wherein they executed Jews who had become Catholics, made it dangerous to speak out: there was no telling what the retribution might be.

The case of the mass murders of the Orthodox Serbs in Croatia by the Ustashe was different. That was not German Government policy; that was home grown. Croatia was a very Catholic country. Why didn't Pius XII use Vatican power to intervene? We don't know. But he did have other responsibilities; he was head of a global church, and he was Christ's Vicar on Earth. Jesus had lived in a politically charged environment: Judea was occupied by a foreign power. Jesus did not engage in politics; perhaps he would have achieved nothing at all if he had, perhaps he was Pius XII's role model.

Like Pacelli, Gandhi was a lawyer, and like Pacelli, he strove for personal sanctity. In a passage which, in its mystical implications recalls St. Bernard, Gandhi writes;

'To see the universal and all pervading Spirit of Truth face to face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into politics, and I say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.'<sup>5</sup>

Like Pacelli, Gandhi had a strong belief in personal sanctification, although he did not call it that;

'without self purification the observance of the law of ahimsa

3 Pius XII. *Encyclical Letter on the occasion of The Eighth Centenary Of The Death Of St Bernard*. Thomas Merton. *The Last Of The Fathers*. Greenwood Press. Westport, Connecticut. Published in 1970. p.98.

4 *Ibid*. p.102.

5 *M. K. Gandhi: An Autobiography*. Jonathon Cape, London, 1966. p. 420.

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[non- violence] must remain an empty dream. God can never be realized by one who is not pure of heart.’<sup>6</sup>

The renunciation of war invites a powerful objection: What would you do if an evil power invaded your country? Would you let yourself be killed or enslaved? Gandhi’s answer is “No. We would refuse to co-operate in any evil enterprise.” They could expect to suffer, but Gandhi hoped that their suffering, patiently endured, would induce a change of heart in their opponents. “Soul force,” he called it, in contrast to physical force. Gandhi did not insist on self purification for nothing.

Non-violent resistance, in its different forms, was a colossal attempt at the purification of the means of solving political conflict. As a result of its use in India, the British left India as friends. The long term consequences of that are not often appreciated: it showed that the process of de-colonisation did not have to be violent. Gandhi’s legacy was used to good effect by the Berrigan brothers during the Vietnam War. Jim Forest, Daniel Berrigan’s biographer, writes;

‘Just months before Dan’s heart stopped beating [in 2016] the Vatican hosted a global meeting of peacemakers who proposed that it was time to bury the just war doctrine and focus on non-violent methods of conflict resolution and what makes for a just peace.’<sup>7</sup>

Plato’s vision of a society in which the rulers know what goodness is, and what forms it comes in, and how they are to be realized in society, has never died. For Plato it is the laws which ensure that the good is done in the state. There is an obvious parallel with Pacelli’s Code of Canon Law, where the divine Ideas are made into law.

The Republic’s Guardians re-surface in history as The Elect in Calvin’s Geneva, and those in whom consciousness is concentrated [i.e. the Communist Party] in Bolshevik Russia. They spurned morality as part of the cultural superstructure of previous ignorant regimes. The result was the millions who died in the camps. No one knows what kind of politics the rest of the century will bring, but, if it is not influenced by saintliness, though nobody may notice that, everyone will feel it.

6 Ibid.

7 Jim Forest. *At Play In The Lion’s Den: A Biography and Memoir Of Daniel Berrigan*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2017. p.301.

# New Books

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**The Madness of Crowds.** Douglas Murray. London: Bloomsbury Continuum. 2019. ISBN 9781635579987.

Douglas Murray examines key categories of identity politics under the headings, Gay, Women, Race and Transgender, in his probing study of the conflicts and confusion at the heart of today's struggle for recognition and fights.

He dismisses the idea that the disparate sex and gender identities in the LGBT acronym form 'a community'. In fact they are often antagonistic towards each other. Leading lesbian feminists like writer, Julie Bindel, have been no-platformed and fired from their jobs for denying that a biological man who has socially transitioned to female can be described as a woman. The claim that gender is hardwired by transgender lobbies is undermined by those who wish to define themselves as gender fluid and non binary. Murray uses the privilege his own gay status gives him to question if the exponential rise in transgenderism isn't to some degree about gay people searching for easier access to potential partners.

The feminist view that there are no differences between men and women 'from the neck up' is at odds with transgender theory that what you feel inside your head is what determines gender, and that genitalia are largely irrelevant. Many feminist groups oppose surrogacy which they see as exploitation of women and this undermines gay claims to parenting rights.

Murray finds that when it comes to race the contradictions and the 'catastrophising' anger reach the point of absurdity. Yale academic, Erika Christakis, was forced from her tenured position by student fury for questioning the appropriateness of the university offering guidelines to students about Halloween costumes. And offensive cultural appropriation doesn't stop at dress and costume. Even food can be a trigger. Chef Jamie Oliver got himself into very hot water with British Labour MP, Dawn Butler for adopting and adapting a West Indian recipe for chicken. Imitation is not seen as flattery but as a nasty form of cultural colonization. Yet the inclusion of actors and singers of colour in Shakespeare's plays and European operas is regarded as progressive and positive. Something that is about equality and inclusion, not cultural appropriation.

The contradictions in fourth wave feminism appears strangest of all. Successful, wealthy women, the ones who 'lean in' without toppling over, railing against an oppressive 'patriarchy', claiming 'men are trash', raises questions that go beyond the workplace for Murray. He does not pursue

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those questions but he notes that feminist scholar, Camile Paglia, has long acknowledged that issues for women around motherhood are largely unexplored.

All this inchoate anger needs another book and much more research to explain. Douglas Murray gives us a fascinating in depth view of the tangled, febrile world of identity politics but leaves us wondering why anger seems to be increasing in step with successive advances in equality. He does offer some pointers though. He notes that ‘virtue has taken the place of faith’. Post-faith culture has kept ‘the guilt, sin and shame without the means of redemption, leaving us with justice but no mercy’.

The demand for ‘safe spaces’ points to something even more interesting. Despite signal successes, minority activists still cling to the barricades ‘as if they had no home to go to’. When a protesting Yale student was told by the husband of Erika Christakis that the university was ‘an intellectual space’, she yelled back, ‘it’s not an intellectual space, it’s a home’. Have our boomer generation of parents failed to give their children a ‘safe space’ at some critical stage of childhood? What is behind the petulance, the insecurity, the emotional brittleness, the ‘snowflake’ vulnerability? Douglas Murray, who described himself as ‘a Christian atheist’ or ‘atheist Christian’ in his first book, *The Strange Death of Europe*, understands that without a framework of belief, values have nothing to cling to.

*Blarney, Cork*

MARGARET HICKEY

**Hearers of the Word.** Kieran J O’Mahony OSA. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2019. ISBN 978 1 78812 118 7.

Subtitled *Praying & Exploring the Readings Lent & Holy Week Year A*, this book sets out the scriptural itinerary for the Sunday readings of Lent, Palm Sunday and the Sacred Triduum culminating in the Easter Vigil. Noting that the Sunday readings represent two ‘large narrative arcs,’ the author comments that ‘even at a superficial glance the Old Testament and the Gospel scenes have been chosen to illuminate each other’ and that ‘the middle reading functions’ as bridge between these biblical spans. The first five chapters focus on the Sunday readings, each beginning with a ‘Thought for the day’ and concluding with ‘Themes across the readings’. In between these there are the texts of the three readings with a brief commentary and ‘Pointers for prayer’. A novel feature is the order of the readings, beginning with the Gospel, followed by the Second and finishing with the First. This lay out allows for an interesting reading of the inter-relationship between the respective texts. Another feature, ‘Related passages,’ offers a valuable space for meditation and reflection. Looking through the lens of moral theology, the opening line of the ‘Thought for the day’ on the First Sunday, that ‘the temptations of Jesus are not at all temptations to this or that sin but rather fundamental options that matter for the direction of his life’ opens both a challenge and a call to be considered in praying and preaching. Transposed to our lives, the temptations teach us to think about the options that ‘matter for the

direction' we are taking. In answer to the question 'What is Lent for?' we are asked, as hearers of God's word, to listen to the 'invitation to walk again the journey of renewal and conversion towards our great feasts of Easter and Pentecost'.

The biblical journey from Palm Sunday to the Easter Vigil is detailed in the same manner as the Sunday Readings. The danger of familiarity with the readings of Holy Week is offset by seeing them set in terms of their 'Old Testament background' and 'New Testament foreground' accompanied by a spectrum of brief commentaries. Scholarship and spirituality are seen side by side in this book which appeals literally to the audience advertised in its title. Complemented by a guide to Ecumenical, Jewish and Catholic Study Bibles this book is completed by a very helpful Biblical Index. The *Introduction* includes Origen's 'prayer before reading Scripture', while interceding for both understanding and undertaking of what is read in the realisation that they are worthless without God's 'graceful love', asks 'that the words of Scripture may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into my heart'. This prayer both inspires and informs this very welcome addition to the literature for the liturgies of Lent and Holy Week and invites us to be(come) *Hearers of the Word*.

*St Patrick's College, Maynooth*

KEVIN O'GORMAN, SMA

**Building Bridges in Sarajevo: The Plenary Papers from CTEWC 2018.** Kristin E. Heyer, James F. Keenan, Andrea Vicini (Eds.). New York: Orbis Books, 2019. ISBN: 9781626983427.

As the title suggests, *Building Bridges in Sarajevo* gathers together the papers from the third Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) international conference, held in Sarajevo in 2018. The book opens with a message from the Holy Father: "Sarajevo is a city of bridges. Your meeting is inspired by this dominant motif, which warns of the need to build, in an environment of tension and division, new paths of closeness between peoples, cultures, religions, visions of life and political orientation" (p.xv). This effort to build "new paths of closeness" is reflected throughout the book. Looking at the Table of Contents one immediately realizes the richness of the collection; scholars from around the world contribute essays on a variety of ethical issues, ranging from interreligious dialogue, human rights and virtue ethics, to climate justice, ethics and public discourse, and dialogical theologies of reconciliation. The book is structured according to the running order of the conference's plenary sessions, and it contains 39 papers in total.

As I write this review tensions in the Middle East are escalating. President Trump's foreign policies are in the spotlight once more, and fears grow of armed conflict in the region. In his paper "A National Crisis: Trump as Cause and Effect" (p.117 ff) Kenneth Himes provides a critical examination of the political atmosphere in the US. He explains that President Trump has "accelerated but did not create" many of

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the problems in American society today. He tells us that “Christian nationalism” was a stronger indicator for voting for Trump than being anti-immigrant, sexist or anxious about the economy and job creation, and that Christian nationalism is more about “belonging” than “believing” (p. 118). One consequence has been an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment.

Himes also notes the rise of far-right movements in other parts of the world, and claims that we are in a period of “democratic recession” (p.118). “A culture of resentment and polarization dominates over the culture of engagement and dialogue that Pope Francis talks about” (p.119). In response to this, and citing Bishop Robert McElroy, he suggests that a “Catholic political imagination” is needed, central to which are four key virtues: solidarity, social justice, intellectual humility, and hope.

If we are indeed in a time of “democratic recession”, as Himes claims, then the need for robust, honest, and inclusive public discourse is more urgent than ever as we consider complex questions about human rights, identity, migration and inclusion. In “Hospitality and Weakened Identities” Alain Thomasset SJ explores several ideas relating to identity. He looks at the relationship between hospitality and the history of salvation, and also insists on the need to learn from the experiences of the poor and refugees themselves. Thomasset notes the paradoxical situation in which we find ourselves – building walls and fences because of globalization and the unification of our world. He acknowledges also the sense of loss that many communities feel as they perceive an erosion of their identity and their way of life: “The defensive retreat into our own identities becomes ever more pronounced as we face the risk of feeling lost in a world that has become more abstract and overwhelming” (p.173).

But for Thomasset this is precisely where Christian identity, rooted in a biblical ethic of hospitality towards the stranger, becomes so important: “For Christians, the status of the stranger is intimately bound to the question of salvation and to the witness that the church must give, as people without borders gathered by the Spirit, to announce the Kingdom in the language of each person” (p.175).

Other papers in the volume deal with related aspects of the themes just mentioned. For example, Petr Stica looks at human rights and migration; George Kodithottam writes about climate justice and marginalized populations in the Indian Subcontinent; Eric Marcelo examines the quality of public discourse in the Philippines. There are essays on liberation and contextual theology from the African perspective, as well as Asian insights on inter-religious dialogue. Linda Hogan ends the volume with a provocative essay entitled “Vulnerability: An Ethic for a Divided World”, in which she argues that “an ethic that takes human vulnerability seriously, and not simply something to be ignored or mastered, has the potential to shape a different kind of politics”, since “shared vulnerability and mutual dependence may be precisely the qualities that have a resonance with the individuals and communities worldwide who are struggling to find the grounds for the hope of a shared future in a world divided” (p.220). The essays in the collection are short, snappy pieces of writing, reflecting



the presentation style at the conference itself. They provide a wonderful insight into the richness of current ethical discourse, and they address urgent concerns throughout our world in a manner that is both informative and imaginative, and at times deeply challenging. The writers provide helpful footnotes that guide the reader to further sources, something especially useful when teaching ethics in diverse, multi-ethnic settings.

*St. Patrick's College, Maynooth*

SUZANNE MULLIGAN

**Thomas Finan - Collected Writings.** ed. D. Vincent Twomey, Dublin:Columba Books. 2019.  
ISBN: 978-178218-360-0.

This collection of essays and occasional pieces is drawn from the writings of Fr. Thomas Finan (1931-2012) from 1951 to 1999. Fr. Finan was Professor of Classics in Maynooth from 1959 to his retirement in 1996. His dual career as priest and Classicist is wonderfully displayed throughout the volume. His editor rightly terms him a Christian Humanist in his introductory note, for his concern to explore the relationship between humankind and the transcendent is a constant theme, whether analysing scripture or Homer.

The bulk of the book (9-419) is in fact devoted to 'Academic' essays which embrace Antiquity, Augustine, Early Irish Christian Literature, Dante, and the Renaissance. Central to this project are his studies of Thomas More and Erasmus, the basis for whose Christian humanism he finds in the reconciliation of the Judaic tradition and Hellenism as espoused in the early Church Fathers such as Justin, Clement and later Augustine. Indeed a first stage of this rapprochement is found in the biblical wisdom literature, as is explained in an important article on 'Hellenistic humanism in the book of Wisdom' in which his detailed knowledge of Greek philosophy allows him to trace its gradual appearance in the early wisdom literature to its clear manifestation in the Book of Wisdom. In a further article on Clement of Alexandria we can see how the author weaves together his own theological concerns and his understanding of Classical literature and philosophy. Particularly striking is Clement's (*Strom.* I.5) positive evaluation of Greek philosophy as a sort of parallel avenue with that of the Judaic tradition in leading us to Christ: divine Truth and the eternal Logos are, according to Clement, like a 'schoolmaster to bring the Hellenic mind, as the Law the Hebrews, to Christ.' In a number of novel approaches to ancient literature he enlarges on the concept of total tragedy, e.g. in Homer's *Iliad*, where the tragedy of Achilles goes beyond the more restricted Aristotelian notion of a tragic flaw (*hamartia*) in his character to the perceived imperfection and injustice of the world in which he finds himself, not least the limitations imposed by his own mortality and the apparent futility of achievement. This serves once more to cast light on humanity's relationship to what is beyond and greater than himself. The universality of the theme is underlined by finding similar concerns in the

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epic of Gilgamesh. And the frequently made comparison of Christ and Socrates is skilfully and sympathetically explored in an essay on 'The desired of all Nations'.

Fr. Finan's studies of Thomas More were originally contributions to a conference on 'Renaissance Humanism and Renaissance Law' held in Maynooth in 1998. The rather forbidding and off-putting title masks, however, some stimulating thoughts on the problems and opportunities presented to renaissance humanists in their endeavour to integrate their classical humanism with their Christian beliefs. Not least of these is the apparent polarity of humanism, which is centred on the human person, and Christianity, which is theocentric. This is, of course, far from the more radical polarity of atheistic humanism and absolute theocracy, but is still a challenge. It is here that law becomes important, not merely practical law but rather the universal divine law on which it is ultimately based and which is the structural principle of all existence. And yet far from being a constriction, law may be seen as providing the parameters in which human freedom may flourish and that too applies *a fortiori* to the divine law on which it ultimately depends. It is there that we may find 'the liberation into harmony with the 'intrinsic' order and teleology of human beings and their world' (p.348).

The analysis of such a wide range of authors spanning a considerable period of time might lead one to expect superficial generalisations, but his treatment of these authors is based always on detailed exposition of central ideas, grounded in precise references and leading to profound and thoughtful insights. Moreover none of this is of merely historical or antiquarian interest, but presents us with issues which still challenge us today: the meaning of life, of death, and the place of the human person in the universe. Even many of the detailed points, and Fr. Finan provides these in plenty, are equally relevant today, e.g. in a review article of Erasmus' letters (pp.360-381) we find a useful reminder of the metaphysical importance of symbolism and the vacuity of the concept of 'mere symbolism' introduced amongst others by Zwingli in the Eucharistic controversies (p. 365).

The smaller collection of shorter pieces under the rubric 'Occasional Essays' (419-543) illustrates the width of his engagement with contemporary topics (e.g. Ireland and Europe, The Canonization of Edith Stein). Even a piece written in 1978 on the 'The Future of Maynooth' has contemporary resonance in its appeal to the perennial values of university education which will always underlie the transient fashions of presentation. And here too the facility for the compressed and striking phrase, e.g. in a homily on 'The End of Things': 'this life and the next do not merely co-exist. *Eternity has been inserted into time.*' A reflection which brings us back to Augustine and Plotinus. A charming picture of the warmth of this scholarly author emerges from his account of a meeting with William Kinsella, then President of the Thomas More Society of Ireland, to discuss his collection of More literature: his eyes lit up when 'he was able to look over my own Thomas More corner - not

quite as big as his but, happily, not overlapping too much, and therefore complementary!’ This is a volume that will be read with great pleasure and profit, and an inspiration for all who ponder on the fate of humankind.

*University College, Dublin*

ANDREW SMITH

**The Way of St. Benedict.** Rowan Williams. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020. ISBN 978-1-4729-7307-8.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury and current Master of Magdalen College, Cambridge, Rowan Williams has had a life-long interest in Saint Benedict and his Rule. This collection of essays, therefore, represents the fruits of a long-matured reflection. Earlier versions of four of the seven essays have been published over the last four decades. The first part of the book, which includes five of the seven essays, explores the tradition of Benedict with a view to contemporary appropriation, while the second part includes two essays focused on historical debates, medieval monastic reform and the contribution of Abbot Butler of Downside on mysticism.

The opening essays entitled “Shaping Holy Lives” and “The Staying Power of Benedict” give an overview of Williams’ thinking on Benedict. There is a significant emphasis in these essays on chapter 4 of the Rule of Benedict, “The Tools of Good Works”, pointing to the practical implications of Benedict for daily life then and now. The challenge of living with the same people all the time is met by a redefined notion of stability, understood as being accustomed to the presence of others as if using an old and familiar tool that is a natural extension of the limb. This training in ‘otherness’ requires a shared vision and goal but also the cultivation of the values of transparency, peace-making and accountability, values distilled from the long list of tools. These very fine essays showcase the power of the Rule to craft new models of communal life for the coming centuries.

“Monks and Mission: A Perspective from England” explores the paradox of how contemplatives can also be missionaries, beginning with the historical example of St Augustine’s mission to Canterbury in the early 7th century. The accrual of wealth and possibilities of leisure through work so valued through the ages was challenged by the poverty and charity which characterised the communal life of the monks. The apostolic life which pointed beyond to the transcendent became the nucleus for their evangelising mission.

“From Solitude to Communion: Monastic Virtues and Ecumenical Hopes” identifies constitutive elements to monasticism that help to better understand the ecumenical task. Monastic communities are centred on the Word and Spirit. Monks listen, read, meditate and pray the Word of God, which is the guide and measure by which all monks live. Monks embody thereby the task for the wider community to focus ever more on the Word and dependence on his indwelling, integrating solitude and communion.

“Benedict and the Future of Europe” develops three aspects of the Rule,

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namely the Rule's understanding of time, obedience and participation. The Benedictine day is carefully structured, and every activity is for the building up of the monk and the community for the praise of God. The Abbot exemplifies obedience in his attentiveness to the needs of all and this mutual obedience is imitated by the monks. Finally, there is no such thing as a retired monk. Everyone is encouraged according to their capacity to take up a role in the work of the community. The application of these insights of Benedict to today's society forcefully challenges contemporary communal constructs.

The final two essays in part two of this work are more historical. The first analyses the various phases of Benedictine reform from the 8th to the 12th centuries, drawing insights from the dynamic of each phase. The final essay is a very scholarly analysis of Abbot Butler's synthesis of Western Mysticism. Given that this is a collected volume there is some overlap, especially in the first two essays. The first five essays are a very accessible but rich analysis of the Benedictine tradition with many stimulating questions raised for today's human community. The Rule, lived in conjunction with the Gospel, can creatively interrogate contemporary ailing human communities and societies. The latter two essays are probably of more restricted appeal, especially the final essay on Abbot Butler.

*St. Patrick's College, Maynooth*

LUKE MACNAMARA OSB

**For Us and for Our Salvation: The 'Christological' Councils and Trinitarian Anthropology.** Declan O'Byrne. Rome: Urbaniana University Press. 2018. ISBN: 978-88-401-9018-1.

*Gaudium et Spes* 22 famously proposed that it is Christ "who fully discloses humankind to itself." With this in mind, the inspiration for this book should seem a little less unusual. The author, Declan O'Byrne is originally from Dublin and studied at the Milltown Institute and Mater Dei. He is currently lecturing at Rome's Pontifical Urbaniana University and Florence's Sophia University Institute. In this work he attempts to answer the question of how our theology of the Trinity can help us in our attempt to understand ourselves. He does this in an attempt to answer "Rahner's invitation to explore the connection between Trinity and humanity" (p. 7). The dogmatic source for his reflections can be found in the so-called "Christological Councils" of Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II (553) and Constantinople III (680-1).

Most theologians have approached the early Councils as being attempts to understand the identity of Christ and the Trinity. O'Byrne attempts to recast the debate by proposing a consideration of the Councils as an attempt to understand soteriology. Given that salvation can be ultimately understood as a participation in the life of the Trinity, this new approach to the Councils can help readers to appreciate the relevance of the Councils. In this way, the author hopes to develop what he terms a "trinitarian

anthropology.” The book works through the history of the Christological debates, starting with the Alexandrian and Antiochian approaches to Christology, and then progresses through the Councils themselves. The soteriological key that O’Byrne proposes is a common thread running through the book and undoubtedly has much to recommend it. However, the book does not really give the reader an idea of what a “trinitarian anthropology” would look like. This isn’t necessarily a fault, even though the title would lead one to believe that this is what the book hopes to achieve. It might have been better to clarify that this particular work is instead a necessary preparation for such an anthropology. While enlightening, the presentation assumes that the reader is already familiar with the theological background of the Councils. Given the novel approach and the assumptions that the reader has some familiarity with the subject, it mightn’t be a suitable textbook for an introductory course. Nonetheless, the book is to be recommended as a thought-provoking work for those who would like to deepen their knowledge of the Councils of the early Church and it lays a valuable foundation for future considerations of their significance.

*St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth*

NEIL XAVIER O’DONOGHUE

**Newman at Littlemore.** Bernard Basset, SJ. Leominster: Gracewing. 2019. ISBN 978-0-85244-942-4.

This is a re-issue in augmented form of a work originally published in 1983. Intended for the non-specialist reader, it recounts Saint John Henry Newman’s stay and mission at Littlemore and his spiritual journey while there. The four main chapters recount Newman’s move from Oxford to Littlemore; the building of a church in the village; the establishment of a ‘college’ for friends and his eventual departure from Littlemore following his conversion to Catholicism. The book also chronicles Newman’s gradual and painful move from the Church of England to the Church of Rome. A fifth chapter, by the present custodians, describes the fate of the college in the post-Newman era, culminating in its establishment as an International Centre of Newman Friends and a place of pilgrimage under the care of the sisters of the Society of The Work.

This rather prosaic account of the book does not do justice to the wealth of material it contains. It is a mark of Fr Basset’s (+ 1988) skill that within the structure adopted for the book, he captures the social and religious climate against which Newman’s journey took place. Of particular interest is the information concerning Newman’s family and friends, for some of whom his conversion was traumatic and led to partial or permanent estrangement. Also of note is the insight given into the frequently acrimonious atmosphere of the closed academic world of Oxford of the period. Excellent illustrations, mostly contemporary, abound in the first four chapters.

*Glenstal Abbey, Limerick*

HENRY O’SHEA, OSB

**Freedom from Evil Spirits.** Released from Fear, Addiction and the Devil. Pat Collins, CM. Dublin: Columba Books. ISBN 978-178218-352-5.

At a first glance and flick-through this book may cause mild amusement to the supercilious or self-proclaimed liberated, while to those who see the Devil lurking behind even the most harmless event or anecdote it may appear to be the recipe-book for which they have been waiting. The cover, taken from a late 15th century artist, Martin Schöngauer, and showing a rather put-upon but patient St Anthony being poked and clawed by a galaxy of Hieronymous-Bosch-type grotesques may repel some prospective readers while attracting the more ghoulishly inclined. However, it would be as foolish to dismiss this book as irrelevant to the present state of our experience of evil as it would be to canonize it as a vademecum for exorcists of all hues. This is a serious book, as is revealed in its subtitle, 'Released from Fear, Addiction and the Devil.' The methodology of enquiry underlying the book is described by the author as, '...theological reflection of a pastoral kind...' (p.14). Borrowing from a 1995 study by Evelyyn and James Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, the author asserts that theological reflection of a practical kind, '... consists in a dialogue between three interrelated constituents: 1. *Tradition*, i.e. information that we draw from Scripture, the Church's magisterium, liturgy, Church history etc. 2. *Lived Experience* of real-life situations such as the many things that constrain human freedom, such as fear, addiction and oppressive evil spirits. 3. *Cultural Information* which includes such things as philosophy, sociology, psychology and anthropology..' (p.15). His concern is to forge a creative, dynamic link between theology as academic-intellectual discourse and theology as praxis.

Using this methodological tool, the author presents his thesis in four sections, 1. *Freedom from Fear*; 2. *Freedom from Addiction*; 3. *Freedom from Oppressive Evil Spirits* and 4) *Delivering Cities, Towns and Localities from Territorial Spirits*. The general reader who may have reservations about the reality of the existence of evil spirits and considers the Devil as at best a figure of fun in the pantomime or at worst a Faustian literary construct may find the first two parts less challenging or, perhaps, more informative than the second two. In these first two parts, the author shows an admirable familiarity not only with traditional Christian literature on the subject of fear and attendant phenomena, but a wide knowledge of the theories and in some cases, the dogmas, of the main as well as the less mainstream psychologists of the twentieth century. Examples of the themes dealt with in Part One range from *Existential forms of anxious fear* (p.24ff), through, *Coping with realistic fears* (p. 46ff.) to *Neurotic forms of anxiety, fear and phobia* (p.59ff.). Part Two addresses, among other themes, *Psycho-spiritual causes and effects of addiction* (p, 80ff) and *Origins of AA and 12 step programmes* (p. 90ff.).

The theologically and psychologically more sceptical or fastidious reader may find the remaining Parts Three and Four of the study a challenge. In ten chapters, Part Three treats of topics such as, *The devil*

*and evil spirits exist* (p. 134 ff.); *How the devil can get a foothold* (p.155 ff.); *Cleansing disturbed buildings* (p. 187 ff.) and *Some recommended prayers and church norms* (p. 197ff.). Part Four, the shortest part of the book, provides examples of happenings at which the theological/spiritual/psychological reflections of the author and others were given practical expression. One such event described is a two-day festival held by the members of The New Springtime Community in Dublin in 2017. The festival was entitled, *God speaks to those who Praise Him*. To quote the author, ‘It was a wonderful occasion during which the Lords told us that we should go to a high place overlooking the city of Dublin to proclaim the festal shout of victory over evil spirits active in the city,’ (p.207). The theme of the festal shout in its various forms is expanded in the remaining chapters.

The theologically and psychologically fastidious may, like this reviewer, find the doxological justifications in Chapters 32 to 36, with titles such as, *The war cry evolves into the festal shout of victory* (p. 216) or *The festal shout and spiritual warfare today* (p. 227) interesting but slightly creepy. Other readers, however, may greet with some enthusiasm, *Suggested guidelines for event organisers*. (p. 234). Whatever one’s stance regarding the phenomena discussed and the ‘solutions’ or ‘treatments’ suggested, this book is a timely reminder of the reality of evil in a society showing every sign of lacking a moral compass, or even a shared vocabulary and associated with this a breakdown in social cohesion and, indeed, sanity.

The book concludes with a list of some helpful books and websites (p. 239 ff.)

*Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick*

HENRY O’SHEA, OSB

**The Joy of God.** *Collected Writings* Sister Mary David. London: Bloomsbury Continuum. 2019. ISBN 978-1-4729-7132--6.

To those who are aware of the circumstances of the death of the author, the title of this book may at a first glance appear counterintuitive or indeed, piously defiant. It is true, though, that this book is a work of piety but in the best of at least two senses. It comprises the collected writings of the late Sister Mary David Totah of Ryde Abbey on the Isle of Wight within what can be described as the parentheses of an elegantly sensitive foreword by Abbot Erik Varden, OCSO and an account – *Surrender to Joy: Acceptance-with Joy: Her last Lesson* - of the years of her premature but relatively slow death from cancer. The latter section forms Part Three of the book and was written by an anonymous member of her community who is clearly identifiable from the context and language as the infirmarian or one of the infirmarians of the abbey.

The body of the book, Parts One and Two, is composed of conferences, notes, letters or extracts from letters and the occasional formal paper by Sister Mary Totah who was both Mistress of Novices and Prioress of her monastery. Part One – *Called to Joy* – appears to fall into the category

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of a formal conference. Clearly, most of the material was not intended for publication but this does not rob any of it of its vibrancy. The entries of Part Two are gathered under the general title of *Journey to God*. In eight sections, Sister Mary David maps out the journey of the soul. Sister Mary David speaks in turn of *Search, Decision, Growth, Freedom, Endurance, Mercy, Darkness, Light*. While of its nature the book is not an extended treatise and the sections reflect the purpose of their composition – conference, letter etc, - there radiates through every entry the author’s vast familiarity with Sacred Scripture, with the corpus not only of spiritual, and in particular monastic, writings but her thorough grounding in secular, especially English literature, in which she had a distinguished academic career before her entry to the monastery. And all the while the underlying message is delivered with a lightness of touch coupled with a sublime practicality that makes what is being communicated accessible even to the non-specialist reader. An advantage of the structure of Sister Mary David’s writings is that it is possible to take up the book and find passages of varying length, some very short, but each a gem of monastic wisdom reflecting the author’s experience of a life well, consciously and, as the book’s title invitingly asserts, joyfully lived.

*Glenstal Abbey, Limerick*

Henry O’Shea, OSB

**Dom Eugene Boylan.** *Trappist Monk, Scientist and Writer*. Thomas J. Morrissey SJ. Dublin: Messenger Publications. 2019. ISBN 978-1-7881-2025--8.

This biography fills a gap, recounting as it does the life of a monk whose early death prompts the question, ‘what if he had lived longer?’ In thirteen chapters, presented in three parts, the author follows the life of his remarkable subject in chronological order. In Part One, three chapters deal with the life of Kevin Boylan, the future Dom Eugene, from his birth in 1904 to his entry into Mount Saint Joseph Abbey at Roscrea in 1929. There is an almost Joycean feel to the description of life in a Dublin middle-class family with musical evenings, religious observance and the serious pursuit of education in an Ireland transitioning to independence. The author makes due reference to the family’s sojourn in Derry where Kevin’s father was the only Catholic bank-manager at a period of dramatic change. Kevin Boylan’s trials as a clerical student in Clonliffe College are dispassionately described. His academic brilliance and success as a budding physicist in University College Dublin during and after his Clonliffe experience and the three years of study in Vienna are documented, along with his active social life.

Kevin Boylan was clearly one of those people whose entrance to monastic life causes wonderment among those who know them. The living out of this vocation forms Part Two, the body of the book. In eight chapters the reader marvels at what the monk, now named Eugene, achieved in the thirty-four years left to him. The author chronicles his



life as retreat-giver of international reputation, best-selling spiritual author, monastic founder in Australia, monastic superior as Prior - and perfume-manufacturer - in Caldey, in Wales, and finally as Abbot in Roscrea. Throughout, the biography is written with evident sympathy for its subject but is happily free from any whiff of hagiography. The result is that difficulties and disappointments encountered and caused are not passed over. An important chapter deals with Dom Boylan's, as the chapter title calls them, *Political, Religious, Social and Economic Views*. In this the monk and abbot's unvarnished views of and on the social and ecclesiastical realities of the communities and countries in which he was involved – and Ireland in particular - are presented. It is here that the 'what if?' question gains traction. While very much a product of the society from which he came, Dom Boylan harboured none of the complacency of the role and position of the Roman Catholic Church in that society. He was acutely aware of the Church's need for a well-educated and spiritually-grounded clergy and laity and that the Irish Church's failure to encourage, to nurture, the intellectual and spiritual life could ultimately lead to a form of institutional marginalisation and suicide. One can only speculate about the influence that such a gifted analyst and prophet might have had if he had not died in 1964 as the result of a road-accident.

Part Three of the book consists in two chapters, one dealing with Dom Eugene's last four years of life, 1960 to 1964, having being elected Abbot of Roscrea in 1962 and the other an elegantly succinct summary of his life and legacy. While the cover of the book shows a rather dour Trappist, the monk it depicts can, to paraphrase the title of his most famous book, be described as a 'tremendous lover'.

*Glenstal Abbey, Limerick*

HENRY O'SHEA, OSB

**Good Work: Meditation for Personal and Organisational Transformation** (Medio Media 2019). Laurence Freeman, OSB. Meditatio. ISBN 978-981-14-0166-4.

Work is a large part of our lives. Laurence Freeman in this recent book shows how it is not just a need or an opportunity for personal gain but can bring out the best in us. Our work can be an expression of our true self and in that way, be of benefit to others. Good work comes when we work together to create quality not just quantity.

What we need, Father Laurence proposes, is a way of keeping attention on the value of the work in hand, rather than on what we feel we may be getting out of it in the moment. It is in this light that meditation and good work are so connected. Meditation is the practice of loving attention to the source of goodness itself. It is a way of opening ourselves to creativity, value, quality. In turn meditation shapes the way we work: Work becomes in the end a way of self-giving rather than simply getting.

Father Laurence's book joins a long tradition of reflection on the relation between work and spirituality. In the Book of Genesis God is

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seen as working, resting and seeing that “all that was done is good” – a creativity and nurturing in which humanity is called to participate.

Father Laurence engages with the spirituality of work without using traditional religious language or concepts. As such this is an excellent book for the modern marketplace, no –one can possibly think that the aim is to promote a religion. The aim is for people to find ‘good work’ in silence and in action whatever one’s beliefs may be. *Good Work* is, in fact, the perfect book on meditation to give to someone who does not see themselves as religious. The depth of the teaching on Christian Meditation is there, but the path is opened up to a secular reader. If Mindfulness has brought meditation practice out of a specifically religious world so as to help people with mental health, the practice of meditation this book teaches can take us one step further – to take attention of ourselves, to be re-centred in God, and thus to discover new depth to ourselves, new sources of leadership so as to be a real help to others. In today’s world we need leaders who are not driven by the ego, who have an awareness of their inter-connection with the whole human family, and who can witness to integrity and values in professional life that will inspire others to work that is genuinely ‘good’. This book is a great resource and inspiration for that.

*Mount Melleray, Waterford*

STEFAN GILLOW REYNOLDS

## *Shorter Notice*

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**Return to Me with All your Heart: Daily Reflections for Lent.** Gerard Gallagher. Dublin: Veritas. 2020. 978 1 84730 951 8.

This new publication by Gerard Gallagher is a very welcome one as we celebrate the season of Lent in preparation for the great feast of Easter. The reflection for each day of Lent is organized around three R’s – Read, Reflect and Respond. A passage from Scripture is provided for each day and the author’s reflections and practical suggestions are fresh, challenging, concise and relevant. The book itself is compact and could easily be carried in a coat pocket and read while one journeys to work or indeed over lunch. A very valuable resource for anyone seriously intent on embracing the season of Lent.

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