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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Brian Grogan
Give the Spirit the Mic!

Myra Hayes
Religious Spaces in
Transition

Michael G. Lawler
Todd A. Salzman
Two Interconnected
Trinities

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Redeemably Awful

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What are Priests for?

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The Furrow

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Pádraig Corkery
Editor

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The Furrow

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The Furrow

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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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Give the Spirit the Mic!

– *A Strategy for Communal Discernment and Synodality*

Brian Grogan SJ

PART ONE

A SYNODAL CHURCH

As I write, the theme of the 2022 Synod has just been announced: '*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*'. Synodality, understood as a pilgrim people walking along together and with God, is to be a constitutive dimension of the Church, with communal discernment as a central element. Already the documents from the Amazon Synod of 2020 encourage local communities to develop a participative style as they move along, and to trust that the Holy Spirit will guide them, lay and clergy, into ever-deepening fidelity to the gospel. Pope Francis has long been insistent, as throughout *Evangelii gaudium*, that communal discernment is the way forward for the People of God if they are to respond well to the emerging challenges of our world: the term recurs in that document some twenty times.

In one sense there is nothing new about synodality: in the OT the Hebrews walked along together in the wilderness, and they experienced the guiding hand of God who led them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (see Ex 13:21). The gospels too can be understood as synodal in that the disciples as a band of lay-persons, female and male, journeyed with Jesus (see Lk 8:1-3). Synodality brings us back to our identity as People of God, and opens new spaces for dialogue in the Church, with a new freedom that must be used responsibly. While it is still a largely unknown and mysterious concept both for Church leaders and the faithful, with its blossoming the Church will have come of age. The central insight, too easily overlooked, is that the ecclesial conversation involved must include God! This article stresses the crucial shift required if we are to take synodality seriously: from solely talking among ourselves about what we are to do we need

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also to engage directly with God to learn the divine will. This dimension of prayer may seem so obviously important as not to require mention, but how often does it happen?

LET'S PAUSE FOR A MOMENT'S PRAYER!

Over the years I have come to think that many ecclesial meetings resemble those of a family gathered for a case conference concerning a seriously ill member. In their heartfelt concern for the patient the members spend the time discussing among themselves the gravity of the situation and its possible remedies while ignoring the consultants who are present.

At many meetings I have attended – some of which I have led! – God may indeed be invited in, even if briefly, as when the Chair says: 'Let's pause *for a moment's prayer*'. A brief silence falls and then the agenda takes over, with facts, preferences, debates and opinions; sometimes too with power plays followed by silences born not of peace but fear. Reference may or may not be made to specifically Christian values: someone may ask almost apologetically, 'I wonder what God would want us to do?' but the atmosphere may not be congenial to the unfolding of that question. An outsider might wonder what, if anything, distinguishes the meeting from that of a humanist group.

Eventually the Chair intervenes, summarises the discussion, asks for a show of hands, and may wrap up proceedings with a perfunctory Our Father or Glory Be. Over time a pattern of dull predictability emerges both in the style of the meetings and the conclusions, leading to passive aggression or absenteeism. Meeker members may feel they wouldn't be missed by not showing up. Board meetings become 'bored meetings'. Surprisingly, *after* such meetings a surge of energy may emerge that was absent or suppressed during the meeting itself. Is that, I wonder, the sad sigh of the Spirit who is moving on to a more fertile situation?

THEY TALKED AMONG THEMSELVES

The all-too-human human approach sketched above echoes a recurring situation in the gospels: 'the scribes were *questioning in their hearts and discussing among themselves* (Mk 2:8); an argument arose *among the disciples* (Lk 9:49; Mt 20:24); the Emmaus-bound disciples were *talking with each other* (Lk 24:13-14); the Jews disputed *among themselves* about the bread of life (Jn 6:52).

The discussions between Jesus' disciples when among themselves become graced only if and when the matter is referred to Jesus, who

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‘knows their thoughts’ and who intervenes to reveal a divine value which transcends their divisions and misunderstandings. In the encounter with him liberating truth is achieved. So, for instance, the disciples learn with shock that in the kingdom of God the least in human reckoning is the greatest (Lk 9:49); that in the divine order of things it was necessary that the Messiah should suffer (Lk 24:26): and so forth.

MY THOUGHTS AND YOUR THOUGHTS

The shift from the human to the divine level is demanding and requires much unlearning. *‘As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’* (Is 55:8-9). Peter must have brooded long over Jesus’ criticism: *‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things’* (Mt 16:23). Despite his good intentions Peter’s unredeemed mind-set is leading him in a way opposed to the kingdom of God. The challenge to conversion he faced is ours too. Like him we must grapple with the imagination of God, who has a disconcerting habit of thinking ‘outside the box’ as shown for instance in Samuel’s efforts to identify who should be anointed king of Israel: *‘Do not look on his (Eliab’s) appearance or on the height of his stature, for I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’* (1 Sam:16:7).

As long as we remain confined in our own mind-sets we flounder through a meeting, and our conclusions have a hit-and-miss quality about them. Certainly a worthwhile meeting demands good preparation: we must laboriously gather the facts, identify options and so forth. But what happens next? How do we make our choices? At this point do we ask the Spirit to preside, so that our choices may be in tune with divine preferences? How can we become like the disciples who gather around the risen Lord, take to heart what they hear, and *‘bear fruit with patient endurance’* (Lk 8:15)?

THEY WERE AFRAID TO ASK HIM (MK 9:32)

Perhaps the elephant in the room is our fear to ask the Lord directly and upfront, ‘What are we to do?’ (see Acts 22:10). To do so would be so counter-cultural as to seem phoney, almost theatrical, like using a *deus ex machina*. Most of us, it has been said, are atheists before breakfast, but perhaps we remain so for the rest of the day! What does it mean to ask God directly to show us what to do?

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Supposing God does not respond? Is it better to look for responses seemingly more reliable than; ‘I sensed God tugging me ...’; ‘I feel unhappy about our proposal ...’; ‘I felt God was more interested in Option X than Y’? Better to substitute some bright idea of our own, quote the latest book, launch a subtle attack on someone else’s point of view! But have you, like me, ever come away from a meeting with the disturbing feeling that you hadn’t said what you felt you should say? If so what was going on – were you by any chance *ignoring* a divine prompt, silencing the Spirit?

There is a contemplative quality about asking God to touch our hearts; to wait in silent prayer is demanding, as those who consistently try it well know. RS Thomas speaks of ‘the movement of a curtain’ as sometimes the only sign that God is at the far end of our prayer, and we evade the emptiness by saying, ‘We haven’t time for prayer, and there’s a lot to be done’.

Perhaps our faith is weak, so that we doubt this whole business of God speaking to human beings. Scripture is proclaimed as ‘The Word of the Lord’ and we respond, ‘Thanks be to God’. But we doubt that the word might be spoken to us and through us as the good news in the present tense. We accept that in scripture God is portrayed as speaking to a glorious variety of characters, but we may doubt that God might be trying to speak ‘upfront and personal’ with the likes of us, *now*. Is our self-image too low? Would we even want this to happen? Like Amos we may protest that we are not prophets, only herdsmen and dressers of sycamore trees, but the Lord may be saying to us – as Vatican II does, ‘Go, prophesy!’ (Amos 7:14-15). We are told that God likes doing new things: ‘*I will make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known*’ (Is 48:6). This however is disconcerting to the well-ordered and tidy-minded, so let’s not go there! But in M P Gallagher’s words, the world of change is the theatre of the Spirit.

Perhaps we have a poor grasp of the language God chooses to use with us? Does God really address us through our emotions, feelings, tugs, aversions, through the struggles and mood-wars of the heart, through consolation and desolation? Perhaps we so control our own lives that we have little experience of chatting with God about our choices? Does pride, fear of change or of loss of power sap our enthusiasm for such a conversation? Are we embarrassed about sharing what went on – or didn’t go on – during our prayer for fear it might reveal our inner poverty, our paper-thin sense of God?

LED BY ANOTHER

St Ignatius was known as strong-willed but a recent biographer emphasises that the later Ignatius was always ‘led by Another’.

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He had come to see that God wishes to deal directly with each of us, and he would make no decision without consulting with God, ‘as a wise and loving Father’. He had long been ignorant of the remarkable fact that God was addressing him through his feelings and emotions, but after he internalised God’s lessons on his alternating moods of consolation and desolation, he had no doubt that the real God is always online, working on our hearts, orchestrating all things and inviting each of us into service. His advice to his followers was that ‘they should keep God always before their eyes’: this is the contemplative stance. We are to be watching out for the beckoning of God, whether in the demands of the gospel, the calls of the Church, the signs of the times, or the inner stirrings of the heart. For Ignatius, Christian living worth the name is a following of God who is drawing us from out front and from the future into the mystery of the Kingdom: we are – all of us – to be ‘led by Another’. There is radical joy in this, as pope Francis keeps reminding us: consolation is the prevailing resonance in the hearts of those who are trying to please God.

SPIRIT-LED MEETINGS

‘Bidden and unbidden, God will be present’ – so said the Delphic Oracle in the 5thc BC. A version of this quotation hung above C G Jung’s door in Switzerland, but it merits circulation at every meeting. It can remind each member that God is listening attentively to what is being said (see Mal 3:16; Jer 8:6). We can rightly say that the three divine Persons attend every meeting because decisions made at meetings shape our world for good or ill, and this world is the focus of intense divine concern. So the process of meetings must be so designed as to facilitate its members to encounter God and to struggle to harmonise with divine preferences.

A sense of mystery and anticipation grows with the belief that God will be present. Such meetings may be hard work but are never boring: encounters with the divine are not dull affairs! Gospel characters who met Jesus – the Samaritan woman at the well, Zacchaeus in his tree, the woman taken in adultery, the blind man – all were enlivened by the experience. The strategy outlined here sets up the possibility of such direct encounter with the Lord. When used well, it is found to liberate group energy, bring new life to meetings, and give participants the sense that the Holy Spirit truly does ‘speak to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7 etc). Even we Jesuits use it on occasion!

We can call this strategy a *Spirit-led conversation*, because it puts the Spirit at the centre. When all the relevant facts are to hand and the issue is boiled down to ‘What will we do?’ the group

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hands the Holy Spirit the mic! This cuts out endless opinion-airing and contradictory views, and ensures that everyone can be heard, because equal weight is given to the contribution of each. Instead of trying to hold to predetermined positions each tries to cultivate openness and uncertainty, in anticipation of the Spirit's preferred option. Faced with the mystery of God, each becomes a learner; status and rank have no priority; each contributes humbly and tentatively what they sense God may be asking. Solomon's prayer for wisdom is apposite here: *'I am only a little child: I do not know how to go out or come in... Give your servant therefore an understanding mind'* (1Kg 3:9; also Wisdom of Solomon 9). We seek *'the wisdom that comes from above'* (James 3:17). We make an act of faith that the God who created and sustains us is also committed to leading us to what is best. In asking the Spirit to animate the meeting, we will be gifted with a new awareness of the closeness of God in our lives.

PART TWO

A SPIRIT-LED EXERCISE IN DISCERNMENT

So much for preliminaries: it is time to see our strategy in practice. A Leader is presumed.

Agenda: The particular agenda of any Christian meeting for communal discernment will flow from the group's desire to *'seek the kingdom of God'* (Lk 12:31) or as Pope Francis puts it, *'We are united by the new commandment that Jesus left us, by the pursuit of the civilisation of love'* (*Beloved Amazon* 109).

Format: While I have set out below a number of steps the format must not be rigid but allow for flexibility and variation as occasion, time and the capacity of participants demand. Communal discernment can be a very human and untidy event, though conducted under the guidance of the Lord of history. In *Making Good Decisions* I offer a variety of practical examples of what actually went on.¹ The two core points are

1 Brian Grogan: *Making Good Decisions*. Dublin; Veritas 2015, pp 233-252.

The first example is of a parish which faced a change of membership of the Pastoral Council. Various models were proposed: finally one woman said, 'Why not let God take charge?' How this was achieved in practice is described.

The second example is of an impasse between a Parish Council and the Finance Committee about how best to use a considerable sum of money. The many options were boiled down to one, and the group went off to pray and report back: the total time allotted for the communal discernment was three hours. Happily a consensus was reached with 30 minutes to spare. I have found that it helps considerably if agreement is reached at the beginning that as much time will be spent in prayer as in discussion: I know of no better stimulus to brevity.

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- that solid time is given to praying privately over the issue in question:
- that the members report back on *what went on in that prayer* instead of simply resuming discussion of what each thinks should be done.

It was at one of these meetings that the phrase was coined, ‘Give the Spirit the mic!’ – to call contributors back to the task in hand when they were getting stuck in the groove of their personal agendas. In other words, ‘Don’t tell us what YOU were thinking about, but what GOD seemed to be whispering to you about the issue.’ Gentle humour works well!

Step One: The Leader welcomes the members, reminding them of the procedure, discussed beforehand, which will be followed. Then the time-commitment is set. A period of prayer to the Holy Spirit follows, each member asking to be open to the Holy Spirit, who is poured into our hearts (Rm 5:5) and waiting to speak with us (Rev 2:7). The image of Elijah waiting for the still small voice can be helpful (1Kg 19:12). (Time: 15 mins).

Step Two: Preparatory work may already have been done on the issue, so that the members are up to speed on the issue. Now the latest update on the facts is given, with clarifications as needed. The options should be taken singly; Yes or No to each. Many years ago I assisted at a discernment on the Option: ‘Should we buy a formation house in a very poor area?’ The listing of factors for and against the option united the group in common concern, and wonderfully concentrated the mind, as Samuel Johnson remarked about a prisoner being told that he is to be hanged in a fortnight.

When the Pro/Con listing is complete the communal discernment is ready to begin. The group is divided, ideally about six to a group to allow enough time for sharing. A suitable mix of personalities helps: each sub-group chooses a Chairperson who orchestrates its proceedings (15 mins)

Step Three: Everyone finds a suitable prayer space, asking the Spirit to enlighten them on the choice to be made. The focus is to be on what goes on in heart rather than head: heart is understood as the privileged place in which God meets each individual (15 minutes or more as time allows).

Step Four: The sub-groups gather in separate rooms and each person shares briefly what came up for them in the time of prayer. Everyone is encouraged to speak: the ‘small people’ so beloved of Jesus may otherwise be overawed by the fact that the PP or even the bishop is present! Who knows through whom the Spirit

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may choose to speak? God used the jawbone of an ass, wielded by Samson, to achieve divine purposes (Judges 15:16) (5 mins per person, total about 30 mins)

In this stage the Chair's task is to gently but firmly concentrate the focus on what is heart-felt rather than heady; e.g., 'We'll come back to that idea later, but had you any sense of attraction to either side of the option?' Responses might run as follows: 'I felt that God might be saying ...' 'I was against the idea at first but it warmed up for me.' 'I felt energy for the option, even though it would be demanding.'

Each sharing is followed by a silent pause without interventions.

Step Five: When everyone has spoken, a silent space follows in which each reflects prayerfully on what touched them when the others were sharing. Each then shares the fruit of this reflection (30 mins).

Again, no comments. Each is listening out for the whisper of the Spirit through the various contributions.

Step Six: The Chair thanks the members for trying to allow the Spirit's voice be heard through them, and invites suggestions on where the group seems to be beckoned, and what it wants to report back to the plenary. Clarifications may lead toward consensus (15 mins or more)

Step Seven: A plenary session. The Leader searches for signs of consensus – unity, peace, consolation, energy, joy and a growth in love for God and neighbour.

Ideally agreement will emerge on what to do next. This will involve, if required, submission of the agreed proposal to a higher authority, and consultation of others affected by the proposal. Time for confirmation of the intended action is important. Feasibility Studies, Action Plans, Pilot Projects would follow.

A brief reference to the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) may help the participants to realise that what has just gone on is linked to what went on in the Early Church. The same Spirit is at work. The issue then was whether gentiles had to be circumcised, as in Jewish tradition, before being baptised. The Spirit brought unity to the divided Church and led it into freedom, apostolic commitment, mission and joy. Ideally this present group can also say, '*It has seemed good to the Holy spirit and to us*' (Acts 15:28) (30 mins)

Conclusion: Much could be added to flesh out the intricacies of communal discernment: the importance of believing that God is fully engaged; the need for inner freedom and a pure desire for God's will; the ability to listen well to others' hearts as well as one's own; the capacity to avoid one's hidden agendas; the recognition of true consolation, of which the paradigm is Jesus who

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managed through thick and thin to 'please the Father' (Jn 8:29); the willingness to exercise the prophetic gift of trying to articulate the promptings and nudging's of the Spirit; and much more.² The process mapped out above is unequivocally Spirit-centred – an act of faith in God's graced guidance. It supposes that the still small voice of the Spirit can be heard when we silently wait for God. When Elijah came out of his cave God spoke with him: we too need to get out of our caves and stand unprotected on the mountain, so that God's grace may illuminate our dull minds and soften our shrivelled hearts. When the meeting goes well, the members will experience for themselves 'the burning of heart' that came to the Emmaus couple when Jesus was talking to them on the road (Lk 24:32).

The process 'works'!

POSTSCRIPT

Learning from the Amazon Synod, October 2019

It would be enriching to learn the process used in the recent Synod. It included formal and liturgical prayer; doubtless too the participants gave time to private prayer. One hopes that the crowded schedule allowed for the key elements of personal prayer followed by a sharing of its fruits.

A great deal of knowledge was made available and required serious study. In an atmosphere that was open and frank, Francis would have demanded of his fellow-bishops 'a continuous and profound conversion of hearts, possible only with the grace of the Holy Spirit'. This call to conversion echoes his own story of being 'a sinner yet mercifully chosen': through it he came to an extraordinary level of inner freedom.

While Pope Francis' *Beloved Amazon* is a disappointment to many good people, it reveals that communal discernment is not a DIY event, nor is it accomplished by a majority vote, nor yet is it a deal-making or a Win/Lose dynamic. Rather than being neatly wrapped up it may be spread over considerable time. It may also involve the graced emergence of a higher viewpoint: participants who in good faith differ from one another may find, sooner or later, that God is offering a greater gift than either side had hoped for. '*The Spirit can work amid differences*' (108) and opposing approaches can be resolved on a higher plane. Humble prayer can open up a creative vista in which the right step forward is revealed by '*overflow*' in Pope Francis' happy term (105). This overflow of

2 For a detailed examination of the dynamics of meetings see Brady, P & Grogan B: *Meetings Matter: Spirituality and Skills for Meetings*. Dublin; Veritas, 2009.

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grace may weave the conflicting values into a surprising synthesis, thus enabling consensus or even unanimity to emerge. We may hope that Pope Francis is waiting for one of these ‘overflow’ moments when ‘*authentic solutions*’ will be shown us by God in regard to the neuralgic issues of deaconesses and the ordination of suitable married men.

Fasting. The broadest definition of fasting is that it is the voluntary denial of the otherwise normal function of eating and drinking, for some chosen aim. The motivation for such practices has until recent times been largely religious. It could arise because of prescription by authority and this kind of fasting has had a long and rather troubled history. It would quite often be inspired by the liturgical seasons. It could simply be voluntarily undertaken, as part of a penitential programme to accompany prayer and almsgiving, especially in Lent. Today, it is often undertaken for health reasons. In early centuries it was likely among monks to lead to prayer rather than follow from it. ‘Bodily abstinence was the necessary preparation for one’s real prayer.’ Religious fasting can be motivated by, or accompanied by, the desire to give alms; it can also be put in abeyance because of the demands of charity, as many examples from the lives of the Desert Fathers attest.

– P. FINTAN LYONS, OSB, *Food, Feast and Fast*. 2020 (Dublin: Columba Books) p. 349.

Religious Spaces in Transition: Challenge and Opportunity

Myra Hayes

As a new year and a new decade begins, reflection on the events of the previous year allows for a certain amount of analysis and evaluation. Dominated by Brexit and mass protests in France and beyond, one event in 2019 seemed to have had a profound effect. The news of the fire that devastated the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris on April 15th 2019, the Monday of Holy Week, resonated around the world. Many people recalled their visits to the Cathedral in the past and most felt a genuine sense of loss for what had been the symbol of Paris for hundreds of years before the erection of the Eiffel Tower in 1889. News that the damage, though extensive, was not beyond repair was met with a collective sigh of relief worldwide. It was particularly comforting to learn that the sublime twelfth-century Rose windows had been saved, and the fact that the chaplain of the Parisian firefighters, Père Jean-Marc Fournier, had saved the Blessed Sacrament and the relic of the Crown of Thorns in a heroic gesture reminiscent of his action following the Bataclan attack in 2015 was extensively reported. The dramatic imagery of the collapse of the spire on the night of the fire seemed to have inspired genuine grief, so the words of President Macron committing the French nation to restoration and rebuilding were welcomed far beyond the borders of France. The image of the damaged interior of the building with the gold cross remaining intact which was circulated throughout the world the next day was profoundly moving in its symbolism. Less widely reported was the fact that a fire also broke out, at the same time, in the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem – the third holiest site in Islam – which was kept under control. In an opinion piece in Newsweek on the day following both fires Craig Considine commented as follows:

“The building represents much more than Christian identity – it serves as a reminder of the French peoples’ will to persevere and

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their aspirations for France as well as humanity and Christendom ... A similar kind of symbolism holds true for Muslims and their connection to al-Aqsa. The mosque is much more than a place that holds the five daily prayers. Like Notre Dame, al-Aqsa has a complex history of religious tension, warfare and occupation. Originally built by Caliph Umar on the grounds of a former Byzantine building, al-Aqsa was imagined as a continuation and perfection of Judaism and Christianity”.¹

The potential destruction of these sacred buildings represents an enormous challenge for Christians and Muslims and provides an opportunity for reflection upon the importance of their places of worship as well as focusing on the extraordinary achievements of previous generations.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACES OF WORSHIP

As the religious and cultural landscape in Ireland continues to undergo radical change how important is it to ask questions about the *future* of our many religious spaces? This question was posed at a recent symposium held in the University of Limerick.² Organised by Dr. Niamh NicGhabhann, Assistant Dean for Research, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, it interrogated how our places of worship are deeply *embedded* in our sense of identity and values. An important reminder that the future of many of these buildings is uncertain, this is a valuable and timely conversation which is worth having before the problem becomes insolvable. Each of the contributors drew from their own areas of research, focusing on an understanding of these buildings in terms of their past, present and potential future functions in society.

The keynote address, delivered by Dr. Sarah Roddy of the University of Manchester, highlighted the essential role played by voluntary funding by the Irish laity over a 70 -year period following the Great Famine. Entitled “Pray for the Donor: Money and the material in Irish Catholic Church interiors”, Dr. Roddy’s research points to the development of an increasingly cash-based economy, which led to both prominent and anonymous donations contributing enormously to the construction and decoration of hundreds of churches and religious buildings during this period in Irish history. Referring to means of funding such as pew rent,

1 Craig Considine, “Notre Dame and Al-Aqsa Fires Give Christians and Muslims a Chance to Work together to Repair Their Sacred Spaces” in *Newsweek*, 16/4/19 <https://www.newsweek.com/notre-dame-al-aqsa-mosque-fire-christians-muslims-work-together-sacred-spaces-1398119> Accessed 21/1/20.

2 Symposium - *Religious Spaces in Transition*, University of Limerick, 16th January, 2020.

collection boxes, Nativity shrines, and candles, as well as private and anonymous donations motivated by sincere religious faith, it demonstrates that Irish Catholic church interiors are complicated spaces. As well as being an indicator of the experience of ordinary people in post-Famine Ireland, it is also a record of the interaction of religious communities with their local church. Examples are so numerous and ubiquitous that there has been a tendency to take it all for granted. Dr. Roddy's research indicates that this is about to change, and indications are that extraordinary stories of devotion and self-sacrifice are hidden within the walls and furnishings of these buildings. This generosity continued up to relatively recently, when in the commemoration of the Marian year of 1954, the Church of Mount St. Alphonsus in Limerick city – famous for its annual novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help – crowned the icon of Mary and Jesus with jewellery donated by devotees of the icon. The generous response provided gold for the crown, with enough left over to make a large gold monstrance and chalice. Included in the jewellery donated were gold wedding rings from the local community.³

Dr. Richard Butler of the University of Leicester gave an interesting perspective on the “difficult” heritage of some ecclesiastical buildings focusing on the building of Galway Cathedral on the site of the former Galway jail. The links to the Maamtrasna murders and the execution of Myles Joyce, widely believed to have been innocent of the crime provided the background to this complicated history.⁴ Dr. Gillian O'Brien from Liverpool John Moores University developed this theme referring to difficult heritage and dark tourism, pointing out that in 1796 there were 51 jails in Ireland one of which, Kilmainham gaol, has become a sanctified space because of its association with the leaders of 1916.

Jessie Castle's talk on Irish *convent buildings* of the 19th century centred on the enormous growth in the building of convents in 19th century Ireland, indicating that in 1801 there were 11 convents in the country, and by 1901, this had increased to 368. This was of course attributable to the growth of religious orders following Catholic emancipation in 1829, as well as the remarkable resourcefulness of the sisters involved. Dr. Danielle O'Donovan, Programme Manager for Nano Nagle Place in Cork built on this legacy, documenting the transformation of South Presentation Convent from a formal to an informal learning environment. Closed in the late 1990s it was re-opened as a public space four years ago,

3 See *Church of Mount St. Alphonsus, 150th year Anniversary Guide*, (2015), 49

4 See Lorna Siggins, “A Wrongful Hanging in Connemara, 1881” in *The Irish Times*, May 20th 2016.

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with the historical buildings regenerated and blending with the new buildings such as the café and Heritage Centre. Continuing the social justice ethos of its foundress, the building is used by the Cork Migrant Centre and the Lantern Community Project as well as by groups of creative writers, poets and musicians. This project is a very impressive example of what can be achieved with the vision and will to overcome the challenges posed by buildings that have outlived their original purpose.

The symposium resumed following lunch with key insights by Ankie Petersen and Sander Ummelen on the situation in Holland, pointing out the challenges faced by the many churches and their administrations.⁵ Speaking engagingly of the transition processes and change management necessary in an environment where churches are losing 287 people per day, they asked the very pertinent question – Who Cares? It would appear from the following session, which included input from all the participants and attendees, that there is a considerable amount of concern from academics, archivists, historians, museum curators, environmental groups, and educators. The talking points focused on sources, archives and texts which should form part of the exploration of the histories of these buildings, identifying the stakeholders, and what questions need to be asked about understanding these buildings and their past, present and future functions in our societies. The answers to these questions will be crucial in setting out a path for the future of our churches and religious spaces.

The next stage of the symposium involved a visit to the John Henry Newman campus in Mary Immaculate College in Limerick. This former convent and female orphanage, built in the nineteenth century, has been successfully adapted to the needs of a modern third-level institution, housing the Graduate School. The tour of the campus was facilitated by one of the architects of the refurbished building, Cathal Quinn, who pointed out the challenges of adapting the building to a contemporary setting.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Following the tour of the building, there followed a response to the day from Dr. Joseph MacMahon, OFM, and Professor John McCafferty of UCD. Dr. MacMahon reflected that the Church has always been in a state of transition, and that it is now going through a radical period of change, becoming more *faith centred*. Observing that religious spaces point to a deeper reality and mystery that

5 According to Peter Doorackers, an editor at the *Katholiek Nieuwsblad* Dutch society has not yet reached “peak secularisation”, and the “biggest wave of church closures” was still to come. See “More Dutch churches set to close, Catholic newspaper warns” in *The Irish Catholic*, January 23rd 2020, 26.

have profound associations with collective memory and meaning for religious communities, he referred to three reactions to the fire in Notre Dame. The *first* reaction was at the popular level of genuine grief for the loss of a building that represented a world that was precious to them. The *second* reaction was an elitist sense of cultural and aesthetic loss, and the *third* was the reaction expressed by the Archbishop of Paris, Michel Aupetit, who drew attention to the *raison d'être* of the building and to what happens inside it. This leads to the question of what its mission is *now*, in the wake of the catastrophe, and indeed, to what form the rebuilding will take. In a letter sent in Autumn 2019 to the 47,000 donors worldwide who contributed to the rebuilding, the Archbishop pointed out that the Cathedral fund continues to receive over 140 donations per week, assuring those donors that the Notre Dame foundation, of which he is President, continues in dialogue with the French authorities regarding the restoration programme.⁶ Interestingly, on the 16th July 2019, the French Parliament passed a law requiring that the building be rebuilt exactly as it appeared before the fire, indicating sensitivity to the feelings of those who contributed.

The symposium concluded with a response from Dr. John McCafferty, who emphasised the importance of adapting sacred buildings with *sensitivity* to their original purpose and the cultural patrimony that they represent. His reference to the 'widow's mite'⁷ and the potential pushback from communities was a reminder of the deep connection between these buildings and the people from the original communities who sacrificed so much to bring them into being. The story of this wave of religious building in Ireland is a complicated one. The determination and energy of those involved, viewed within the context of post-Famine Ireland, was breath-taking. Certainly, abuses of power occurred, but equally certainly, there were extraordinary acts of generosity and self-sacrifice involved. The individuals involved in the building of the great Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages shared an ideal with those who contributed their energy and money to the building of churches, cathedrals and other religious buildings in nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland. All of them aspired towards transcendence, an aspiration that has receded considerably in our time.

NOTRE DAME REVISITED

Bearing this in mind, it is worth returning to the events of 15th April

6 A reminder that Notre Dame Cathedral has been the property of the French State since 1789, although the Archdiocese of Paris is responsible for the upkeep and care of the building.

7 Cf. Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4.

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2019, and to the actions of Père Fournier, the priest who risked his life to save the Blessed Sacrament and the relic of the Crown of Thorns from the flames. In an interview held two days after the fire he described how he and the Chief Sergeant of the Fire Department entered the building, and had to locate the keys to the sanctuary and the reliquary as pieces of burning wood dropped from the ceiling of the building. Having rescued the Blessed Sacrament he blessed the cathedral with it, an action he described as an act of faith. “I asked Jesus - whom I believe is really present in these hosts – to combat the flames and to preserve the edifice dedicated to his mother. This benediction coincided with the start of the fire in the North Tower. And, at the same time, its extinction! Without doubt, it was Providence ... the two belfries were saved.”⁸ When he had ensured the safety of the relics and the Blessed Sacrament he climbed up the South tower, which was accessible, with the Fire Chief. When they arrived at the top of the tower, they saw that the roof had been consumed by the fire, and the cathedral was in flames. Asked what feelings he had experienced at this moment, he replied as follows:-

‘We were about to enter Holy Week. We had begun Lent with the distribution of ashes, and that phrase “Remember that you are dust and that into dust you will return”. That condition of dust is closely aligned to our humanity. But also, it is necessary to view it from the perspective of the Resurrection. I had, at the same time, this great sadness at the loss of an extraordinary good, this great framework of the cathedral. And, at the same time, this indescribable joy lying in the hope of the Resurrection. I knew that the cathedral would be rebuilt, more beautiful, stronger, and more alive.’⁹

Asked to clarify what he meant by “more alive”, he responded:

‘Yes, because many of these buildings are shells that are a little dead. For these religious monuments, there is a risk that they can become whitened sepulchres. In the history of Western Christianity these buildings were burnt, collapsed, and were attacked. What happened? Everyone rolled up their sleeves and rebuilt. There is a kind of inherent life in these buildings which accompanies the daily life of Christians.’¹⁰

8 Hugues Lefèvre “Père Fournier: “Dans Notre-Dame en feu, j’ai récupéré Jésus et beni la cathédrale”, Numéro 2154, 17/4/2019, <https://www.famillechretienne.fr/boutique/magazines/2154>, Accessed 5/2/20.

9 Ibid. (Translated from the French by the author).

10 Ibid.

CONCLUSION

This identification of our religious spaces with the life of Christians, lies at the heart of how we plan for their future in an increasingly secular world. While church attendance in Ireland remains relatively high in comparison to the rest of Europe this is likely to change in the future. The symposium at the University of Limerick started a conversation that many of us might be reluctant to engage with, but it is nonetheless necessary in order to ensure that the future use of our religious spaces respects the integrity of their original purpose. The words of Père Fournier describing both his sadness and joy when watching the roof in Notre Dame in flames seem appropriate as Ireland faces this next phase of her history.

Meeting God? Every human being can meet God. This happens all the time, even though most people are unaware of it. Christians believe that experiencing deep joy has to do with experiencing God's presence. This is especially true for joy that leaves a good aftertaste following the event that caused the Joy. You can experience that joy while praying or in the church but just as well at work, in the kitchen, in a museum or walking in nature. That joy can be strong. It is often quiet and almost unnoticeable. Joy that continues to resonate says something about where and how God is present in a person's life.

- NIKOLAS SINTOBIN, SJ, *Did Jesus really exist?*. 2020. (Dublin: Messenger Publications). p. 20.

Two Interconnected Trinities: A Catholic Reflection

Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman

The infinite God has never been and never will be understood by finite human beings; infinite divine reality simply cannot be fitted into finite human brains, categories and language. It is not oratorical hyperbole when Jesus says in Jewish Matthew's gospel that "no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt 11:27). The nature of God, therefore, has always been hotly debated among theologians, with charge and countercharge of heresy being exchanged between them. It all started in the early Church in a debate over those writings that the early Christians accepted as their Bible.

The Old Testament is a thoroughly Jewish book, very down to earth, very short on deep theological thinking. To know God means simply to know God's name. When God calls Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, the first question Moses puts to God is a question about God's name. "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them 'the God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me 'what is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God replies: "I am who I am," essentially all you need know is that I exist, you need know nothing else. "Say this to the people of Israel, 'Yahweh the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you;' this is my name forever" (Exodus 3:13-15). And so it was: the God of Israel was named Yahweh (Lord) and to know God was to know that name, a name "glorious" (Psalm 72:19), "exalted" (Psalm 148:13), and "a revealer of mysteries" (Daniel 2:47). To that name and that God belong the "kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory" (Daniel 2:37) to be apportioned as Yahweh wills.

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TWO INTERCONNECTED TRINITIES

The New Testament introduces new theological mysteries and the history of the interpretation of those mysteries demonstrates that theological polarization is not new in the Catholic Church. Yahweh is now called the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the only Son in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18). This divine Son “became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) and is confessed by doubting Thomas as “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28). The Son “reflects the glory of God and bears the very character of his [God’s] nature” (Hebrews 1:3), and thus he makes the Father known (John 1:18). He does not make the Father known as the prophets made Yahweh known in the Old Testament, namely, by their words. Rather, Jesus makes God known in his very person, in his being and action. His words and actions reveal that God is a faithful God (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Thess 3:3), a loving God (John 3:16; Rom 8:37, 39; Eph 2:4), a compassionate God (Matt 18:14; 1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9), a merciful God (Luke 1:72, 78; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 2:4), a forgiving God (Matt 6:14; Mark 11:25; Luke 15:1-32). They also crucially reveal that God stands firmly with the poor (Matt. 19:21; Mark 12: 42-43; Luke 14:13, 21; John 13:29; James 2:2-6), and that “you always have the poor with you” (Matt 26:11; Mark 14:7).

In addition to its teaching on the divine Father and Son, the New Testament also introduces a doctrine of a Holy Spirit. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is said “to be with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:18) and her husband Joseph, troubled by her pregnancy without any contribution from him, is told that “what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:20). When Jesus is baptized by John the Baptizer, John “saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him” (Matt 3:16; John 1:32). When he sends his apostles out to preach, Jesus instructs them that “it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt 10:20). Paul assures his followers that “God’s Spirit dwells in you” (1 Cor 3:16) and that “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). These are but a few of the many testimonies to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. They are all summarized, and the divinity of the Spirit equal to that of the Father and the Son placed beyond doubt, in Jesus’ solemn missioning of his apostles before he returned to his Father: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

TRINITY

There is revealed, then, in the New Testament what became the Catholic doctrine of Trinity, a doctrine of one God in three

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“persons.” That doctrine was easy to state but not so easy to explain theologically. It stated only descriptively what God looks like to human beings but did not explain or define what God is in Godself. In the post-New Testament Church, theologians sought an answer to that latter question and many explanations were offered. Sabellius, an early third-century Roman priest, and his followers believed and taught that there is only one God, one divine person, who is made manifest to women and men in three modes: a Father who is Creator, a Son who is Redeemer, and a Holy Spirit who is Sanctifier. Contesting this theology was another that came to be called Subordinationism. This theology taught that God was, indeed, a trinity as revealed in the New Testament but that in the trinity the Son was not equal to but subordinate to the Father and the Spirit was not equal to but subordinate to the Son. Contesting with these two theologies was, perhaps, the easiest theology for simple folks to grasp, namely, tritheism that taught that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were each a separate God, so that there were three Gods instead of the biblical one God. Pope Dionysius (259-268) convoked a Synod in Rome to settle the trinitarian debate, but the Synod did not succeed in resolving it. No final resolution was achieved until the end of the fourth century, provoked by the teaching of an early fourth-century priest of Alexandria named Arius.

ARIAN DEBATE

Arius taught that the Son was not equal to the Father, that he was not divine but a creature of the Father’s like every other creature. The Arian debate can appear to be a purely theoretical one, the sort of question theologians raise in their spare time, what precisely is the relation of the Son to the Father? It is, however, far from a purely theoretical question, it was treated as a very practical question, one having to do intimately with our salvation. From the New Testament, which first raises the question of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we also learn that our eternal salvation is won for us by the life and death of the Son made man. Arius threatened that claim of salvation by teaching that the Son was not divine but a creature no different from the rest of us. Since he is a creature and not God, his life and death have no more value with God than the life and death of any other creature. We are not saved by the Son of God. That practical question divided Constantine’s Empire in the fourth century, St. Jerome complaining that “the whole world groaned to find itself Arian,” and in 325 Constantine summoned a Council to Nicea to put an end to the polarization in his Empire.

TWO INTERCONNECTED TRINITIES

NICEA AND CONSTANTINOPLE

Every time they attend Mass Catholics pray (somewhat glibly?) the Nicene solution to the question of the relation of the Father and the Son. “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty ... We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God ... true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.” The Son is not a creature, Nicea taught, but “true God from true God” and “consubstantial with the Father.” He was *not* made or created but begotten by the Father. The Creed continues: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.” Catholics tend to call this Creed the Nicene Creed, but that is historically incorrect. While the Council of Nicea settled the relation of the Father and the Son, it left *unsettled* the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. That question raged for another fifty years, many denying the divinity of the Spirit as Arius had denied the divinity of the Son. It was settled in another Council, at Constantinople in 381. The bishops at Constantinople reaffirmed the faith of Nicea and added to it the teaching that the Spirit is one in being and coeternal with the Father and the Son and, therefore, to be “adored and glorified” just like them. It is the Nicene Creed with its Constantinopolitan addition that Catholics pray at mass.

A SECOND TRINITY

We are fully aware that this excursus into the theology of the Trinity might appear as theoretical to readers in the twenty-first century as it did to the followers of the Christ in the fourth century. We insist that it is no more theoretical than those debates in the early Church. We want to link it to *another* largely ignored trinity, often used only as an imprecation by Irish Catholics, that of *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph*. Both trinities, we will argue, have major practical implications for Catholics.

Mark begins his gospel with the confession of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The Greek word translated in English as gospel is *euaggelion* which means good news, and the good news that Mark and the earliest Christians have heard is that the promises of Israel’s God have now been fulfilled, that the redemption of Israel has been achieved in Jesus the Christ. In ancient Israel, anointing with oil was a symbolic ritual that was thought to imbue the one anointed with a power inhering in the oil. Priests were anointed, prophets were anointed, kings were anointed (1 Sam 10:1; 16:13) and ever afterwards were known as the *anointed one*, in Hebrew *masiah*, in Greek *Xristos*, in English Messiah or Christ. In the second book of Samuel, God promises a

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dynasty to the anointed king David: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father and he shall be my Son” (2 Sam 7:16). The dynasty of David ended in humiliation in the Babylonian exile (587-539 BCE) and by the time of Jesus had not been restored but, based on God’s infallible dynastic promise, there was expectation that God would finally raise up the seed of David, the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ. That the early Christians believed that Jesus is that Messiah/Christ is evident in the scenes of both his baptism and transfiguration and of the voice from heaven identifying him in the words of 2 Samuel 7:16 and of Psalm 2:7: “my beloved Son” (Mark 1:11; 9:7; Matt 3:17; 17:5; Luke 3:22; 9:35).

What are we to make of the fact that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ, God’s ultimate messenger? He himself supplied the answer to that question when he invited his disciples to “Follow me” (Mark 1:17; Matt 4:19; Luke 5:27). That “follow me” did not mean follow me to Nazareth or Jerusalem, though that invitation was later issued (Mark 10:32-45). It meant follow me in my life and in my actions, and his life and actions were a life and actions of service. “Whoever would be great among you,” he instructed his disciples, “must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.” The Son of man, the Messiah/Christ, he continued, “came not be to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:43-45). Jesus the Christ and the Son of God was and is the person in whom the divine and human intersect in the world, and his followers are challenged to continue to be that point of intersection. They are challenged to bring God to the world and the world to God. Thirty years ago, French Dominican theologian Yves Congar submitted *two signs* for this kind of holiness, signs that have only been enhanced in the intervening years.

The *first* sign is that the following of the Christ is not something to be done only by attendance at Sunday mass or some other church ritual. It is something to be done in the whole of life. Belief in the Christ, and actions in accord with that belief, is not an overcoat to be worn on Sunday and shed for the rest of the week, it is a personal commitment that must inform the whole of life. The proper function of Christ-ians, the Second Vatican Council taught, is to “work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven” (*Lumen Gentium* 31). The *second* sign is that the modern-day saint is someone who achieves holiness in the day to day circumstances of everyday life in the world, not in a retreat from the world. Mother Theresa of Calcutta perfectly exemplifies such sanctity, penetrating deeply into a spiritually impoverished world and revealing in it the love of the Christ and of his God.

Matt Talbot, living among and serving Dublin's poor, is another shining example.

Both of these saints offer to the world the message that the world is nothing and service in the name of the Christ is everything. Their lives, so obviously from and for God, are a daily "demonstration of the power of the Spirit" and that faith in the Christ rests "not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4-5). There was a time in the not too distant past in Christian spirituality when Catholics were encouraged to retreat from the world, to be strangers in the world. The Second Vatican Council changed that. It taught, as we have already noted, that Christ-ians, "led by the spirit of the gospel ... can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven" (*Lumen Gentium* 31). The followers of the Christ are called to be an active presence in the world; they are called and challenged to work daily for the world's betterment (*Gaudium et Spes* 43). This precisely echoes the call and challenge Jesus the Christ made in his time to those Pharisees who "preach but do not practice" (Matt 23:3-23). Sadly, we have abundant evidence of the presence of such Pharisees in the Catholic Church in our time.

MARY

Another shining example of such everyday sanctity is *Mary*, the mother of Jesus the Christ. Mary's sanctity is largely hidden in the gospels, they do not tell us much about her life or her actions; she very much takes a second place to her son and his messianic mission (see Luke 2:41-51; Mark 3:31-35). What they do tell us, however, is significant, and what is most significant is emphasized by the angel Gabriel to her and us: "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you...You have found favour with God" (Luke 1:28-30). Mary, the unmarried virgin from Nazareth, has found favour with God. What is that if not a profound proclamation of her sanctity? Gabriel also gave Mary another message that led her to the service one would expect from the mother of the Christ. "Your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren" (Luke 1:36). Wishing to be of help to Elizabeth in her old-age pregnancy, which could be expected to be difficult, "Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth" (Luke 1:39) and "remained with her about three months" (Luke 1:56), presumably until Elizabeth's child was born.

Then there was the wedding at Cana. Mary noticed that the wine was running out and, wanting to save the young couple

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embarrassment, pointed out to her son “They have no wine” and, even when he appeared not to be interested, told the servants “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:3-5). What he told them was to fill six “twenty or thirty” gallon stone jars with water which he changed into better wine than that previously served. John comments that “this, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11). We point out the obvious: Jesus the Christ did this first of his signs at the behest of Mary his mother and nothing has changed; he continues to do signs for his followers at the behest of his mother. In search of the good wine of Christian action in the everyday world, therefore, we pray the words of the Magnificat: “From this day all generations will call me blessed, the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.” We have no doubt that Mary’s recognition of the great things God has done for her include her *ongoing* supplication for God to do, and enable his followers to do, great things in God’s name. Her plea to her son on our behalf today, “they have no Christ-like actions,” is every bit as effective as her plea for the wedding feast at Cana, “they have no wine.”

JOSEPH

The gospels tell us even less about Joseph’s everyday life than about Mary’s, but again what they do tell us is significant. They tell us that Joseph was “a just man” (Matt 1:19), offering in support of that judgment his behavior towards his betrothed Mary who, “before they came together,” that is, before they had sexual intercourse, “was found to be with child” (Matt 1:18). Joseph was shaken when he learned this, he did not yet know that the child was of the Holy Spirit. The law allowed him to divorce the illegitimately pregnant Mary but, “being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, he resolved to divorce her quietly” (Matt 1:19). It was following this decision that God intervened in Joseph’s life, sending an angel to inform him that the child “conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” and that her pregnancy was “to fulfill what Yahweh had spoken by the prophet, ‘Behold a maiden shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel’ (which means God with us)” (Matt 1:23). It required *deep faith* from Joseph to believe that this apparently illegitimate child was of the Holy Spirit and was God with us, but he did not hesitate. He believed God’s word delivered by the angel and accepted his role as the protector of Mary and her child, accepted to form them all into a Holy Family. That role led him, we know, to take them off into the distant land of Egypt to protect them from the marauding agents of the jealous Herod seeking to kill the child, to care for them there (which could not

TWO INTERCONNECTED TRINITIES

have been easy in a foreign land), and to return them home when he got word of Herod's death (Matt 2:13-23).

CONCLUSION

The argument of this brief essay is a simple one: Catholics have available to them for their support two trinities, one divine which they acknowledge when they are in some kind of need, and one human which they seldom acknowledge, except as an imprecation. The two are intimately related. The *divine trinity* communicated and continues to communicate with the human one via its third person, God the Holy Spirit, via messenger angels, and ultimately and incredibly via its second person, God the Son, become human and son of Mary in Mary's womb. That Jesus would then be legitimately confessed as son of Mary and putatively Joseph and would form with Mary and Joseph what we are calling a *human trinity*, though it is more often called, of course, the Holy Family. That human trinity communicated and continues to communicate with the divine trinity via the Holy Spirit and ultimately the divine Son became human in Mary's womb as the beloved Son in both trinities. We do not know, nor can we begin to imagine, all that human trinity communicates to and receives from the divine trinity, but we do know some of what that communication is about. It is about their *pleas* when they notice that Christ-ians have no more wine, no more faith, hope, charity, compassion, mercy and again need of the intervention of the Christ, the son of Mary, and the Son of God. How blessed and lucky are we Christ-ians in an era in which, as never before perhaps, both the divine and the human trinities are practically unknown.

Ecumenical Conversations. The importance of monastic life to the ecumenical conversation is thus not simply in the undoubted fact that monks and nuns of different confession are able to relate to one another freely and appreciatively, significant and creative as that undoubtedly is. I have been suggesting that there are aspects of monasticism as such that enable us to understand more fully some things about ecumenism, and that make monastic communities crucial partners in all ecumenical encounter.

— ROWAN WILLIAMS, *The Way of St. Benedict* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum) p. 63.

Easter Elegy

Kevin O’Gorman

Army convoys carrying
coffins through Italian
cities to crematoria,
instead of images
of teeming tourists
visiting Verona,
flocking to Florence,
roaming in Rome
when a line from
Livy – *vere ineunte* –
with Spring coming on,
lingers from Leaving
Cert Latin. Verdi’s
record reduced to
the requiem, can
a Caravaggio cast
light amidst the
darkness, canvassing
Christ’s glory to
radiate its healing ray.

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Ten Covid-19 “Outcomes” for the Church

+ Brendan Leahy

TS Eliot’s line about having the *experience* but missing the *meaning* is a spur to us to not let the Covid-19 experience pass us by in vain. What is it saying to us? In what direction is it pointing us? Can we name what we’ll take away with us from this time?

Each of us will answer that at different levels. A picture-cartoon sent to me recently reminded me of this. It showed a dog with some mud half-way up his feet but another dog alongside him up to his neck in mud and the line said: “How deep is the mud? All depends on who you ask. We all go through the same stuff differently”.

On a personal level, it’s been a weird time for Bishops and priests. It’s as if someone suddenly put the brakes on and we’ve had to cope with the sudden jerk. All kinds of emotions and reactions have emerged in us. In a webinar Sr. Maryanne Loughry has explored the issues that have arisen on the personal level: stress and worry, hyper vigilance and particularly a sense of grieving with the sudden loss of so much that was part and parcel of everyday Church life.¹ She maintains Church personnel too experience symptoms of the collective grief going on in society at large with normal life so disrupted. And there are several stages of grief, not all in a nice neat order.

There is value in naming and recognising what we are going through on a personal level. In Limerick Diocese, just before the Covid-19 virus hit, we had a clergy conference with a question that had prompted good engagement: “who are you when you are not *doing* your job?”. Little did we think it was preparing us for what was coming just a few weeks later. The more personal analysis of the impact of the virus crisis on priests is an exploration that is being taken up by Fr. Hugh Lagan SMA.

In this short article, however, my focus is different. I want simply to suggest *ten* possible “outcomes” from the experience of

1 See Maryanne Loughry RSM, “Covid-19: How to face the Social and Personal Grief”. International Union Superiors General webinar, 21 April 2020

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these months. I offer it as a kind of memo of the experience, what is it we are learning or being reminded of. Each point is briefly stated, it would require teasing out but that's for another day.

The Church is not the building or simply an institution. This sounds obvious but so often when the word “church” is used, the building or organisational institution is what comes spontaneously to mind for many. Suddenly, with the virus in some cases the buildings were closed but everywhere the organisational structures severely curtailed. And yet the Church remained alive. We were being reminded the Church is the People. We remember that in Irish the church building is referred to as “teach an Phobail” (the People’s house). The Church is a People and this, as we know, is a theme underlined by the Second Vatican Council. In our Irish history, we know many episodes of institutional collapse but the People still managed to communicate the Faith.

The sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are like an “Operating System” that is always active. We only get baptised once. We only get confirmed once. And there is a reason for that. When we are baptised, we become a new creation, children of God. The Spirit is poured into us. In Confirmation, we are strengthened for mission with a new outpouring of the Spirit. With the normal attendance at Mass interrupted and reception of the Eucharist gone, the Covid-19 crisis brought a new recognition that the basic “operating system” that makes us Christians continues to be operative. We have witnessed in these months many baptised faithful, maybe many who don’t go regularly to Mass, living selflessly and generously in the weeks and months of the crisis. This has reminded me of Pope Francis’ striking comment in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Seeing reality with the eyes of faith, we cannot fail to acknowledge what the Holy Spirit is sowing. It would show a lack of trust in his free and unstinting activity to think that authentic Christian values are absent where great numbers of people have received baptism and express their faith and solidarity with others in a variety of ways.” (n. 68). We need to recognise Baptism as the fundamental sacrament. It gives us our Christian vocation. Each of us individually and together exercise our baptismal priesthood day by day in all the bits and pieces of life (see *Lumen Gentium*, 11).

The Family is Church, the Domestic Church. With no public celebration of the Mass, sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation postponed, and even pastoral visits to the sick and dying curtailed, we all have to admit we have never experienced anything like it. Enter another humorous cartoon. It depicts God

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talking to the ‘enemy.’ The Devil is saying, “With Covid-19 I have closed your churches,” and with God answering, “On the contrary, I have opened a church in each house.”

There has been a new discovery of the family as the Domestic church. We have heard of whole families coming together, in a way they haven’t for years, to participate in Mass being transmitted on Television or online in one way or another. People have gone looking up online how to pray the Rosary as they wanted to do so with loved ones who were dying, or in their homes or mortuaries alongside the deceased. We certainly value our Church buildings for prayer but prayer can happen around a table or sitting together in a sitting room or privately on our own. Some families set up small sacred spaces in their homes. I received a letter from a family saying they had talked about things of faith in a way they never seemed to have had time for before.

Here too we can mention the sacrament of marriage. It too keeps on working. Because of the Holy Spirit’s activity, the family can be a house of Nazareth where Jesus is present as we love one another. The Church isn’t just prayers and ritual. It is life in all its aspects. Families have learned to be creative in caring for one another from cooking to entertainment, from finance to education, from sport to communication. We’ve learned to appreciate nature more. All of this is an experience of Church in a full sense, the “spiritual worship” of which Rom 12 speaks. Is this all too ideal? Of course, it might seem so but in its official teaching, the Church actually proclaims this. We all know there’s no such thing as a perfect family. That’s not the point. What is at stake is that we realise just what a great thing the family can be – it is called to be the Home (Domestic) Church. And just as there are varieties of church buildings, colours, styles and paintings, each family will be different, but nonetheless each family can be Church. In families in these weeks, we have listened to the Word of God that each member is!

Difficulties can be teaching moments. Faced with a crisis, certain basics of the Christian faith get recalled. We’ve noticed that in recent months. The notion of spiritual communion gained new traction. I appreciate that from a purist liturgical point of view, the practice of spiritual communion has its limits. The specific prayer formula often used harks back to St. Alphonsus of the nineteenth century trying to help people make up for a lack of regular reception of communion. Nevertheless, it is good to be reminded that there are circumstances when we are far from a church or unable to receive the Eucharist but we are spiritually linked to Christ and one another, and can make an act of spiritual communion.

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Another area was the Church's teaching on Confession. At his morning Mass on Marcy 20th, Pope Francis spoke about this doctrine in words that reminded people of the merciful interpretation of the Church's norms. He commented: "I know that many of you go to confession before Easter ... Many will say to me: 'But Father ... I can't leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me ... How can I do that unless I find a priest?'. Do what the catechism says. It's very clear. If you can't find a priest to go to confession, speak to God. He's your Father. Tell Him the truth: 'Lord. I did this and this and this. Pardon me.' Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise Him, 'afterward I will go to confession.' You will return to God's grace immediately. You yourself can draw near, as the catechism teaches us, to God's forgiveness, without having a priest at hand."

The notions of solidarity and subsidiarity so central in the Church's social doctrine have also been clearly in evidence. The language of solidarity was used a lot. At one point, the European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen, a Catholic, said Europe had become "the world's beating heart of solidarity" in the coronavirus crisis that will likely redefine "our politics, our geopolitics and possibly globalization itself". In terms of subsidiarity, we saw many family and local neighbourhood initiatives and community projects. In Limerick, for instance, we saw Limerick City and County Council, in association with An Garda Síochána, Limerick GAA, HSE, Munster Rugby, FAI, the Catholic and Church of Ireland Dioceses as well as various religious orders and multiple sporting and volunteer groups, come together in a coordinated response to assist the vulnerable and elderly across Limerick City & County in this time of need. As well as the high level state input, a healthy society is always going to need to local, more immediate, subsidiary levels of participation.

Likewise, the Church's language around "the dignity of life" and the "common good" were echoed in many ways. The Coronavirus certainly brought up the priority of priorities: life. And that life has a dignity right to the end. And in order to do our part, we need to be mindful of the common good.

A new Alertness to Care of our Common Home. The Virus has brought the environment agenda to the fore. Pope Francis' line in *Laudato Si'*, whose fifth anniversary occurs this year, certainly rang through: everything is interconnected. Human fragility and the woundedness of our planet have revealed a great poverty that calls for humility, care and co-operation. Linked with this was a new global consciousness. None of us (individuals, states, churches)

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can resolve issues on our own. We need to work together. We always need to expand our horizons.

Technology is a must. At the Limerick Synod in 2016, I was surprised how often delegates who weren't all that young kept mentioning the need to use technology more in communicating the message – and what was intended ranged from projecting the words of hymns on the wall/screen during liturgies to a lively parish website to modern means of catechesis and engagement with young people. I've often remarked that I took this as a voice of God. The current crisis has done much to really alert us to the significance of the social means of communication. I appreciate there will be a lot of discernment afterwards on what is best practice etc., but we have certainly learned we cannot ignore it. The use of social media is a new way to be 'ecclesia', a continent most of us have only entered. Priests have commented on how much feedback they have received through text messages etc. in a way they wouldn't have before. And, of course, we are beginning to recognise the funding stream will increasingly be flowing through on-line methods of donation.

We've learned technology is a “must” and yet we've also realised the value of real time personal encounter in community as the living space for sacraments. In a morning homily on April 17, Pope Francis commented on how the on-line transmission of liturgy has been an expression of the church in a difficult situation that the Lord has allowed, “but the ideal of the church is always with the people and with the sacraments – always.” For Pope Francis our relationship with Jesus “is intimate, it is personal, but it is within a community.” He added that a personalised, familiar relationship with Christ “without the Church, without the people, without the sacraments, is dangerous”.

Priests and Lay Faithful are very much bound together. Archbishop Eamon Martin commented on how the Covid-19 crisis “has forced us all to stay apart and it has prevented us from doing a lot of the things we love to do as priests and as bishops – to walk with our people, to accompany them in the happy days and in the sad days of their lives. It has destroyed our opportunity to gather our people – the church is about gathering. Ecclesia: the whole meaning of church is about gathering people together.” The virus crisis has brought with it a recognition that a priest is essentially a man of dialogue, of deep relationships, of communion. It's what gives him energy and life. His identity is relational. Pope Francis talks about “closeness”. Priests are ordained to be close to God, to each other, to their Bishop and to all the faithful they serve. And

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people desire this contact with priests. Many have kept in contact informally and then more formally through the transmission of liturgies. While these weeks have seen many activities decrease, we've seen a new vibrancy in people making contact with each other at all levels. Relationships are at the heart of what the Church is about.

There's more than One Table; There's more than one Presence of Jesus. These weeks and months have been for many a Eucharistic fast. And it has been painful. But it has been a time to begin to recognise that at Mass we sit at two tables – the table of the Eucharist and the table of the Word. Indeed, in recent years, Church documents speak of the many “presences” of Jesus.

I know of priests who have managed to continue *lectio divina* groups via zoom conference or by e-mail contact. Others were receiving and transmitting daily Scripture reflections. Perhaps there is more we could be doing here in terms of promoting the discovery of the presence of Jesus in the Word.

But also the other “presences” of Jesus. These weeks have provided many testimonies of service of Jesus present in our neighbours whether it be doing shopping for those cocooning, or working in ICU to attend to those struggling with the virus. Indeed, these weeks have been an opening of our eyes to the presence of Jesus in so many whose “ordinary” service we have taken for granted – cleaners, truck drivers, shop assistants, carers.

Parish Structures are not set in stone. With over 70s cocooning we were given a glimpse at where we'll be in five years' time. It's been something of an alarm bell indicating the need to take the steps to shape units that are sustainable and liveable for priests and lay faithful. And the Covid-19 crisis has opened up flexibility – priests celebrated funerals in neighbouring parishes, people tuned into Masses in different parishes. When we return to “normality”, certainly the local community can still have its spiritual, prayer identity but the overall structure of parishes needs change. These weeks have given us a sort of permission to really begin in earnest to move on this.

Discovering the “Sacrament” of Jesus among Us. The big “absence” for so many during these weeks is the Eucharist. We know the Eucharist makes the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist. Of course, we remember that for centuries Catholics received communion often just once a year. But in recent times frequent reception is more common. So it hurts not to get to Mass and be nourished on the Bread from Heaven. Perhaps absence will make the heart grow even fonder of this gift.

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But perhaps there is something else. Thérèse of Lisieux spoke about Jesus wanting to exit the Tabernacle. While the Eucharist is indeed the source and summit of Christian life, there is a risk that we have limited our understanding of that simply to the ritual of the Mass and reception of the sacrament, whereas the sacrament propels us out to be the “sacrament” of Jesus among us in the world around us. We recall Mt 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

The Covid-19 crisis has been one great invitation to discover this “sacrament”. In 1960 Chiara Lubich, probably at that time with Communism in the background, wrote: “Even if all the churches are closed, who is able to destroy the living temple of God who is Jesus in our Midst. And even if the sacraments are prohibited, who can stop us from quenching our thirst at the fountain of living water, which is charity in our midst, which is Christ in our Midst”. Yes, the presence of Jesus among two or more gathered in his name, in love of neighbour, is something of a sacrament. Perhaps it is particularly the “sacrament” of the laity, that presence of Jesus among people out and about in their daily lives, building up the world of fraternal relationships, the Church serving humanity.

CONCLUSION

In her webinar Sr. Maryanne Loughry noted how our impact with the Coronavirus started in Lent and our reflection on it has continued during the Easter season. She quotes words from the prophet Hosea. It is fitting to conclude with them as they express our experience – a “tearing down”, a “dying”, yes, but one that contains seeds of the Resurrection, his “appearing”, and outpouring of the Spirit:

‘Come, let us return to the LORD;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
he will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.’

Redeemably Awful: Active Participation

Neil Xavier O'Donoghue

I remember as a seminarian being disgusted by some experiences of attempts to promote active participation in U.S. parishes, ideas such as the whole congregation being asked to come to church dressed in red for Pentecost or to bring a bell to church for the Epiphany, really turned me off. My issue was not with the dressing in red (although I still don't get the connection to Epiphany and bells), it was that this had almost seemed like a box that was ticked to guarantee "*active participation*."

If you are reading this article, the chances are that you have already heard the term active participation bandied around a lot. The problem is that many of us are hard pressed to define exactly what it is. It is often mistaken as meaning that we must give everybody something to do. If a class in the primary school is receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, then every candidate must be given something to say in the liturgy, with extra prayers being added to the ceremony just to facilitate this. Likewise when organizing funerals we think that every family member has to have a specific task and if all the legitimate ministries are taken, then we add a plant pot or bingo card to the offertory procession, or even invent a second offertory procession of "symbols" of the deceased's life. Our school Masses are full of gold fish bowls and text books being processed to the altar as "gifts" that are promptly taken back as soon as the liturgy is over. A recent First Communion Mass that I attended was put into crisis when a bored parent ate the bunch of grapes that was on a table at the back of the church awaiting the offertory procession.

Giving an unwilling child a hurley to bring down to the altar during Mass is not what the Second Vatican Council meant when it called for "*active participation*."

Active participation in the liturgy ought to be a privileged opportunity for each baptized member of the Church to meet the risen Lord. Obviously, there are many other places where we can

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meet Christ. Christ can be met in the beauty of nature, in a newborn baby's laugh, upon seeing an act of Christian charity and even, if you have faith enough, in the poor and the suffering. This was why St. Lawrence, the third century martyr, declared that the indigent, the crippled, the blind, and the suffering were the true treasure of the Church. Likewise St. Francis, at the start of his conversion kissed a leper with disgusting sores and later realized that it was Christ himself that he had kissed.

But, of the many places where we can meet Christ, the liturgy affords us the easiest access to our own "tent of meeting." My own particular favourite definition of what the liturgy is comes from a phrase that Pope Leo the Great preached in a fifth century homily, when he informed his assembly that everything "which was visible in our Redeemer has passed over into the liturgy" (Pl 54, 398).

Obviously, *participation* was not invented in the twentieth century. Christians have always participated in the liturgy. Famously the Roman Canon prays that "all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing." When Christians participate in the liturgy, the events of salvation history become present again. The Church has always sung during the *Exsultet* at the Easter Vigil, that "this is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld." In the liturgy Christians can enter into direct contact with Christ's victory over death.

When I was a child I remember priests talking about a Mass as being "my Mass." Today, we know that the liturgy does not belong to the priest. Indeed the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that "Liturgy is an "action" of the *whole Christ*. Those who even now celebrate it without signs are already in the heavenly liturgy, where celebration is wholly communion and feast" [# 1136].

However the term "active participation" was coined at the start of the twentieth century. Pope St. Pius X is rightly remembered for his promotion of frequent communion and lowering the age of communion. However, he also coined the term "active participation" which was to become the leitmotif of the liturgical movement. In his 1903 letter *Tra le sollecitudini* on liturgical music, he gave a significant papal endorsement of what was to become the liturgical movement.

The theological realization that the liturgy was not simply an obligation or a divine tax on our time, but rather a privileged place for a regular encounter with the Risen Christ, was perhaps the most important theological development of the twentieth century, and gave birth to the modern liturgical movement. While this movement developed in a parallel fashion in many places, the

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Belgian monk, Dom Lambert Beauduin, of the Abbey of Mont-César is the person who can be most correctly credited with being the founder of the twentieth century liturgical movement. Before entering the monastery, he had been a diocesan priest and was involved in giving pastoral care to workers. He realized that so many people were alienated from the Church and that the Church seemed to be on a different level to them. When he entered the monastery, he discovered the power of the liturgy and the spiritual life. He was particularly influenced by the spirituality of Blessed Columba Marmion, the monastery's prior. But Beauduin realized that the *liturgy* could be an answer to the religious indifference that was spreading throughout Europe. This new appreciation of the liturgy was that it possessed an ability to reach and transform every baptized Catholic and that it ought not to be the sole possession of monks or other religious professionals. In 1914 Beauduin published an influential book *La Piété de l'Église*, where he explained how the Church shapes us through the liturgical celebrations which constitute "the primary and indispensable source of true Catholic piety."

A multitude of other pioneers of the liturgical movement promoted new attitudes towards the liturgy in the awareness that people could find there a true source of spirituality. Many of the priests involved had experienced the terrible reality of the First World War as chaplains while a later generation would have similar experiences during the Second World War. This experience of what Robert Burns terms "man's inhumanity to man" was an eye-opener to priests who had been living a sheltered religious life. They also realised that many soldiers coming from traditional Catholic countries really didn't practice their faith in a meaningful way. Romano Guardini would even go so far as to ask whether "in this industrial and scientific age, with its new sociological structure" the human person "is no longer capable of a liturgical act?" They also realized how the liturgy as it was then celebrated, in Latin, with the priest facing the altar and not the assembly, using a missal that hadn't been systematically revised in centuries, was very alien to most people. After centuries without any change it was time to renew the liturgy. Already in 1947, soon after the end of World War II, Pope Pius XII published his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, where, he gave a resounding endorsement of the liturgical movement. He also began revising the Roman Missal with a renewed Easter Vigil and Holy Week. This was the first substantial revision of the Missal since the Council of Trent. His successor, St. John XXIII's major achievement was the calling of the Second Vatican Council. He also saw the need for continuing structural reform of the liturgy and, rather than do it himself, he decided that "the more important

principles governing a general liturgical reform should be laid before the members of the hierarchy” during the Council.

When the bishops of the world gathered for the Second Vatican Council the first document they composed was *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Liturgy. The document deals with many aspects of the liturgy. It gives some suggestions on how the liturgy should be renewed, for example, proposing that a greater quantity and selection of the Word of God be read during the liturgy. But the main contribution of this document was to promote active participation as the framework for the reform of the liturgy. Time and time again the Constitution returns to this theme. In number 48 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* we find perhaps the most important magisterial definition of active participation:

“Christ’s faithful when present [at the Eucharist] ... should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should *give thanks to God; by offering the immaculate Victim*, not only through the hands of the priest, but also *with him, they should also learn to offer themselves*; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect unity with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all. (emphasis added)”.

Here *active participation* is not simply having some external action to perform during the liturgical celebration. It is not to bounce around with a tambourine. It is much more than this, it is to have the grace of living a life that is fully a thanksgiving to God, to offer Christ to his Father, and to offer ourselves with him. Active participation in the liturgy is no less than *experiencing* God to such a degree that we become one with his divine life so that “I am alive, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Amen. To say ‘Amen’ to the embodiment of Christ’s oblation in the consecrated Bread and Wine is an enormous and, we may as well admit it, a risky proposition. In a beautiful formula he recites silently before communion, the priest prays that the sacrament may be for him ‘a healing remedy’. For healing to spread through our consuming *of* it, we must be consumed *by* it, by the saving reality it represents.

– ERIK VARDEN, *The Shattering of Loneliness* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum) p. 95 .

What are Priests for?

Edmond Cullinan

In recent decades the decline in vocations to the priesthood and the increasing age-profile of the clergy have become noted aspects of Church life in Ireland and in other western countries. There are many reasons for this clerical decline. The main reason is probably that it is part of a general decline in the life of faith. There is a shortage of clergy because there is a shortage of laity. However, one factor in this complex situation may be that for many people it is not very clear what the vocation to the priesthood is. In other words, what are priests for?

Historically and theologically, we can say that there are three aspects to the priestly ministry. These are the administration of the sacraments, the preaching of the word of God and the leadership of the community. All three are necessary. There must be an organic connection between the three aspects of priesthood. Otherwise, they could be separated and be done by different people. To some extent this is the case. There are teachers and preachers of the word who are not priests and there are community leaders who are not priests, but these roles are, nevertheless, still intrinsic to the priesthood.

At different periods in the Church's history the emphasis has been on one or other of the three roles of the priest and the other two have been seen as derived from it. This has had implications for how priests see themselves and for priestly spirituality. In this article I want to explore what is the most fruitful way of looking at this question today.

THE CELEBRANT OF THE SACRAMENTS

In the centuries prior to Vatican II the emphasis was on the sacramental ministry of the priest and especially on his role in offering the sacrifice of the Mass. This was partly in reaction to Luther who had denied that the Mass was a sacrifice and that there was any special priesthood. The Council of Trent dealt with the priesthood as part of its teaching on the sacraments.

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Sacrifice and priesthood are by the ordinance of God so united that both have existed under every law. Since, therefore, in the New Testament the Catholic Church has received from the institution of Christ the holy, visible sacrifice of the Eucharist, it must also be acknowledged that there exists in the Church a new, visible and external priesthood into which the old one was changed. Moreover, the Sacred Scriptures make it clear and the Tradition of the Catholic Church has always taught that this priesthood was instituted by the same Lord our Saviour, and that the power of consecrating, offering and administering his body and blood, and likewise of remitting and retaining sins, was given to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood.¹

The Council of Trent defined the priesthood very clearly. It emphasised its sacred character which set the priest apart as a sacred person. The priest was someone who acted in the person of Christ. This gave the priest a strong sense of identity and motivated him to imitate Christ, to be a person of prayer and an icon of Christ in his dealing with others.

It is interesting that the Council of Trent itself made the connection with the Old Testament priesthood. Holiness in the Old Testament was associated with being separate from ordinary life. The spirituality of the priesthood was influenced by this concept. The difference between the priest and everyone else in the Christian community tended to be emphasised. He dressed differently, he was not married, he had a different lifestyle and he did not get involved in secular affairs.

In the pre-Vatican II Church there was in fact a very exalted view of the priesthood. The disadvantage of this was that it made the laity seem like second class members of the Church. If the “high theology” of priesthood was not balanced by an appreciation of the dignity of all the baptised, it could lead to a sense of superiority and the resulting evils of clericalism. If the sacramental ministry of the priest is taken as starting point it is hard to see where the other two roles fit in. One could be a priest without ever preaching or exercising a pastoral ministry. This in fact was the case with many priests who were monks.

THE PREACHER OF THE WORD OF GOD

In the twentieth century there was a move away from the cultic interpretation of priesthood and a rediscovery of the importance of the word of God. We can see the influence of this trend in the

1 Council of Trent, Twenty-third Session, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Order, Chapter I (1563), Neuner and Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, (New York, 1996) p. 627.

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documents of Vatican II. The Council's Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, treats comprehensively the three aspects of the priestly ministry. It begins with the ministry of the word.

The People of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God. For since nobody can be saved who has not first believed, it is the first task of priests as co-workers of the bishops to preach the Gospel of God to all.²

This emphasis on the word has been very fruitful for priestly spirituality. It has meant that priests have engaged with the word in their personal prayer and this has influenced their preaching. Since Vatican II the homily at Mass is based on the Scripture readings. Many priests begin their homily preparation by taking the readings of the coming Sunday for their personal prayer and reflection during the week. In this way their personal prayer and their preaching are enriching each other.

It is easy to see that there is an organic connection between the preaching of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments. On the first Pentecost when Peter had proclaimed the message, explaining the meaning of Christ's life and death and the significance of his resurrection, the people asked: "What must we do?" and Peter replied: "You must repent and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2: 37-38). Preaching led to repentance, which in turn led to the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. Similarly, at Mass we hear the word of God proclaimed in the readings and in the homily. If this has been done effectively, we see our lives in a new light. We want to give thanks and so, we celebrate the Eucharist. Every sacrament is preceded by a proclamation of the word of God.

The sacrament is also the culmination of the proclamation of the word. Every sacrament consists of actions and words. It is the words that interpret the actions. It is the words that make the action a sacrament. For instance, the pouring of water over a baby's head is just that, but when done with the words "I baptise you" etc., the action becomes a sacrament. The Eucharist is the sacrament in which the power of the word is most dramatically demonstrated. At the word of Christ, spoken by the priest, the bread becomes the Body of Christ.

The connection between the preaching of the word of God and the pastoral ministry is, perhaps, not quite as clear as the connection

2 *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 4, Flannery, Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents (Dublin, 1975), p. 868.

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with the celebration of the sacraments, but it is there nonetheless. The preaching of the word of God brings about faith. This faith is a shared faith, the faith of the community. We are baptised into a community, the Church. The Eucharist makes us one body in Christ.

Taking the preaching of the word of God as the fundamental role of the priest has the advantage of integrating word and sacrament. From the point of view of the priest's relationship with the community, it applies more to missionaries and travelling preachers than to the resident priest in a parish. Where does the priest's role as pastor come in? A third approach to our question is to begin with the pastoral ministry and to see preaching and the celebration of the sacraments as essential components of that ministry.

THE PASTOR OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

St John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), takes the figure of Christ the Good Shepherd as his main inspiration in putting forward a rich and integrated theology and spirituality of the priesthood. The love of Christ the Good Shepherd extends to all. This pastoral charity in which the priest shares is the underlying motivation for the ministry.

The internal principle, the force which animates and guides the spiritual life of the priest inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the head and shepherd, is pastoral charity, a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.³

Pastoral charity denotes the idea of caring for the Lord's flock. This includes the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments. In fact, St John Paul sees it as the unifying principle in the priest's ministry.

This same pastoral charity is the dynamic inner principle capable of unifying the many different activities of the priest.⁴

The advantage of this approach is that it does not just begin with one of the functions of the priest, but with the underlying motivation for all he does. This means that a sense of vocation is essential. Being called by the Lord implies a relationship with the Lord. In the passages quoted above it is stated that pastoral charity

3 Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

4 *Ibid.*

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is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This may be said to be the charism of the priesthood. It is a charism freely bestowed on all priests by the Holy Spirit. Priests who belong to religious orders or missionary societies also share in the charism of their particular institutes. The vocation of the diocesan priest is especially characterised by pastoral charity. Most diocesan priests are engaged in parish work where this charism is most obviously needed. However, all priesthood is pastoral. The priest who teaches Maths and French in a secondary school has a pastoral relationship with his students. The monk-priest, who may not have any pastoral charge as such, nevertheless exercises pastoral charity in his encounters with people through the sacrament of reconciliation, counselling or spiritual direction. What all pastoral activity involves is some personal contact or availability in order to help people in their relationship with God.

The word “pastor” comes from the Latin for shepherd. In Chapter 10 of John’s Gospel Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. The shepherd was a familiar figure in the countryside where Jesus lived and ministered. Minding the sheep was a full-time and hands-on job. There was a close bond between sheep and shepherd. Jesus uses the image of the shepherd to describe the relationship that his disciples have with him. “The sheep follow [the shepherd] because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers” (John 10: 4-5). Jesus gives his life for his disciples: “The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”

In Chapter 21 of the same Gospel Jesus shares his ministry of shepherd with Peter. “Feed my lambs ... Look after my sheep ... Feed my sheep” (John 21: 15-17). Before giving Peter his pastoral charge Jesus first asks Peter if he loves him. It is for love of the Lord that the priest takes on the office he is given. He then shares in Christ’s love for his flock. This is pastoral charity. Like Christ the Good Shepherd, the priest has a relationship with the flock and he is dedicated to their welfare. It is worth noting that the lambs and sheep in this passage remain the property of Jesus. They do not become Peter’s lambs and sheep. Peter is asked to care for them, not lord it over them. He must respect the fact that each of them has a direct relationship with the Lord himself.

PASTORAL MINISTRY INCLUDES WORD AND SACRAMENT

Feeding the sheep involves giving them the word of God and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The preaching of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments are intrinsic to the pastoral ministry. The ministry of the word of God includes the

proclamation of the word of God in the liturgy, but also teaching the faith, input into prayer groups and faith formation in less formal settings. The most effective sermon is one's own life. The liturgical homily has a central place in this ministry. Its purpose is to make the connection between the message of the Scripture readings and people's lives. The preacher can only do this if he knows the people he is addressing and has some understanding of their concerns, fears and hopes. There may be some effective televangelists, but the local pastor is more likely to have his finger on the pulse of the community and is more likely to strike a chord.

The celebration of the sacraments is also an essential aspect of the pastoral ministry. As mentioned already, the sacraments are the natural culmination of the preaching of the word of God. This is most clearly apparent in the Sunday Mass. The community hears the word of God together and then celebrates the Eucharist. The sacraments also mark important moments in people's lives. Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation mark key stages in the growth of the young Christian. They are also important family occasions. They are more meaningful if the priest is not a complete stranger. This is even more true when it comes to a wedding or a funeral. It also makes it more meaningful for the priest himself if he has some connection with the people with whom he is celebrating.

THE PASTORAL DIMENSION AND VOCATIONS

Let us now return to the question of vocation with which I began this article. What motivates the would-be priest to respond to the Lord's call in the first place? I would say that usually there are two aspects to it. On the one hand there is the desire to follow the Lord and to dedicate one's life to God and on the other there is the desire to help people on their way to God. Both are essential to the priestly vocation. The priesthood is about bringing people to God. So pastoral charity is there from the start as part of the motivation to respond to a vocation. The pastoral dimension continues to be fundamental to the priest's motivation throughout his life. If, because of the shortage of priests, the priest is mainly seen as someone who administers the sacraments without any real pastoral involvement with the people, the priesthood becomes less attractive to potential candidates. The following anecdote helps to illustrate this point.

A few years ago, I met a young priest in France who had been ordained for the Paris Archdiocese even though he came from a different part of the country. I asked him why he did not go for his home diocese and he said it was because in his own diocese, which was largely rural, he would be going around six or seven parishes

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where he would have no real connection with the people, whereas in Paris he would be in one place and would have a chance to get to know the community.

The point I want to make is that if we want to encourage vocations, the priesthood needs to be presented as fundamentally pastoral. The best advertisement for the priesthood is the life of priests as seen on the ground. If priests are perceived as fulfilled in their ministry and making a valuable contribution to the life of the community, this will attract others. If they are seen as overstretched and under stress, this will turn people off. Priests need to be relieved of much of the administrative work, such as looking after buildings and finance. These tasks are not pastoral and are often a source of worry and hassle. There are other people who can do these things more efficiently. The answer to the shortage of priests is not to place all the emphasis on the priest's sacramental ministry. The three aspects must be kept in balance.

In answer to the question which of the three roles of the priest can most fruitfully be taken as the starting point for the theology and spirituality of the priesthood today, it seems clear that it is best to see the pastoral role as the fundamental one. The ministry of proclaiming the word of God and the priestly role of offering the Mass and celebrating the sacraments are necessary components of that. The positive points in the other approaches can be incorporated into a theology which begins with the concept of sharing in the ministry of Christ the Good Shepherd.

THE DEPLOYMENT OF CLERGY IN THE CURRENT SITUATION

How should we respond to the problem of the depletion of the clergy in Ireland at the present time? One of the results of this situation is the increasing involvement of the laity. This is to be welcomed. In the coming years there will be much greater involvement and, hopefully, new ministries will be developed which will engage the talents of both women and men. Lay ministry does not replace the ministry of the priest but complements it. A lay Church in which the priest would be an occasional visitor to provide some sacramental functions would be an aberration. It would also be very unsatisfactory for the priest himself. So, I think that stretching out the remaining priests over larger and larger groups of parishes is not the solution.

An alternative solution was actually proposed in *Presbyterorum ordinis* as far back as 1965. Having pointed out, that every priestly ministry shares in the universal mission that Christ gave to his Church, the document states as follows.

WHAT ARE PRIESTS FOR?

Priests, therefore, should recall that the solicitude of all the churches should be their intimate concern. For this reason priests of those dioceses which are blessed with greater abundance of vocations should be prepared gladly to offer themselves, with the permission or encouragement of their own ordinary, for the exercise of their ministry in countries ...that are hampered by shortage of clergy.⁵

The Council document goes on to recommend that clergy coming from abroad “should be sent at least in groups of two or three so that they may be of mutual help to one another.”⁶ In the globalised world in which we now live many young priests would welcome the opportunity to spend five years in another country. It would be quite a normal thing for people of their generation. The fact that Ireland is English speaking would be an advantage, as it is the language most often learned as a second language.

A good way to deploy these volunteers from abroad would be to place them in the more urban areas, most of which are becoming increasingly multi-national and multi-cultural. This would free up the native clergy for the more rural areas. Rural parishes may suit the older priests better. It is important that the Church does not abandon rural Ireland. The priest in the rural parish is a reminder of God and of the service that is due to God and his presence is greatly valued by the community. It may be said that what I am proposing is a short term solution. This is true. What is needed now is a short term solution. There is no point in trying to devise a solution for twenty years time, because the situation will be completely different then. We do not know what Ireland or the Church will be like in twenty years time.

CONCLUSION

What are priests for? The service that priests give to the People of God is to humbly represent Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church who cares for all and who feeds his flock with word and sacrament. This vocation will always be needed in the Christian community.

5 *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 10, Flannery, Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents (Dublin, 1975), p. 882.

6 *Ibid.* Flannery, p. 883.

Homilies for June (A)

Dermot McCarthy

The Most Holy Trinity

June 7

Ex34:4-6, 8-9. Ps. Dn 3:52-56. 2 Cor 13:11-13. Jn 3:16-18

For a mystery which challenges and tests our imagination, the Trinity is at the very heart of our faith. The symbol of Christianity, the cross, is infused with a Trinitarian identity, the physical expression of our invocation of the Trinity.

For from being an arcane dogma, our understanding of God as Trinity frames our theological understanding, shapes our faith and liberates our imagination. To believe that at the very centre and foundation of everything is a profound love between three Divine Persons is to say that our faith is about relationship, creativity and the joy of difference embraced in profound harmony. With this insight we can understand the journey of faith as entry into that relationship, as participation in the sublime conversation between Father, Son and Spirit. The Word made flesh opens up the conversation to include all of creation. We are invited into the life of the Trinity not least in our role as stewards of creation and brothers and sisters to one another.

The Spirit that enables us to appreciate if not understand this mystery leads us to appreciate also that our God invites us, in the words of St Catherine of Siena, to enter into a deep sea, a boundless ocean of love.

The world is coming through a period of enforced separation, a careful isolation to protect the vulnerable from the threat of infection. An imagination that is enlivened by a sense of Trinitarian mystery can appreciate how separation can produce solidarity and unity. We have reached out to our brothers and sisters and recognised beneath entrenched differences and divisions the fundamental reality of our common humanity. We have been shaken into a fresh awareness of our interdependence. We appreciate how the weaving together of the talents and skills – in health care, food and energy production, transport and public safety, communications and policy-making – provide the basis for human society.

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Whenever differences are celebrated and encouraged, and talents are harnessed to support life and solidarity, the Trinity is praised. Building up the Kingdom of God in times of trial brings fresh revelation of the Trinity, the foundation and destination of all there is.

Feast of Corpus Christi

June 14

Deut 8:2-3, 14-16. Ps. 147:12-15, 19-20. 1 Cor 10:16-17.

Jn 6:51-58

The celebration of Corpus Christi this year has a particular poignancy after so many were prevented from receiving Holy Communion, true food and true drink. The Covid-19 epidemic gave most of us a direct experience of the Eucharistic famine experienced by communities of faith in, for example, the Amazon.

The traditional Corpus Christi procession is a symbol of all of those communal gatherings and celebrations which were paused, as isolation replaced gathering. Despite its mediaeval origins and unfashionable character, the procession is an appropriate expression of the feast of Corpus Christi. We are celebrating the very real presence of Jesus in our world. The consuming of bread and wine at the express instruction of the Master is what animates us as Christians, as we desire to become what we consume.

Spiritual communion is a potent participation in the body of Christ. It is however a poor substitute for the sensory experience of Communion, the touch of the divine which heals and strengthens. The physicality of the presence of God is also expressed in our gathering to celebrate the Eucharist. The traditional Corpus Christi procession deepens that communal spirit, the people of God on the move.

The idea of procession also symbolises that the Eucharist is given for the benefit of all. When Pope Francis raised the monstrance to bless Rome and the world on 27 March, facing an empty and rain-lashed St Peter's Square, he gave poignant expression to this truth.

Peter McVerry SJ writes that receiving Communion is an act of radical commitment to following Jesus and uniting in his total self – sacrificing love. When the deacon dismisses the faithful at the end of Mass, instructing them to glorify the Lord by their lives, we are reminded that we are a communion of forgiven sinners called, in the words of Tom Wright, to repay our unpayable debt of love by working for Jesus' kingdom in every way we can.

Deep devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, anguish at the inability to receive Holy Communion, are signs of our desire to be united with Jesus. Today's Solemnity reminds us that our appetite for the Divine is the gateway to transformation of life.

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 21

Jer 20:10-13. Ps 68:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35. Rm 5:12-15.

Mt 10:26-33

Every hair on your head has been counted. This extraordinary assertion expresses the depth of the love of the Father for those who accept the teaching of his Son. For those touched by tragedy, and for a whole world of fearful souls recoiling from contact with strangers to avoid infection, it seems an impossible promise. Matthew's gospel is a sustained plea to the followers of Jesus not to be afraid. In truth, we are often very afraid. We live in an age of anxiety. Is our gospel offering naive assurance?

Jesus warns that rejection and persecution await those who follow Him: so for the Master, so for the servant. Jesus is not inviting his followers to enter an ecclesiastical bubble, insulated from the turmoil of life. On the contrary, He is assuring them that it is despite the inevitable setbacks, humiliations and persecutions that they will know His presence. The transformation of Jesus in the Resurrection transforms the suffering of His followers too. That liberating event is the basis of our hope – and courage. Our fears are relieved not by trying to convince ourselves that they're not justified, but by the conviction that they are not the end of the story.

Far too many Christians face persecution, but in our circumstances oppression is more subtle and more insidious. Faith is derided as irrational or delusional, unhealthy or oppressive. Many modern minds are firmly shut to the liberating touch of a Christian imagination.

How can we speak to a culture that is determined not to listen? We are called to the same mission as the first disciples: to proclaim the Kingdom and to follow the example and teaching of Jesus, wherever we are called to be. Like the Cistercian monks of Tibhirine in Algeria contemplating the probability of their eventual martyrdom, we are here to serve our brothers and sisters through witness, and an unshakable resolve to provide a place of refuge and refreshment that points to the love of God. Whether in the face of a pandemic, in the long struggle for justice for the oppressed, or in resistance to persecution, we are constant in prayer and tireless in service. Above all, we are not afraid.

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 28

2 Kg 4:8-11, 14-16. Ps 88:2-3, 16-19. 2 Rm 6:3-4, 8-11.

Mt 10:37-42

Today's gospel sets before the disciples a warning and a promise. They're warned that placing anything above their calling as

Christians means that they have not fully embraced their mission. Choosing the wrong path can lead to disaster: if we go our own way we may forfeit the fullness of life which has been offered to us.

The promise is that generosity will have its own reward. When we open our hearts and our doors to those who represent the Kingdom of God, we will be rewarded. We will have drawn closer to the Lord who is present in His witnesses.

These two messages are, of course, related. A selfish turn cuts us off from openness to others. Placing our own interests above the needs of our neighbour means a hardening of heart that prevents our responding to those who, in their vulnerability, are closest to the Kingdom. Pope Francis reminds us continually that our response to the needs of migrants and refugees is a very clear indicator of whether we have heard God's abiding message of hospitality.

It is not just a matter of our openness to welcoming strangers and sacrificing self interest for their good. We may also reflect on how we, as a community of faith, respond to prophets and the righteous ones of God, to say nothing of the 'little ones' who are at the margins of our ecclesiastical structures. The need for conversion of heart may arise in unexpected places. Our irritation with styles of liturgy, traditional or modern, may betoken an aesthetic rather than a religious sensibility. Our willingness to hear and respect dissenting voices about who may, or may not, find a place in God's family gathered around His altar might be another benchmark. And what about the ministry of those whose talents don't fit into preordained channels? Lay and ordained, male and female, conventionally pious or scandalously different – is the welcome we offer what would be expected from followers of the Master who enjoyed table fellowship with all, and condemned the instinct to exclude or discriminate?

We are challenged today to reflect on whether our actions and our instincts have been shaped by our calling as Christians, or do we need to draw closer still, leaning in so that we may hear more clearly the warning and the promise?

Featured Review

Theology and Ecology

Sean McDonagh

It is important to have a clear understanding of the scale of change in the theology of creation which Dermot Lane's presents in his very welcomed book. First of all it is important to situate this change in its proper historical context. After the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563), the Roman Missal was published by Pope Paul V in 1570. In that Missal, the post-communion prayer for the Sundays of Advent read as follows: *Domine, doceas nos terrena despiciere, et amara celestia.* (Lord, teach us to despise the things of earth and to love the things of heaven). This prayer with its dualistic and escapist theology had no value for the natural world. Every year for almost 400 year in the Catholic Church this text was read each Advent. Regrettable, this lack of concern for creation was not confined to the liturgy. It was also found in the *Salve Regina*, one of the most popular prayers throughout the entire second millennium. It refers to the condition of human beings in this life as “mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.” The implication was clear that, if our true home was in heaven and this world was just a valley of tears, all our energies should be devoted to pursuing the development of the interior life, rather than waste our energies on the things of earth all of which will pass away. This ‘domination’ theology continued after Vatican II and is reflected in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which was published in 1994. It thought that “God willed creation as a gift addressed to man Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present and future humanity.”¹

In his book, Lane's does not merely tweak this teaching, or attempt to present it in a more nuance way. On the contrary, he challenges and refutes it based on the teachings of scripture and the findings of modern science. In line with his philosophical

1 Catechisms of the Catholic Church, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1994.

* Dermot A. Lane, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue: The Wisdom of Laudato Si'*. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2020. ISBN 978 1 78812 1941.

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anthropology, humans are related to everything existing in our universe at present, and are connected with everything that has existed going back to the birth of the universe 13.8 billion years ago. For example, if the carbon atom had not been created in supernova explosions which took place maybe ten billion years ago, life would not have emerge on earth more than six billion years later and there would be no humans. And since then, the mesmerising multitude of species would not have emerged without the dynamism of evolution. It is unfortunately that in no 81 of *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis seems hesitant to accept the full reality of evolution even though in no 79 of the same document he writes that “faith allows us to interpret the meaning and mysterious beauty of what is *unfolding*.”

In line with the evolutionary dynamism and the writings of Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Lane believes that the whole of creation is gifted with self-transcendent possibility through the action of the Holy Spirit. (As an aside, I am always amazed that, though four popes have quoted favourably from Teilhard’s writing, the 1962 *monitum* or warning from the Holy Office against his writings has never been withdrawn). Lane argues that “if we took the spirit seriously, we would have a different theology of the Church and creation today.” This theology ‘from below’ involves two elements. First we must grasp the extensive understanding of the idea of *ruach* (spirit) in Jewish theology and, secondly, we must explore the primordial experiences of the spirit, not just in history, but, also in the encounter and experience of the spirit in nature around us.

Lane is not content with articulating a new deep pneumatology. He claims that this should go hand-in-hand with a new Christology, one that is intimately linked to the natural word. Like every one of us, Christ is a child of the universe. He is also taken by Raymond Brown’s insight that Jesus is the culmination of a tradition that runs through the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Most significantly the spirit in Judaism is an earth-loving spirit dwelling in the dust, nostrils and the matter of creation. The theology of the Word is also crucial; as it sees the cosmic activity of the Word descending down into human history when the Word became flesh and lived among us. This cosmic Christology which is found in both the theology of Saint John and Saint Paul confers a new dignity on the creation; recovers the intrinsic value of the earth’s processes and systems, and points to an underlying solidarity between the earth community and the human community. *Laudato Si'* affirms that if all things are destined to be part of a new creation in Christ; then other creatures must be respected for their value in themselves and not just for utilitarian reasons.

Furthermore, Lane attempts to develop an eschatology which moves beyond our concern for the last things – death, judgment, heaven and hell. He is unhappy that this watered down eschatology has left a hole in the rest of theology because it leaves us bereft of “the essential elements such as the subversive and prophetic role of hope, the centrality of the resurrection to Christian faith and the link between creation and eschatology.” Biologists tell us that we are living in the sixth largest extinction of life since life began 3.8 billion. The last time such a catastrophe took place on earth was 65 million years ago when the impact of an asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs and countless other creatures. This time the prime cause of extinction globally is human activity.

On another front, our western culture and our Christian faith has very little respect for the oceans. Though 70 percent of the planet’s surface is covered by the sea, we know more about the surface of Mars and the Moon than we know about the oceans. Without the oceans our planet would be as inhospitable as Mars: no meadows, no forests, no birds, no animals and no humans. Life began in the oceans 3.8 billion years ago. It evolved and was nurtured there for more than 3 billion years before it began to colonise the land. When life came ashore almost 500 million years ago, it brought water with it so that water makes up more than 70 % of all living beings, including human beings. Pressure on the oceans comes from many sources, including industrial pollution, destructive fishing methods, acidification of the water from burning fossil fuels and the ubiquitous plastic waste. Every diocese in Ireland touches the oceans, yet I do not know a single one that has drawn up a reflection on the presence of God in the oceans, chronicled the damage humans have done to date, and devised a concrete plan to protect the oceans in the future. If Christian communities were engaged in this kind of action, Lane believes that “eschatology (could) inspire and motivate ecology practices that will enhance the well-being of our common home?” He claims that eschatology can begin to bridge the gap between human being and non-human creatures; between the human community and the community of creation and between society and the modern world. This new focus is “intended to widen the scope of the resurrection from being exclusively anthropocentric to being cosmo-centred.”

Lane does deal with the conflicts that surround the classic text from Genesis 1: 26-23, which speaks of ‘tilling the earth and subduing it and having dominion of the fish.’ He makes the point that the text is ambiguous and is coloured by the belief in modern times that humans are allowed to exploit the earth’s ecosystems. Even the Fathers subscribed to ‘domination theology.’ *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), states that the world is

there for the exclusive use of humankind, “man created in God’s image received a mandate to subject to himself all that it contains and govern the world in justice and holiness” (*Gs* 34).

Ecology played a very little role in the Social encyclicals after the Vatican II. One of the most impressive social encyclical is *Populorum Progressio* (On the Progress of People). It states that, in the very first pages of scripture we read the words; “Fill the earth and subdue it.” This teaches us that the world of creation is for man that he has been charged to give it meaning by his intelligent activity, to complete and perfect it by his own efforts and to his own advantage (No 23). The encyclical was blind to the damage which humans were causing to the natural world. There was no caution about the impact of industrialisation on the biosphere. It stated boldly that “the introduction of industry was necessary for economic growth and human progress; it is also a sign of development and contributes to it. By persistent work and the use of his intelligence man gradually wrests nature’s secrets from her and finds a better application for her riches.” (No 25). Even at that stage the dark side of industrialization was very evident in air pollution, climate change, the depletion of the ozone layer, the destruction of biodiversity, acid rain, soil erosion, pollution of the oceans and rivers and nuclear waste. The encyclical and much of subsequent Catholic Social Teaching is silent on all of this destruction. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004) has little understanding of the ecological crisis. Chapter 10 is devoted to “Safeguarding the Environment”, and has only 15 pages. On the other hand, Chapter 6 which deals with “Human Work” has 26 pages. In more than 400 pages the book has only one paragraph on climate change (No. 470) and one on biodiversity (No. 466). This is an example of how poorly the leadership of the Catholic Church was focused on these vital issues a mere sixteen year ago.

If we wish to get an understating of how widespread the domination theology was in the past 500 years we need to turn to historians rather than scripture scholars. The historian Keith Thomas in his book *Man and the Natural World; A History of the Modern Sensibility*, writes about the understanding of the relationship between humans and the rest of creation in the Tudor period. They believed that “the world had been created for man’s sake and that other species were meant to be subordinate to his wishes and needs.” Those theologians and intellectuals who felt the need to justify it could readily appeal to the classical philosophers and the Bible. “Nature made nothing in vain, said Aristotle, and everything had a purpose. Plants were created for the sake of animals and animals for the sake of man. Domestic animals were

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there to labour, and wild ones to be hunted. The Stoics had taught the same: nature existed solely to serve man's interests."² In recent years, the research by Terrence Tilley and others has made it clear that "humans created in the image of *Elohim* have to recognize God's goodness in creation and to respond by acting responsibly, not tyrannically, not selfishly, in our dominion as God does over the whole of creation." But this is a new understanding of human relationship with nature, so Pope Francis is right to state that a domineering approach to nature is not "a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church" (no 67) in the 21st century. However, for centuries Christians had no problem with controlling nature in order to benefit humankind. So, I would argue that this is new teaching and we should recognise it as such.

Worship is central to the Christian experience and to Dermot's book. He quotes the saying from the Fathers that *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* (we pray as we believe). Unfortunately, there is little reference to creation in the liturgy of the Eucharist which means that our liturgical prayers are almost schizophrenic. We believe one thing, and at the same time celebrate something quite different and maybe at odds with what we believe. This is tragic, since thanking God for the blessing of creation was present in the Eucharist prayers from the very beginning. In the Eucharist prayer found in the *Apostolic Tradition* which dates from around from around 215 A.D. thanking God for creation appears in the second paragraph immediately after thanking the Father for sending Jesus as Saviour and Redeemer.³

In 1984, an effort was made to weave the biblical and modern scientific understanding of how our universe and local environment were formed into a Eucharist prayer. The Eucharist prayer was published by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). The Preface set out to capture in poetic language the beauty, inherent dynamism and inter-relatedness of all creation.

Blest are you, strong and faithful God.
All your works, the height and the depth,
echo the silent music of your praise.
In the beginning your Word summoned light;
night withdrew and creation dawned.
As ages passed unseen,
waters gathered on the face of the Earth
and life appeared.

2 Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World; A History of the Modern Sensibility*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1983, page 17.

3 Gregory Dix, *The State of the Liturgy*, 1945, London, Dacre Press, Adam and Charles Black, page 157.

When the times had at last grown full
 and the earth had ripened in abundance,
 you created in your image humankind,
 the crown of creation.
 You gave us breath and speech,
 that all the living might find a voice to sing your praises.

It was disheartening that the mildly evolutionary overtones contained in the ICEL text proved unacceptable to some bishops' conference. Admittedly ten out of the eleven of the bishops' conference represented in ICEL had no problem with the text and approved it. Even so, the U.S. Bishops' Conference voted it down on the grounds that "it seemed too poetic and too imbued with evolutionary images of creation."⁴ As a result of the U.S. Bishops' action, Rome refused to sanction the text for public use. In his book, Lane constantly uses poetry to help us experience the mystery of the presence of God in all creation from the explosion of the supernova stars to Seamus Heaney's poem 'Postscript' set in the Burren. I think that we should be thrilled that Eucharist prayers are poetic, but obviously the U.S. bishops, at the time, did not share this view.

One of the earliest expressions to describe the Eucharist is found in the Acts of the Apostles. It involves breaking bread and sharing the cup in the memory of the Lord Jesus. Acts 2:42 "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to breaking the bread and prayers." His enemies accused him of eating with prostitutes and sinners. His death was His ultimate sharing with us. Sharing is also central to the Eucharistic experience, whether that is sharing with fellow human beings or with other members of the earth community. We might ask, can other creatures share in the Eucharist? Those who illustrated the Gospel of St. Matthew in the Book of Kells in the 8th century thought that they could. The illustration shows two mice eating the host because, obviously, the artists believed that the Body of Christ was meant as food for all creation. For them the understanding was based on the text from Isaiah that "the wolf will lie down with the Lamb" (Is 11:6-7).

The Ritual that denotes this sharing, called the *fractio*, is almost lost completely in the current ritual of the Eucharist. It is supposed to take place after the *Agnus Dei*, but it is now lost in the sign of peace which in most countries involves a handshake. There are no words to accompany this central and crucial gesture so, for many people attending Mass, it is completely lost. Even priests

4 Richard N. Fragomeni, "Liturgy at the Heart of Creation: Towards an Ecological Consciousness in Prayer," in *The Ecological Challenge*, (Ed. Richard N. Fragomeni and John T Pawlikseke), 1994, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, page 67.

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have problems with it as some of them break the bread during the consecration of the host.

If we were challenged at each Eucharist to share the earth with humans and with other species in the earth community we would have to face the stark reality that we are very poor at it. Every ecosystem on our planet has been colonised by humans for our benefit only. We have very little concern for the well-being of the millions of species who share this planet with us and, of course, we have given them no basic rights.

In his book Dermot Lane criticises the sexist language used in the Eucharist prayers “for which there is no excuse.” The same is true of the liturgy of the hours. In Morning Prayer for Thursday of the First Week psalm 56 says that “my soul lies down among the lions, who would destroy the sons of men.” In the same way, the *Benedictus* states that “so his love for our fathers is fulfilled.” Not a word about mothers! How could anyone encourage young women to pray these texts? The tragedy is, it would seem, that neither the leaders in the Church, in Rome or bishops in local English speaking dioceses are aware that the sexist language used in Church worship is alienating many people, especially, young women from experiencing the Gospel. If today half the bishops were women, this anomaly would be corrected immediately. Lane could have also mentioned the appalling, incompetent and unreadable prayers that are found in the current Missal which was foisted on English speaking Catholics in 2011.

This books about ecology and theology is not just about a special area of theology that might be of interest to scholars. It deals with the most important issues of our times both for the world and the Church. As we have seen, until *Laudato Si'*, the Catholic Churches' was meagre and patchy in responding to the destruction of our world. So, it is wonderful to see a competent theologian, in dialogue with other theologians, investigating both our biblical sources and modern science to fashion a new vision of our Christian faith that takes the ‘sign of times’ more seriously. It also outlines a new way of acting where Christians begin to listen to the cry of the poor and the earth. And finally, it points in the direction of a new liturgy, were all join together in praising God for the wonders of creation. If we fail in this vital task, in the words of Pope Francis, the earth, our mother will become more and more like an immense pile of filth.

New Books

Introduction to Catholic Theological Ethics: Foundations and Applications. Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books. ISBN 9781626983243

An introduction to Catholic theological ethics only a few decades ago consisted of a year-long course in what was known as Fundamental Moral Theology. Earlier, when textbooks were in Latin, the accompanying volume was entitled *De Principiis*, aptly, whether one is thinking of ‘principle’ or the more fundamental sense of starting-point. That course was the starting-point of a study which in subsequent years would focus on specific topics, and it introduced principles and concepts to be met later in areas such as justice, bioethics, and the ethics of sexuality. Heythrop philosopher-theologian Gerry Hughes SJ used to say that it was the part of moral theology he liked best to teach because you didn’t have to answer hard questions. The quip was not without its point: specific moral issues were referred to briefly, and only as illustrating more general themes: conscience, moral norms, the resolution of dilemmas by way of the doctrine of the act of two effects, the principles regarding cooperation in the wrong-doing of another, etc. It was frequently a source of frustration that concrete questions couldn’t be pursued, these being of more immediate interest than many of the more general; and abstract principles and concepts were often forgotten by the time specific issues were reached.

The starting-point of *Introduction to Catholic Theological Ethics* is not abstractions but the response of students to three questions posed them as they embark upon their study. Depending on the topic to be taken up during the semester – biomedical issues or ethics of sexuality – students are asked their view on the morality of acts pictured in three slides. Typically in each case, student response is unanimous about two slides, divided upon the third. Nazi experiments on children were wrong, all agree; treating patients in a hospital facility in Haiti is right; but as to the withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration from a person in a permanent vegetative state, some say this was right, others that it was wrong. ISIS throwing a gay man out of a building to his death was wrong, marriage of a heterosexual couple in church is right, but there is disagreement about the marriage of a gay couple on a beach (though latterly there is increasing agreement that this is right). The exercise discloses a universal consensus on some matters, notwithstanding the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the

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students, and Todd Salzman and Michael Lawler take this as showing that the students' take on morality isn't relativistic, even if they differ in their evaluation of some issues. *Introduction to Theological Ethics* seeks to account for both the agreements and the differences, an enterprise which from the outset involves examining the factors that give rise to differing perspectives.

Perspective turns out to be a leitmotif, as does virtue. For, in constructing a comprehensive Christian ethical theory in the course of five chapters in Part One, the authors opt for perspectivism as an epistemological point of entry toward explaining how there can be differences in moral evaluation without denying the existence of universal values and objective moral norms. Their account draws on Bernard Lonergan's *Insight and Method in Theology* and, with him, they are at pains to distinguish perspectivism from a relativism which admits of no possibility of attaining to truth. The chapter which follows makes the case for a virtue-centred ethic, and the concept of virtue underpins and informs the treatment of specific areas of ethical concern in Part Two. One could say that the stance and methodology of the entire work is caught in one subsection's heading: 'Virtuous Perspective and the Selection, Prioritization, and Integration of the Sources of Ethical Knowledge'.

Part Two is entitled 'Christian Formation of Conscience and Contemporary Ethical Issues'. It opens with a chapter on conscience and discernment, and succeeding chapters deal with ecology and climate change, hookup culture, cohabitation, homosexuality, economics and justice; and two chapters on biomedical ethics deal respectively with issues concerning the beginning and the end of life. Part Three, 'Possible Future Directions for Christian Ethics, analyses *Amoris laetitia*, pointing to some features which are significant for future developments in official teaching as well as in theological ethics: its shift from a deductive to an inductive methodology for example, its recognition of historicity and cultural difference, its understanding of the importance of 'discernment' in evaluating concrete situations, above all its move toward the integration of Catholic social and sexual teaching. Salzman and Lawler believe that 'Pope Francis has pointed the way, not to any abrogation of Catholic ethical doctrine, but to its organic development, a renewed gospel, and therefore Catholic, way to approach it' (p. 336).

The book has many strengths, and first its methodology. US moral philosopher the late William Frankena, not unsympathetic to theological ethics, complained with some justification that Catholic moral theology lacked a satisfactory ethical theory. *Introduction's* elaboration of what it calls a comprehensive Christian ethical theory includes an account of virtue ethics which draws on the work of leading anglophone moral philosophers as well as the thought of Aristotle and Aquinas, and of biblical scholars and theologians who have engaged in crafting a Christian account, and the result is satisfying. The theory isn't 'merely' philosophical, though: as the exposition becomes more explicitly theological it is indebted especially to Congar, Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and Dulles.

The authors' understanding of Catholic theological ethics is also ecclesial, as is evidenced by the way in which it integrates the moral with the spiritual and liturgical, as well as in their engagement with Magisterial and quasi-official sources of Catholic teaching and thinking. Core documents of Vatican II inspire and shape their approach, and encyclicals and other instruments of papal magisterium from Pope John XXII to Pope Francis are adverted to appropriately and effectively. When they engage critically with magisterial teaching, they do so respectfully, aware that not everyone will agree with their view, open to dialogue and to deepening learning. Their use of the work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and the International Theological Commission is exemplary.

Salzman and Lawler say that their target audience is undergraduate students and an educated lay public interested in Christian ethics, and their book has indeed the virtues of a good textbook. It is orderly, well structured, the material clearly if sometimes densely presented; and the 'Learning Objectives' and 'Questions and Reflections' at the beginning and close of each chapter are well considered. Teachers in settings other than that of the authors, a Jesuit University in Omaha Nebraska, will be the best judges of how suitable the book is for use elsewhere. As the holder of the post of introducer in the rapidly-receding past, I would have been greatly helped by the material in Part One; for those in the field nowadays, I imagine that the chapters on the hookup culture, climate change, and economics and justice, must be invaluable. As for the second group in the authors' target audience, *Introduction* would, I think, make a good text for a guided reading programme, or an adult education study group which included someone trained in theology.

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PATRICK HANNON

Baptismal Ecclesiology and the Order of Christian Funerals. Stephen S Wilbricht, CSC, (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications) 2018. ISBN 978-1-61833-304-9

This is a timely and indispensable book that explores the rites of the Order of Christian Funerals within a framework of Baptismal Ecclesiology. Approaching his task with discernment, Wilbricht produces a work that is an accessible pastoral venture.

The book has five chapters, a significant Bibliography, a considerable set of endnotes, and a detailed and helpful Index.

Wilbricht begins with an Introduction that consists of four sections, the first of which recalls an encounter with Francis, a fisherman for many years until age and infirmity overtook him. The author makes a helpful link between Christian initiation and death, asserting that the baptised have a role to play in the Church, particularly at the end of life on earth. While death brings about a change in the baptised Christian, the change ensures the dead are still at home in the Church. The juxtaposed imagery

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of boat and life powerfully recognises the link between Christian initiation and the journey through death to eternal life.

In the second section, Wilbricht addresses Funerals as a Christian “Order”, and notes how the word ‘Order’ was understood in the early centuries of the Church. He helpfully offers a three-strand approach to consolation that he suggests is the responsibility of all the faithful.

The third section approaches ‘Baptism and Death’ in which, by placing the sacrament of Baptism in juxtaposition with death, Wilbricht argues that the dead have a continuing role in developing and strengthening the Church until it transitions into ‘heaven’s light’.

The helpful summary in ‘About this Book’ contains short notes on each of the succeeding chapters.

In Chapter One, Wilbricht suggests that the term Baptismal Ecclesiology while well-known within the Episcopal tradition, is perhaps less familiar to Roman Catholic audiences. He explores this topic with a wide range of literature, beginning with an accessible definition of ecclesiology and tracing some images of Church developed in the conciliar documents of Vatican II, in particular *Lumen Gentium*. Wilbricht prefers the term ‘Body of Christ’ to characterise the Church, in which the Head and members both living and dead are united as one. It is this image of Church that Wilbricht asserts is Baptismal Ecclesiology. The author regards the scholarship of several 20th century theologians as significant. Wilbricht notes that, without referring to Baptismal Ecclesiology per se, they nonetheless assisted in enabling an understanding of Church as the corporate Body of Christ. The Lutheran writer and scholar Gordon W. Lathrop in ‘Holy People’, one of his trilogy of works, regards Baptism as a gathering instrument drawing the ecclesial assembly to Christ.

Wilbricht considers the contribution from the Episcopal Church and argues that for a baptised Christian, it is not enough to maintain an individualistic grasp of baptism. For the most part, Anglicanism advocates that Baptism is an ongoing process. There is a debate in Episcopal circles that, in light of their baptism, all members of the Body of Christ may be considered as ministers. The Roman Catholic Church has been similarly challenged regarding the link between the centrality of Baptism and public ministry.

In Chapter Two, Wilbricht surveys the ‘Ecclesial Nature of Death in Ancient Christianity’ and considers how Christians adapted early funeral practices to create a unique approach to their theology of death. Wilbricht suggests that St Augustine’s understanding of Original Sin may, however unintentionally, have contributed to apprehension and fear of God’s judgement in the perception of death. Accordingly, for the following two hundred years, prayers for the dead took on a sombre and melancholy role.

The evolution of Funeral Liturgies is addressed in Chapter Three. Around the time of Pope Gregory the Great, they began to take shape as a structured ritual of joy and hope of the Resurrection. Wilbricht explains that the Requiem Mass became the established funeral liturgy of the

Church. While one of the constructive features of Reformed theology of the 16th century was the idea of ‘corporate resurrection’ of the dead, Calvinist influences demanded Christian burial ‘without any ceremony’. As Wilbricht notes, the Second Vatican Council would be tasked with restoring the funeral liturgy along the lines of the early Christian vision of death.

Chapter Four sees a further examination of the 1969 *Ordo exequiarum*. Wilbricht contends that the *Ordo* and its English translations have re-established the paschal nature of the funeral liturgy, and that there is much ‘that is baptismal about its rites.’ He notes that the guiding principle of ‘full, conscious and active’ participation in liturgical celebrations has been adhered to in restoring the unity of the Body of Christ.

In Chapter Five, Wilbricht concludes his investigation with a perusal of ‘Contemporary Conundrums and Pastoral Possibilities’ associated with celebration of Christian burial and offers some suggestions on restoring baptismal identity. In accompanying the reader back to the funeral liturgy of Francis the fisherman, Wilbricht makes an important point regarding the purpose of the homily, emphasising also that Baptism and the ongoing journey to God ‘are really two sides of the one coin’. Wilbricht is to be applauded for his significant contribution towards the understanding of the meaning of Baptismal Ecclesiology in relation to active participation in the corporate nature of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Belfast

MALACHY MCKEEVER

Revelation and Art. What, first and foremost, is needed is not experimentation but a deepening of perception in regard to the visual forms in which Revelation reaches the faithful in iconographic art. It has long been noticed that, despite the occurrence of wonder-working images in the West, the theological aesthetic of Latin Christianity characteristically lacks the dimension of depth expected in the icon-doctrine of the East. The Orthodox Byzantinist George Galavaris notes how the didactic prevails over the epiphanic in the Western Christian understanding of the image.

– AIDAN NICHOLS, OP, *In Search of the Sacred Image*, (Herefordshire: Gracewing) p. 262.

Shorter Notice

Did Jesus Really Exist? And 51 Other Questions. Nikolaas Sintobin SJ. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2020. ISBN 978 1 78812 121 7

This latest publication by Nikolass Sintobin is a very imaginative attempt to engage with young Christians in a rapidly changing world. The author is the internet pastor for the Jesuit province of the European Low countries and the director of the Dutch version of the popular podcast 'Pray as you go'. He has, therefore, a serious and visible commitment to the effective communication of the Christian faith. The book can, in the words of the author, be read as an introduction to Christianity or as a refresher course for those already familiar with Christianity. It is constructed around 52 questions about the faith that include; Is God a man or a women? Does suffering make sense? Who is the Holy Spirit? Prayer, what is that? The answers offered 'take a maximum of two minutes to read' and include two discussion questions. The book concludes with a mini glossary of 52 words linked to the Christian tradition such as grace, sacrament and Easter. The author's style is conversational and fresh and invites the reader into a deeper appreciation of the life enhancing message of Christianity. With a question for each week of the year it could be fruitfully used by individuals, schools or parish groups to aid the process of growth and conversion.

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