NOVATE VOBIS NOVALE

The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

July/August 2020
€4.50 (inc. VAT)

The Furrow

The next three issues of *The Furrow* will be available to read online on our website for **FREE**

Go to **www.furrow.ie** and let us know what you think of the online version.

In time you will be offered the opportunity to change from the print version of *The Furrow* to the online version.

Send you comments or queries to

editor.furrow@spcm.ie

or

furrow.office@spcm.ie

Pádraig Corkery
Editor

Volume 71
Number 7/8
July/August 2020

The Furrow

Articles

News and Views

New Books

ISSN 0016-3120

The Furrow

A pastoral monthly founded 1950.

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

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

Editor: Pádraig Corkery, St Patrick's College, Maynooth. E-mail: editor.furrow@spcm.ie (for editorial enquiries, typescripts etc).
Rates: Single copy €4.50 (plus VAT 37c and postage: Rep. of Ireland €2/Elsewhere €2.90). Annual Subscription: Republic of Ireland €75.00. Northern Ireland and Great Britian Stg£70.00/€75.00. Foreign: €90.00/$106/Stg£84.00. Student rate €50.00/$56.00/Stg£46.00.
Subscriptions are payable in advance to the Secretary, The Furrow, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Telephone (01) 7083741; Fax (01) 7083908 (Codes: National 01; International +353-1). E-mail: furrow.office@spcm.ie Website: www.thefurrow.ie. Subscriptions can be paid by cheque or online through The Furrow website.

Single articles can be purchased and downloaded from our website: www.thefurrow.ie.

Back numbers and advertising rates available from the Secretary.

The Furrow's bank is the Allied Irish Bank, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Bank Giro Code No. 93–32–01.

Back issues of The Furrow are available on microfilm from: ProQuest Information & Learning Co., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, U.S.A., and JSTOR.

The Furrow is published by The Furrow Trust and edited at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. The views expressed in its pages are in no way attributable to the College authorities. The Furrow is printed in the Republic of Ireland at Naas Printing Ltd., Naas, Co. Kildare.

The new 'nones': the implications of ticking the 'No Religion' census box for educators in Ireland

Patricia Kieran and Aiveen Mullally

In recent decades every census in the Republic of Ireland has given a snapshot of the rising number of people who self-identify under the category of 'No Religion'. In 2016, one in ten people in Ireland belonged to this group. The manner in which the data is gathered changes over time[1] but the data collected is both fascinating and significant. In 2016 the census question asked 'What is your religion?' followed by seven tick box options. This format first appeared in 2002 when 'No Religion' was given as the final tick box option in the Religion section. Prior to this people simply wrote their non-religious beliefs in the box provided for religion. For example, under the category of 'Religion' in the 1991 Census results, 320 people self-described as 'Atheist', 823 as 'Agnostic', and 66,270 people described themselves as having 'No Religion'.[2] Between 1991 and 2016 this number increased seven-fold and currently represents the fastest growing category in the Religion section in the 2016 Census.

At the outset it is important to acknowledge that in Census data terms, Ireland has a very high rate of religious affiliation. In the most

1 A proposed amendment to this question in the 2021 Census will read 'What is your religion, if any?' and the option to tick 'No religion' will come first and not last (where it was placed from 2002-2016) in a series of tick boxes.

2 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8rnraa/.

Patricia Kieran teaches Religious Education at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. She is Director of the Irish Institute for Catholic Studies. Her most recent book *Connecting Lives:Inter-belief Dialogue in Contemporary Ireland* (2019) focuses on dialogue among belief diverse communities.

Aiveen Mullally is a lecturer at Marino Institute of Education teaching in the area of religious diversity, multi-belief education and the spirituality of the child. She is author of national guidelines on the *Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools* (2010, 2019) published by the JMB/AMCSS.

recent 2016 census, 78 per cent self-identified as Catholic with a further 8 per cent identifying as other Christian denominations and minority faiths. Although the 'nones' represent ten per cent of the entire population,[3] there is surprising little sustained research into the composition of this group in Ireland, what they believe and what they reveal about identity and culture. Further, understanding this group provides a unique opportunity to explore the complex causal factors, manifestations and consequences of an unprecedented growth of non-religious worldviews in recent decades.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

Ireland is not unique in witnessing rising numbers of non-religious citizens. Many Western countries have experienced a rapid increase in those who profess no religious affiliation. Andrew Singleton notes that in Australia 'census data reveal the proportion of the population who declare they have no religious affiliation increased from 7% in 1971 to 22% in 2011. Census results from England and Wales show the proportion of the population with no religious affiliation grew from 15% in 2001 to 25% in 2011.'[4] In the United Kingdom, Linda Woodhead contends that the category of 'no religion' is a new cultural majority that rivals 'Christian' as the preferred self-designation of British people.[5] In the USA, Victor Sensenig draws on data from the Pew Forum's survey where 'the number of Americans who answer "none" when asked about their religious affiliation has been increasing over the last 20 years'.[6] Sensenig notes that this has occurred almost uniformly across gender, income levels, and educational attainment. In a 2012 survey 'almost 20 percent of the American public do not identify with a formal religion, an increase from 10 percent in 1970 and from about 15 percent in 2007.'[7] In Europe Stephen Bullivant's 2018 report paints a vivid picture of young adults and religion. Drawing on data from the European Social Survey (2014-2016) Bullivant notes that 'The proportion of young adults (16-29) with no religious affiliation ('nones') is as high as 91% in the Czech Republic, 80% in Estonia, and 75% in Sweden. These compare

3 https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter_8_Religion.pdf.

4 Andrew Singleton (2015) Are religious 'nones' secular? The case of the nones in Australia, Journal of Beliefs & Values, 36:2, p. 239.

5 Woodhead, L. (2016) 'The Rise of No Religion in Britain: The emergence of a new cultural majority'. Journal of the British Academy, 4, 245–61.

6 Victor Sensenig The Rise of the "Nones": Does Education Explain the Decline in Religious Affiliation? p.339.

7 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 2012. "'Nones' on the Rise." The Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/noneson-the-rise.aspx.

to only 1% in Israel, 17% in Poland, and 25% in Lithuania. In the UK and France, the proportions are 70% and 64% respectively'.[8] The statistics here clearly show that age is a major factor in a very strong trend toward the emergence of 'nones' in religiously unaffiliated younger age groups in Europe.

BELIEF FLUIDITY

While gender fluidity is a relatively recent and commonly acknowledged concept, belief or religious fluidity is less generally recognised. Maurice Harmon's work on the voice of the child involved working with primary school children in Ireland, over an extended period of time, to ascertain their perspectives on religions and beliefs. His research provides evidence of a kind of belief fluidity among children, where categories become plastic and porous. In his research children attending a Catholic primary school self-described as belonging simultaneously to a range of different traditions without exhibiting any sense of contradiction. One child in Harmon's research stated 'My parents … well, my dad's atheist, my sister is Christian, my mother is Catholic … they're really religious. Um, my brother I think he's atheist as well. There's a few atheists in my family but a lot of them are Russian Orthodox and Christian. I am Catholic, I think![9] Harmon speaks of children's 'blended' religious identities as evidenced by another child who described themselves as a 'Catholic Atheist'. Elsewhere another child said 'I am a Catholic Buddhist'. These children exhibited very high levels of awareness of the varieties of belief traditions and perspectives in contemporary Ireland and in their immediate families. One child stated: 'Like my mother, she don't [sic] believe in anything. Her mother was Christian, and her sister is Christian, but she just doesn't believe in anything. Just sometimes people are kind of like and she is shunned by some people, like judged for not believing in anything.[10] It is not only the young primary school cohort who show this awareness of diversity of religious and non-religious belief. Recent *Religions and Beliefs in Changing Times* (RBCT) research explored 900 third-level students' perspectives on religion and belief in contemporary Ireland. One focus group participant self-identified as Catholic but in a manner consistent with what British sociologist Grave Davie terms belonging without believing. The RBCT participant said 'My dad's view of the Catholic religion …. I don't believe in it but

8 Stephen Bullivant Europe's Young Adults and Religions (2018) p. 3.

9 *Harmon, Maurice* (2018) "I *am a Catholic Buddhist*": the voice of children on religion and Religious Education in an Irish Catholic Primary School, Doctor of Education thesis, Dublin City University.

10 Harmon 2018, p.72.

it influences me because he's a sweet person. I have more respect for religion because I was born into it not because I believe in it.'[11]

THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

As a consequence of this type of religious and belief fluidity, an analysis of the beliefs of the 'nones' is all the more challenging. Even the very terminology of 'nones' is problematic as it could present a very large diverse group under a homogeneity that is non-existent. There is an acute need for sensitive exploration of this area because of its complex and contested nature and it is worthwhile to listen to what young people have to say about this issue. In 2012 *The Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* included the viewpoint of a primary school child who stated that the school '… think that Christian is the only good religion'. In this report, issues such as children noting that 'having to say prayers and go to Church even though you are of a different religion or an atheist' also came to the fore. In an attempt to address the diverse and fluid educational needs of a changing society, educational resources such as *Signposts* have been developed for primary school teachers in Ireland. In this resource a group of teachers developed multi-belief lesson plans including resources on non-religious naming ceremonies. The resource begins a lesson with the words 'Many people have no religion. They do not believe in god and do not pray to god. They believe that life is very important and that every baby is very special. Sometimes they have naming ceremonies to celebrate the arrival of a new life. Family and friends come along and say poems and sing songs and everyone is very happy.'[12] It is evident that teachers perceive a need to educate children accurately and respectfully about non-religious perspectives.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE NEW NONES

Affirming diversity is at the heart of what it means to be Catholic. The roots of the word Catholic originates from the Greek *kath'holou* which means universal and there are numerous documents from the Catholic Church emphasising the inclusive nature of Catholicism.[13] At the heart of the Catholic tradition lies a deep respect for

11 Marie Parker Jenkins, Patricia Kieran & Anne Ryan, (2019) *Religions and Beliefs in Changing Times*, Scotens Report.

12 Darmody, A., Ward, F. Kelly, E. (2010) *Signposts Lessons for Living: Lessons on Diversity for Junior Infants to Second Class*. Original Writing. p.109.

13 *Nostra Aetate*, 1965; *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium,* 1997; *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School,* 1998; Vision '08, 2008; *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, 2013.

humans to follow their conscience and the inviolable human right to practice freely and with dignity their chosen religious or non-religious belief tradition. In the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* (1965) Vatican 11 stresses the rights of all humans to 'act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty'.[14] So what might the rise of the new nones mean for Catholics in Ireland? Research by St Mary's Press in the US (2017) on why millennials (ages 18-25) leave the Catholic Church highlights that 40% of people under the age of 30 identify as having no religion. Some of these participants described themselves as 'sorta Catholic', 'atheist', 'none' and 'anti-theist'.[15] Three categories emerged in the research identifying why the participants disaffiliated from the Catholic Church; the injured, the drifters and the dissenters and this has challenged ministers in the US to reflect on how they are engaging with people's experiences and identity within the Church. The Catholic Church might learn much from researching and understanding the complex reasons behind the rising numbers of those who are religiously disaffiliated.

Catholic schools in Ireland are no longer exclusively *of* and *for* Catholics and seek to be places of welcome and dialogue between different beliefs. They recognise and respect the religious freedom of their students and of their families and 'offers itself to all, non-Christians included'.[16] While there is much to indicate that Irish Catholic schools are inclusive, welcoming, respectful and supportive of belief difference, there are also signs that educators face a challenge to ensure that the needs of students from a range of religious and non-religious world views are acknowledged and addressed. In response to this the Catholic School Partnership (CSP) published examples of good practice on the inclusion of all pupils regardless of belief in Catholic Primary schools in 2015[17] and the Joint Managerial Body have published two editions of Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary schools (2010, 2019).[18] These publications affirm the inclusive nature of Catholic schools and offer practical recommendations on how to welcome, include, encourage and enter into dialogue with students from different religious and non-religious worldviews in Catholic school communities.

14 *Dignitatis Humanae* Par 1.

15 McCarty, R.J. & Vitek, J.M. (2017). *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*. St Mary's Press: Minnesota.

16 Vatican City, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* 1997, par 85.

17 Catholic Schools Partnership (2015), *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils,* CSP: Maynooth.

18 Aiveen Mullally (2010, 2019), *Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools*, JMB: Dublin.

LANGUAGE IS KEY

A lack of terminological consistency and clarity is a key issue in any exploration of the new 'nones' in Ireland. It is crucial to acknowledge the difficulty of achieving agreement on the use of terms when it comes to non-religious groups. 'No religion' is a vague category and contains within itself a whole range of possible positions ranging from strong or weak atheists to ethical atheists, to new atheists, to a wide variety of agnostics, humanists, free thinkers, sceptics, secularists, lapsed religious believers, unbelievers and many others. This means that the census category of 'No Religion' encompasses multiple positions and perspectives and is open to complex interpretations. Bullivant, Farias, Lanman & Lee 's study of *Atheists and Agnostics around the world* (2019) based on research in Brazil, China, Denmark, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, concludes that 'Atheists (i.e., people who 'don't believe in God') and agnostics (i.e., people who 'don't know whether there is a God or not, and don't believe there is a way to find out') exhibit significant diversity both within, and between, different countries. Accordingly, there are very many ways of being an unbeliever (i.e., atheists/agnostics combined).' [19] Indeed, defining terms such as atheism and agnosticism is highly contentious and contested and 'it is important to recognize that the term "atheism" is polysemous – i.e., it has more than one related meaning – even within philosophy'.[20] For Atheist Ireland (AI) 'Atheists are just people who do not believe that any gods exist. Most atheists believe things when there is reliable evidence that they are true.' AI speaks of ethical atheists who 'want to promote reason, critical thinking and science; atheism over supernaturalism; natural compassion and ethics; inclusive, caring atheist groups; fair and just societies; secular government; and local, national and global solidarity.'[21] So the language people use to self-describe, and the ways in which terms are used, makes the interpretation of census data extremely complicated. Further, when it comes to the exploration of non-religious beliefs, the difficulty surrounding the frustrating terminology and inadequate language sometimes creates friction and compounds a negative portrayal of these worldviews as a deficit. Moreover a plethora of terms describing worldviews such as non-religious, non-believer, no religion, non-theist, unreligious, unbeliever epitomise this approach. Critics argue that

19 Lanman, J., Bullivant, S., Farias, M., & Lee, L. (2019). *Understanding Unbelief: Atheists and agnostics around the world: Interim findings from 2019 research in Brazil, China, Denmark, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.*

20 Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy

21 http://www.michaelnugent.com/2012/08/24/a-draft-manifesto-to-promote-ethical-atheism/

the very attribution of the negative preface to the category 'No Religion' is problematic as it defines a dynamic diverse range of beliefs negatively while prioritising and normalising religion by inferring that the 'nones' are somehow deviant or lacking.

NON-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES AND THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN IRELAND

Interestingly for educators, apart from lesson plans designed collaboratively by the Humanist Association of Ireland and Educate Together,[22] some resources designed by Atheist Ireland for teachers and parents,[23] and the book *Is my family odd about gods? An Introduction for children to the Freedom of Religion and Belief*[24], there are few home-grown resources enabling educators to learn from and teach about the beliefs of the new 'nones' in schools in Ireland. In a country with an overwhelmingly denominational or faith-based system of schooling at primary level with a sizeable majority of faith schools at post primary level, it is important to explore what this rise of the religiously unaffiliated might mean for children, parents, and school personnel in Ireland. Further it is crucially important for faith schools to consider the experiences of the religiously unaffiliated within the educational system from preschool to tertiary level. As primary school teacher Emer Byrden asks 'What are we teaching this group of children about themselves and what are we teaching other children about this group? … What do children in this group hear or crucially not hear about themselves?'[25]These questions relate, not only to the curricular area of RE or Ethical education, but to the heart of school ethos in all aspects of school life.

An analysis of literature on the topic of non-religious perspectives and education in Ireland reveals some worrying issues. In a 2018 International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) report on the best and worst countries in the world for Atheists, Humanists and Non-Religious, Ireland comes 115th place out of a total of 196 countries.[26] In terms of educational policy ten different UN and Council of Europe reports stress that

22 https://www.educatetogether.ie/sites/default/files/humanism_lessons_3rd_class_4th_class.pdf

23 https://atheist.ie/2019/08/lesson-plans-about-atheism-for-teachers-and-parents/

24 Atheist Ireland *Is my family odd about gods? An Introduction for children to the Freedom of Religion and Belief* https://atheist.ie/shop/books/is-my-family-odd-about-gods/

25 https://moodle.mic.ul.ie/pluginfile.php/111310/mod_resource/content/1/What_about_the_nones.pdf

26 IHEU Humanists International At the heart of a vibrant global humanist community Annual Report 2018 https://humanists.international/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2706-HI_AnnualReport_AW_Web.pdf

Ireland is infringing on the human rights of atheists, agnostics and minority faith members. Atheist Ireland's Human Rights Officer Jane Donnelly says 'In Ireland the non-religious are now the second largest group in society after Roman Catholics, but still face religious discrimination.'[27] One atheist parent speaks of her children's experience in the Irish education system where religion plays a major role. 'There's an assumption that everyone is okay with religious instruction or a priest coming into the classroom … and if you're not, you're relegated to the back of the class and treated like a second-class citizen.'[28] While this experience may not be representative of many non-religious parents and children, the existence of such negative experiences in schools is a matter of concern for educators. In 2018 Peter Gunning, a retired principal with thirty-seven years of experience as a teacher and principal in a Catholic primary school in Ireland said that it was only when he took early retirement that he could come out as an atheist. He noted 'It was relatively easy to be an atheist principal of a Catholic school. All one had to do was to pretend not to be. The level of pretentiousness in primary schools is stark. As a principal who was lapsing from a la carte to non-practising to atheism, I wore my lack of belief in God with poker-face anonymity.'[29] Gunning speaks of the prevalence of teachers in denominational schools playing the pretend game. While such practice indicates a need for compassion and understanding it also suggests a need to take non-religious beliefs seriously at all levels of the Catholic educational system.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to Catholic schools, there is no indicator of whether or not children are being educated compassionately and comprehensively about the fastest growing belief group within the Irish population. Further there is no way of knowing whether educators appreciate the diversity of perspectives associated with the new 'nones'. There is a real need for the Catholic Church to appreciate the complex composition of the new nones, the factors leading to increased religious disaffiliation and the reality of belief fluidity among certain groups in contemporary Ireland. For instance, is there a causal connection between the way we are practicing, understanding and representing the Catholic faith in Ireland and the rise of the new nones? A lot can be gained from research into

27 https://www.thejournal.ie/best-and-worst-countries-atheist-4310703-Oct2018/

28 https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/schools-and-religion-non-believers-treated-like-second-class-citizens-1.3973464

29 https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/religion-and-schools-it-s-time-to-stop-playing-the-pretend-game-1.3647813

and dialogue with non-religious groups. It is time to move away from a rhetoric that, in the past, tended to place religious and non-religious groups in competing, binary and even hostile positions. In advance of the 2021 Census with its rephrased question about Religion and its option to tick the 'No Religion' box, it is important for Church members to recognise that understanding the voices and beliefs of every citizen has the potential to enable educators to work toward creating a more compassionate, inclusive, educated society.

Pope Francis on World Order. Pope Francis is not a defender of the liberal order that brought in the neoliberal economic system. At the same time, Francis is also not an advocate of demagogic and simplistic solutions to the crisis of that order nationally and internationally, given the neo-nationalistic and xenophobic instincts of the anti-system and anti-establishment political parties. Francis's international actions amounted also to a rejection of the plan of Catholic traditionalism and anti-liberalism in America to take back Europe from secularism, multiculturalism, immigration, globalization, and, in particular, from the European Union. In this we see the connections between this global papacy and the anti-internationalist agenda, which is the agenda of the political opponents of this pontificate.

– Massimo Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis* (New York: Orbis Books) p. 176.

A Theological Reflection on Pastoral Practice in this Time
– *From Maintenance to Mission*

Eamonn Fitzgibbon

I have been very struck in these times by the phrase that we often use in Pastoral Renewal – 'from *maintenance* to *mission*'. Donal Harrington says that "this implies a shift on focusing effort on maintaining what is there already to focusing effort on striking out in order to put something different in place"[1]; essentially it recognises that maintaining the *status quo* is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of a rapidly changing cultural context. A strategy primarily built on maintenance was perhaps appropriate fifty years ago when church practice, vocations etc were all in such high numbers. Now we need to think mission and respond to the plea by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* to operate in a 'missionary key'. Mission implies new strategies and creative responses to go out and engage with people, to be a Church which evangelises and strives to connect with people who may not be connected in the traditional sense.

I have felt for some time that the idea that we could simply move from maintenance to mission mode is unrealistic. The reality is that maintenance is needed to continue alongside any attempts at mission – without some maintenance our Church would fall in to disarray. However, I would argue that a disproportionate amount of resources, time and energy is spent on maintenance rather than mission. The Mass schedule still had to be fulfilled, babies baptised, the dead buried, schools still expect that the priest would visit and that schools themselves would prepare children for sacraments. Any time or energy for mission is somewhat depleted. In the current context of the Coronavirus crisis, we have moved completely in to the territory of mission and the need for maintenance of most

1 Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal: Reflecting on the Experience*, (Dublin: Columba, 1997), 74.

Eamonn Fitzgibbon is a priest of the diocese of Limerick. He is Director of the Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies at MIC, St. Patrick's Campus, Thurles

of the previous schedules and practices has fallen away. We can't speak about people coming to Mass and instead we have to find ways of reaching people with on-line liturgies, radio Masses etc. We are now in entirely missionary territory - we must find ways of reaching out to connect with people who are unable to come to where we are, we need to be creative and imaginative.

ORDAINED MINISTRY AND PRIESTHOOD OF THE FAITHFUL

Immediately after the more extreme restrictions were announced by the Government, Bishop Brendan Leahy rang me first thing on that Saturday morning and asked me to identify those *clergy* in the diocese of Limerick who are under seventy years of age, and of those, who might have underlying conditions that require them to cocoon. The next task was to clarify the geographical spread of those priests who are available. In many ways it is as if we are now projected forward ten years or so. We have approximately forty to forty-five priests covering essential services across sixty parishes, including funerals, sick calls and on-line liturgies. We were also asked to identify *lay people* who could lead prayers at the graveside if required. I have been making simple resources available to families so that they can pray with family members gathered around deceased loved ones at home for the wake as we are precluded from going in and out of houses. So, families are now praying at home, leading liturgies themselves, joining in for the on-line Masses. In all of this there is an opportunity - an opportunity to let go of so much of the maintenance that was holding us back from truly operating in a missionary key.

There is no going back – even when things return to 'normal'. There is an opportunity to look again at the volume of Masses celebrated throughout our parishes, to look again at the dependence on schools for sacramental preparation, to look again at the way in which a Church that was so clergy dependent may have denied the parish community the opportunity of being a truly ministering parish. We need to take seriously the opportunities provided in the modern culture for evangelisation – such as technology in our churches, social media etc. Never again can we argue that it would be impossible not to have Mass in this or that church every weekend, neither can we insist that the priest has to be present for every aspect of funeral liturgies.

THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

I am very struck these days by the way in which the domestic Church has been mobilised. It is interesting that the Passover

celebrated in the Jewish tradition – the Seder meal – takes place in each household, in the home, with the family. We too speak of a basic and principal unit of the Church as being the domestic Church – the family in the home. Alongside the other units – the parish, the diocese, the universal Church – this unit is hugely important. This is the message behind each of the World Meetings of Families – the most recent having been held in Dublin.

Sadly, it seems that the significance of the domestic Church has somehow diminished over the generations. However, current circumstances dictate that this unit is now the one through which the Church finds expression. Families gather in their homes to attend Mass on the television, the internet or the radio and families find new and creative ways to pray together. Recently, when preparing a family for the funeral of their loved one they explained that the remains would be brought home for a wake – a wake that was private and confined to family. They asked me for some resources that would help them in praying that night with their deceased and I was very happy to oblige. However, it did strike me that somehow families have lost the confidence and experience around these basic ways of living and expressing their faith. These times of Covid have created a climate of necessity whereby 'staying at home' challenges us to ensure the domestic Church is the essential unit of Church. We cannot presume that just because families are staying at home means there is a vibrant domestic Church in place; anecdotally, it is certainly true that some families are gathered together in prayer in a new way but this may need to be accompanied with formation and encouragement.

POST-COVID ?

William Bridges offers us a wonderful example of Moses as a leader who successfully managed the transition needs of a community in a time of great change.[2] There is a danger that we will rush back to the way things were when all of this is over – a flight back in to Egypt. The greatest tragedy for the living and the greatest insult to the dead will be for us to go back to the way we were, carrying on as if nothing had happened. We are now in what could be called 'the neutral zone' – that time of wilderness between the old and familiar and the birth of something new. God is not teaching us a lesson through Covid but God uses every moment as a *teachable moment* and so it will be important that we reflect on this experience and draw out what it might mean for how we do things in the future.

2 William Bridges, *Getting Them Through the Wilderness: A Leader's Guide to Transition*, 2006.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION

In fact, this year will require of us a creative response to the provision of Confirmation to those children who, not having received confirmation in the Spring of 2020 will now have left primary school. Here, there is an opportunity for parishes to provide some catechesis and sacramental preparation for the sacrament. Parents could be invited to apply to their local parish for the sacrament and commit to undertake a basic programme provided at parish level. Similarly, deferred First Communion ceremonies could now take place across a number of Sundays with families again being invited to apply to receive the sacrament. This crisis could present the opportunity and impetus to move towards the parish based sacramental preparation and celebration that we have long spoken about.

INTERNET RELIGION

The immediate aftermath of Covid 19 saw a huge rise in the array of on-line Masses and liturgies provided over the internet. This development is worthy of reflection. Ilia Delio sees this internet religion as a sign of a *new* religious consciousness on the horizon and through it we can attend different liturgies around the world, exploring different religious traditions. She continues:

> 'Internet religion may be God's way of saying – I am much larger than you think; I actually enjoy different languages and rituals. I can be found in a thousand ways and I cannot be boxed into a concrete structure whether a Church, a Temple, a formula or a decree – all of these are human constructions that in the past were helpful but in our age have hindered and, at times, alienated us from our capacity to unite. Now we are in the midst of a pandemic and the internet is pushing us toward a new planetary community, sharing our fears and hopes online, joining in a common concern for our future'.[3]

The internet certainly provides the means to a new community and within this a new faith community. In saying that I have been very struck by the fact that people still wish to connect with their own locality, their own neighbours and clergy, even if it is through the internet.

3 *Internet Easter* by Ilia Delio April 6, 2020, Accessed at https://omegacenter.info/internet-easter/

ECOLOGY

At the height of the pandemic we celebrated Earth Day – the fiftieth anniversary of this celebration which focused this year on Climate Action. In looking for the causes of coronavirus, there is a recognition that it is linked in some way to human interference with the earth's ecosystems and biodiversity. This is true whether it originated in a laboratory in Wuhan or in a wild animal market where animals are brought from their natural environment to highly stressful conditions creating a breeding ground for viruses. Even if the cause lies elsewhere again, all agree that globalisation and world travel facilitated the spread of this virus throughout the world. Many years ago, Thomas Berry reminded us that we belong to the earth; the earth does not belong to us. Some argue that because we humans have disrupted the Law of Nature:

> 'there is likely a silent war that has erupted between nature and humans; for we have become the most unnatural species on the planet … the systems of nature … forming a federation of earthlife to consider the extent of human destruction and probably planning a global human *coup d'état* in the 21st century … for nature is made for the flourishing of life and will do whatever it takes to achieve its purpose'.[4]

Perhaps, such an interpretation of this crisis may seem too extreme but there is no doubt we cannot be healthy unless the planet is healthy:

> 'There is a clear link between the wellbeing of humans, other living beings, and the ecosystem which we can ignore only to our peril – a hard look at our consumption patterns that have been wrecking the planet. We also need to take a hard look at some of the luxuries we are addicted to, like flying around for frivolous reasons, holidaying in exotic places and travelling thousands of miles to reach there, etc., with detrimental impacts on the planet and its ecosystems'.[5]

It is encouraging that when human health is endangered there is a capacity to act, changing our behaviour and complying with the extreme measures that are required. If we can recognise the ecological crisis as being equally urgent, with devastating consequences for human health, it may not be too late to make the necessary lifestyle changes. Similarly, there has been a growing

4 *Internet Easter* by Ilia Delio April 6, 2020

5 *Seven Reflections on the Coronavirus Emergency from an Ecological Perspective*, Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam SDB, Coordinator of the Sector on Ecology, Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

sense of the worldwide community coming together in response to Covid – it is to be hoped that this global solidarity will continue in the form of an international response to the needs of poorer nations.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE

Ministry encompasses practice which in turn can be defined as intentional action. However, it is recognised within pastoral theology that alongside what we term best practice, practice is corruptible – practices are not neutral and they are not always good. Therefore, we also need to be continually asking what is the *shadow-side*, the possible negative consequence of some of the hastily convened pastoral practices enacted as a response to Covid-19. The suddenness of the situation in which we found ourselves caused a rush to solutions which, though well-intentioned and perhaps appropriate in the circumstances, may give rise to some dangerous off-shoots. That which has been put in place is certainly not the ideal – it is a *'needs must'* response – it is also true that sometimes well-intentioned actions can have negative unforeseen side-effects.

Indeed Pope Francis is alert to these dangers and he has reminded us that "online Masses and spiritual communion do not represent the church, this is the church in a difficult situation that the Lord is allowing, but the ideal of the church is always with the people and with the sacraments" - one's relationship with Jesus "is intimate, it is personal, but it is in a community,"[6] The *community dimension* of our liturgical celebrations is seriously undermined and virtual communities are a poor – albeit necessary – substitute. Online Masses, prayers and acts of spiritual communion are available but Pope Francis says this is not the church and he has even gone so far as saying it is 'dangerous'.

Others expressed discomfort at online liturgies because far from seeing them as a forward step towards a technological future, they experience them as a backward step to the liturgy of yesteryear – clergy centred without lay presence or participation, where the congregation is very much cast in the role of spectator. Somebody even remarked to me that it is ironic that the distribution of communion is discouraged at lay led liturgies and now, when the distribution of communion is impossible our first recourse is the Mass – is it not now time for creative prayer and lay led liturgies?

The rush to fill the void created by closed churches may be keeping us from entering in to a deeper moment of prayer and reflection. Tomáš Halík, the Czech priest and theologian has remarked:

6 Pope Francis, Homily at Morning Mass in Santa Marta, April 17th 2020.

> ‘Maybe we should accept the present abstinence from religious services and the operation of the church as *kairos*, as an opportunity to stop and engage in thorough reflection before God and with God. I am convinced the time has come to reflect on how to continue the path of reform, which Pope Francis says is necessary: not attempts to return to a world that no longer exists, or reliance just on external structural reforms, but instead a shift toward the heart of the Gospel, “a journey into the depths’.[7]

There is also the danger that the Eucharist becomes less of an action and more of an object – our language communicates this objectifying the Eucharist when we speak of getting, taking or receiving communion. We have seen priests and bishops, with the best of intentions, bless streets and cities with the monstrance from open-top cars (even a diocese from a helicopter) as a protection from the virus. Thomas O’Loughlin invites us to:

> ‘use this experience to rediscover that we are the church (it is not a building), we must be eucharistic every day … but the word ‘eucharist’ relates to a verb: it is something we, the whole People of God, do. It is our basic activity as Christians, not some ‘thing’ that the priest does for us or makes for us’.[8]

Technology and the internet has offered us a wonderful resource creating opportunities previously unimaginable but we need to proceed with *caution*. For example, I know that some clergy provided deferred celebrations of the Easter ceremonies by previously recording them through Facebook on YouTube – initially for those using Facebook streaming this was the only option available to them. The canon lawyer Luigi Mariano Guzzo alerts us to a very interesting dilemma created by this practice. He asks whether the internet is a communicative or a liturgical space. Traditionally the internet has been used by the Church for communication, we are now using it as a liturgical space and this is untenable with deferred celebrations.

> ‘If the Internet is understood as a liturgical space, then the situation has to change. Taking into consideration Matthew 18:20 (“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them”), it seems that there are two essential elements of the Eucharistic celebration: 1) the actuality of the celebration, as a present moment of grace; 2) the people of God as an assembly

7 Tomáš Halík, *Christianity in a Time of Sickness,* America: The Jesuit Review, April 13, 2020, Vol. 222 / No. 8.

8 Thomas O’Loughlin, *Reimagining the Eucharist*, The Tablet, 25th March 2020.

> that gathers in "breaking" the bread. In the deferred celebration both these elements are missing … If we don't talk about these things in our ecclesial communities, we will continue to live in the contradiction of bishops and priests who recommend to people to follow celebrations which are formally considered 'without people', while asking them, at the same time, not to take them as if they were simply entertainment. But if there is no liturgical participation, in the full sense, what should distinguish these celebrations online from other broadcasts in programming, that is, from entertainment?'[9]

CONCLUSION

I am conscious that, as a friend remarked recently, 'you are great at asking the questions but where are the answers?' I am raising more questions than answers here but for now it is appropriate to live with the questions, to develop the capacity to ask open questions and attend to the answers with an open mind.

For now, ours is a task of discernment, praying to the Lord to "Grant that all the faithful of the Church, looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith, may constantly devote themselves to the service of the Gospel."[10]

9 Luigi Mariano Guzzo, *Can Web/Internet be a liturgical Space?* Il Regno blog, 8th April 2020. (translated from the Italian)

10 *Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs (III): Jesus, the Way to the Father*, from the 3rd Edition of the Roman Missal, English Translation, 2011.

True Love. Once again, love must not be confused with like. The point is not to *like* everything and everybody – not even God could seriously issue such a command. Rather to *love* means to respect the other as other – even if I should not like him or her. Hence, love often implies hard work and intimate engagement, and, contrary to popular opinion, love ought not to be reduced to sentimental feeling of harmony or nostalgic romanticism.

– Werner G. Jeanrond, *Reasons to Hope.* 2020. (London: T. & T. Clark), p. 174.

Placing pilgrimage during Covid-19

Richard Scriven

Covid-19 and its far-reaching effects will dominate the histories written about 2020. Amongst the litany of impacts, it will be noted that planned pilgrimages did not occur that year. Instead of crowds climbing Croagh Patrick or pilgrims fasting on Lough Derg, thousands of people are participating in online pilgrimages, through television and radio, and in their prayers. This significant disruption has brought the very nature of pilgrimage into focus as organisers and shrine staff arrange alternative facilities for believers to maintain personal and family traditions.

While the Covid-19 emergency presents many challenges, and indeed considerable sorrow for some families and communities, it also offers opportunities to re-consider many aspects of normal life. We have a new appreciation for nature, for the simple act of meeting family and friends, and for the importance of communal spaces. The same applies to pilgrimage locations. The people and places of the journey on *Tóchar Phádraig* or at Lourdes are valued even more when they are inaccessible. This article reflects on these lessons based on my research on pilgrimage in Ireland by considering the role of place, the characteristic of virtual pilgrimages, and a long history of spiritual pilgrimage in Christianity.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

Place is central to pilgrimage. People travel on historic routes and to particular locations. These sacred spaces relate to the life of a holy individual, miraculous events, or special natural significance. In Hinduism, millions of people travel to the River Ganges to ritually purify themselves in the water, while the Shikoku pilgrimage in Japan involves visiting eighty-eight temples associated with the Buddhist monk Kūkai. The Irish landscape is dotted with sites linked with lives of saints, particularly the hundreds of surviving holy wells. Pilgrimages bring us to these places forging a connection between people, place, and God.

Richard Scriven is a geographer whose PhD, funded by Irish Research Council, examined pilgrimage in contemporary Ireland

This connection is especially prominent in Irish pilgrimages. The work of a fellow geographer, Mary Nolan, found that topographical and natural features are a clear focus of pilgrimage activity in Ireland, while on continental Europe objects and relics tend to be the primary subject of pilgrimage.[1] Physical characteristics define many of our main pilgrimage centres; for example, Lough Derg is an island, Croagh Patrick a mountain, and Lady's Island is a coastal lake. These places are embedded in the natural and cultural landscape with long histories of worship. Also, they tend to be located in more peripheral areas, reflecting trends in Judaeo-Christian tradition where remote and difficult to access locations are strongly associated with spiritual events and inner transformation.

Pilgrimages facilitate out-of-the ordinary experiences and consciousness of forces that cannot be accessed elsewhere.[2] The Holy Land vividly presents the life and mysteries of Christ, while Lourdes can make the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary seem more palpable and holy wells can bring locals closer to their patron saint. These places are considered sacred because of their history and associations with religious figures, but they are also the sites of personal spiritual encounters for people, adding to their significance. In Christian terms, it is important to clarify that God is as present in these spaces as elsewhere, but human awareness of this presence can become heightened through the practices and character of these places. Writing about Croagh Patrick, Rev. Garry Hastings, explains it well: 'mountain is just a way of thinking. A tool to help is get nearer to God. We are always close to God, but we forget…The mountain is a way to help us remember.'[3] Holy sites and their pilgrimages are instruments of faith encouraging journeys of reflection and spiritual renewal.

One of the ways pilgrimages enable this process is by removing us from the everyday world. Edith and Victor Turner, two prominent scholars of pilgrimages, define this as *liminality*: a transitionary state where pilgrims are freed to consider the more important things in life and open themselves to spiritual encounters.[4] It is encapsulated in Lough Derg where pilgrims spend three days both physically and metaphorically disconnected from the world on a lake island. Discussing this aspect, one participant, Ann, explained

1 Mary Nolan, 'Irish Pilgrimage: The Different Tradition', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73 (1983), 421–438.

2 Jill Dubisch, *In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1995), p.38.

3 Gary Hastings, *Going Up the Holy Mountain: a spiritual guidebook* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2015), p. 26.

4 Victor Turner & Edith Turner, *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

to me that: "We're all so busy. I find at work with email, and then I have an iPhone, so you never get off-line … I think it's good that we can cut off and just get back to basics, maybe listen to the silence for a while." She describes being liberated from normal concerns enabling spiritual awareness crafted by the prayers and ceremonies of the three days.

Communitas, or fellowship, is the other primary feature identified by the Turners' examination of pilgrimages. The shared journeys bring people together and encourage conversation and reflection. Fr Frank Fahey, the spiritual driving force behind the revived *Tóchar Phádraig* path and leader of countless pilgrimages, emphasises that pilgrims are inclusive, being open to others and the lessons we can learn from encounters with strangers.[5] Claire, who had walked the route several times, described to me this sense of community: "most of the people get it, that you don't stick with your own gang and you try to mix around … walking along the road, we're all kind of together and people are minding each other." Pilgrimage is a gathering of different people, who in sharing a common path can forge solidarities, tell stories, and learn truths through each other, as well as through God.

Together these different strands illustrate the role of place in pilgrimages. It is the physical and social setting that enables people to become closer to God and each other. However, what happens when we can no longer travel to these places?

ONLINE PILGRIMAGES: A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

The Covid-19 restrictions have seen Irish pilgrimage sites respond creatively to enable people participate remotely. This builds on pre-existing infrastructure which have become more common recently, such as live streaming masses or devotional websites dedicated to shrines. Virtual or cyber pilgrimage has been in existence for some time with different groups and shrines using the new connectivity of the internet. The limited research in the area has shown that these pilgrimages can still be spiritually nurturing and meaningful for participants.[6]

Technology and good online services (where available) enable more immersive experiences where places can be vividly represented through detailed photographs and audio-visual recordings. I have used video in my own research on pilgrimage

5 Frank Fahey, 'Pilgrims or Tourists?', *The Furrow*, 53:4, (2002), 213-218 (p.215).

6 Connie Hill-Smith, 'Cyberpilgrimage: The (Virtual) Reality of Online Pilgrimage Experience', *Religion Compass*, 5:6, 236-246, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00277.x

in Ireland to record events and show them to different audiences.[7] Although these representations cannot do justice to the reality of being there, and fail to fully capture the sense of the place and the crowds, these tools can nonetheless help people feel closer to sacred places.

Lough Derg, best known for its three-day pilgrimage running throughout the summer, has a series of online resources, including messages from the pastoral team and the initiative to 'Do Lough Derg from wherever you are'.[8] Also, in place of day retreats run during the early summer, the staff have assembled videos and prayers forging new connections with the shrine and its long spiritual history. Feedback from pilgrims illustrate the value of these facilities: "So grateful to be able to tune in online and be in a prayerful space", "A beautiful prayerful online retreat, I enjoyed every moment of it. It really touched my heart."[9] Participants gain from these online pilgrimages. Photos and prayers from Lough Derg help prompt memories of previous visits creating spiritual and emotional resonances. While these are obviously different from the experiences on the lake-island, they still offer believers comfort and a means to feel closer to God during a challenging time.

Online pilgrimages can also help generate a sense of connection with others. The Coivd-19 restrictions have encouraged families and friends to interact using live chats and messaging apps much more. Social media groups are being used to help communities mobilise and for people to reach out to each other. Sharing time in the same virtual space can forge solidarities and help people feel part of a group. Knock has transferred its busy summer schedule online with diocese, religious communities, and lay organisations participating virtually.[10] They are facilitating people in connecting with the shrine and with each other. Likewise, the Facebook page for the annual Lourdes pilgrimage for the Diocese of Cloyne assembled a programme of events and shared items across the week when the pilgrimage was due to occur.[11] Comments from members of this community highlight the value of this temporary replacement. Different forms of fellowship arise through social media channels, which provide a space for groups to share and explore faith together.

7 For example, Croagh Patrick https://vimeo.com/88449841 or Lough Derg https://vimeo.com/88745693

8 Lough Derg June 2020 Notice: https://www.loughderg.org/

9 Lough Derg, Online Day Retreats May 2020: https://www.loughderg.org/online-day-retreats-may-2020/

10 Knock Shrine, Online Pilgrimages For May & June 2020: https://www.knockshrine.ie/online-pilgrimages-for-may-june-2020/?v=d2cb7bbc0d23

11 See https://www.facebook.com/cloynelourdes

While pilgrimages are described in terms of the physical journey, the accompanying spiritual and emotional journeys are the more significant parts. Paths, churches, fellow travellers, and encounters along the way are the infrastructure. Personal development, reflection, and learning in faith are the hallmarks of pilgrimage. As Fr Frank Fahey, wrote 'the essential journey of the pilgrim is the journey inwards to that sacred space within the heart where the Holy Spirit dwells.'[12] By this measure, online pilgrimages can have comparable impacts to real-life ones.

SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE

While online pilgrimages are a recent innovation, they succeed a long tradition of different forms of spiritual or contemplative pilgrimage. Writings from the early church in Ireland and Britain show that prayerful reflection on sacred sites has been a Christian practice for centuries. Following the official acceptance of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the sites in Palestine associated with the life of Christ began to be developed, especially through the patronage of Emperor Constantine's mother, Helena. Structures, such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, enabled a form of spatial theology whereby these locations served as witnesses to the major events in the Christian story.[13] These sites could be studied and reflected upon to enhance understanding of scripture. The physical locations of the incarnated God assisted believers in achieving the salvation he promised.

These developments are encapsulated in the text *De Locis Sanctis* (*Concerning sacred places*) by Saint Adomnán (c.627/8-704), the ninth abbot of the Iona monastery. He was a spiritual leader of some significance whose writings still inform our understanding of theology in the early Irish and British church, or the Insular church as it called. *De Locis Sanctis* provides a description of the seventh century Holy Land which was to be used as an exegetical aid to help monastics understand the mysteries of the bible.[14] Considerable details are included to enable contemplative pilgrimage for an audience who knew they would never be able to visit Palestine. The book reduced the physical distance between Jerusalem, understood as the centre of the world, and Iona, or other monasteries in Ireland and Britain, the islands at the end of the earth.

12 Fahey, *Pilgrims or Tourists?*, p.215.
13 John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*. (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003).
14 Jennifer O'Reilly, 'Reading the Scriptures in the Life of Columba', in Cormac Bourke (ed.), *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba* (Dublin 1997), p.80-106.

In his chapters on Jerusalem, for example, Adomnán blends the physical description and biblical tropes to highlight it as the heavenly city (e.g. Ezekiel 40-48; Revelation 3:12; 21:1). Writing on the church marking where Jesus ascended, he tells of how the light pours out and 'mount Olivet seems not alone to be illuminated, but even on fire, and the whole city…seems to be lit up.'[15] This vision merges the earthly metropolis and the new Jerusalem to come, while also being a hopeful symbol calling to mind Matthew 5:14 - 'You are a light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden'. Throughout the text, he crafts a geography that combines scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers and monastic saints, and religious motifs to create a vivid atlas leading people through the mysteries of Christianity. In *De Locis Sanctis*, Adomnán created a rich meta-tool: a text on the Christian holy places in and around Jerusalem which aimed to help the faithful reach the heavenly Jerusalem.

De Locis Sanctis is one of the clearest early examples of a device facilitating spiritual pilgrimage. It used the mechanisms of the time to overcome the barriers faced by Christians far from the Holy Land. In essence, this is the same principle at play in the online pilgrimages of this summer. Times of hardship and restrictions can foster creativity. The labyrinths in medieval cathedrals, most prominently in Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres, were used as a substitute for pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which was inaccessible at the time. Or, more locally, people have told me about those who are sick or housebound using a book illustrating the prayer pattern at St Gobnait's holy well in Ballvourney, Cork to spiritually complete the stations. On different scales, across different times, each of these cases illustrate the role of virtual pilgrimages.

The tradition of spiritual pilgrimage in different forms illustrates that the recent online pilgrimages follow a well-trodden path. Technology and connectivity render them in new ways but underlying each of these innovations is a desire to assist people in journeying closer to God. There is insight and strength to be gained from considering how these diverse instruments align towards a common goal – many roads to the same destination.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

In early June, the beginning of the Lough Derg pilgrimage session, I was thinking about the island lying empty, when usually there would be hundreds of people going barefoot on the prayer beds, in the basilica, and keeping the twenty-four-hour vigil. Through

15 Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis* i.24, ed. and tr. Denis Meehan (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies: 1983), p.69.

social media, Fr La Flynn, the prior, explained how he was keeping on the spirit of the pilgrimage through daily mass and performing prayer stations on behalf of everyone. It was a simple yet poignant message emphasising the power of this place and the attempts to help people connect with it remotely.

The Covid-19 emergency has prompted us all to reflect on different parts of our lives and society more generally. It has highlighted the importance of family and community over economy and materiality. This reflective time has also underscored the significance of pilgrimage, and the role of places such as Lourdes, Croagh Patrick, and Knock in the spiritual lives of the faithful. Perhaps, when we can return to these places, we will do so with a new appreciation for them and those we encounter along the way.

Fr Frank Fahey defined pilgrimage as 'essentially a journey in faith or at least with an element of faith expectancy in it.'[16] These journeys are understood to be physical ones on the Camino de Santiago, in rituals of Hajj, or circling Mount Kailash in Tibet. However, traditions within Christianity and other faiths show us that the spiritual journeys – the crucial part - can take different forms. St Adomnán assembled a rich text to lead his community and others towards the benefits of exploring the Holy Land over thirteen-hundred years ago. Today websites and apps are doing the same thing. They help people deal with the challenges of their lives or assist in their spiritual progression. Place remains central to pilgrimages, but *how* we get to those places is just as significant. Each pilgrim walks the trail in their own way, praying for their own intentions. Books, computers, and labyrinths have their place alongside mountains, paths, and churches.

16 Fahey, *Pilgrims or Tourists?*, p.213.

True Worship. Worship we must, but worship whom? Worship is only demeaning if one worships anyone or anything other than God. Twice when the seer of the apocalypse bends down to worship an angel, he is rebuked. 'Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!'" (Rev. 19,10 c f 22.8-9.

– Timothy Radcliffe, *Alive in God,* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum) p. 345.

Responsibility in the Christian Life

Bill Cosgrave

The idea of responsibility is a fundamental one in ethics, in moral theology and in the Christian life. An understanding of moral responsibility is crucial for the participation of the Christian community and its members in the moral life we share with all of humankind.[1] 'When we ask about responsibility we are asking about ourselves'.[2] We may begin by reflecting on this concept of responsibility, especially in relation to the moral life.

THE IDEA OF RESPONSIBILITY

At the literal level the word means that one is able to respond to some stimulus; one is capable of a response to someone or something in the environment. This will usually be a free response, since our freedom is presupposed here, though some raise questions about it. If, in addition, one speaks of a person as responsible, one is referring to that person's trustworthiness or dependability in some enterprise or relationship. It may also involve a reference to one's mature or adult attitude in the various areas and activities in life. Having responsibility for something or some situation will indicate that one has been or is the cause of a particular development or state of affairs and one is committed to some value or values. A Christian understanding of responsibility is provided by Bernard Haring when he says: 'Responsibility, seen in a distinctively Christian way, is our God-given capacity to make all of our moral aspirations and decisions, indeed all our conscious life, a response to God, and thus to integrate it within the obedience of faith'.[3]

1 James M Gustafson in his Foreword to Albert R. Jonsen's book *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics*. Corpus Books, Washington/Cleveland 1968 pp v & ix.
2 Gustafson in his Introduction to H. Richard Niebuhr's book *The Responsible Self – An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy.* Harper & Row Publishers, New York, Evanston and London, 1963, p 15.
3 Bernard Haring, C. SS. R., *Free and Faithful in Christ – Moral Theology for Priests and Laity,* Volume 1: General Moral Theology. St Paul Publications, Middlegreen, Slough SL3 6BT, 1978, p 65.

Bill Cosgrave is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns. Address: Parochial House, Monageer, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

to set it in the context of our relationships in life and to make clear that we are persons-in-relationships-and-in-community by our very nature. This must be seen as an essential setting or foundation for our consideration of the moral reality we are referring to as responsibility.

Moral theologians today use different models to throw light on the moral life and some of its aspects and elements. So here we will consider the reality of morality in terms of the relational model of the Christian moral life. This will provide the necessary context for our consideration of moral responsibility.[4]

Human life and hence also the moral life consists essentially of a complex set of relationships between persons, whether individuals, groups or communities. We live and act within these relationships. It follows, then, that the moral life is fundamentally about persons in relationship and in community. It is in this context of relationships and community living that moral obligations arise and that the moral call is heard. The other person is a gift or blessing and from him/her comes the call or obligation to respond positively in the situation in which one is. This call or invitation is experienced as coming from the other person but ultimately from God. To that invitation a response needs to be given, a response that is loving and appropriate to the circumstances. So, being moral is a matter of being faithful to the fact of our inter-relatedness and to the demands of relationship.

In the relational model of Christian morality that we are considering, there is a significant effort to stress the social and not just the personal aspects of the moral life. We live in groups and communities and these have an essential moral dimension: moral obligations arise within them and moral responses are called for by individuals and groups.

The relational model also gives a lot of attention to the moral subject, the person or group living and acting in relationship with others. It is not adequate just to take note of a person's or a group's individual actions and assess these morally. We must also take into account what the person or group has become and is as a human person or group. In a word, it is essential to focus on the moral character of the agent, because that is the primary moral reality as far as any moral agent is concerned.

The relational model of the Christian moral life also stresses the historical or temporal dimension of the person, group and community. This refers to the fact that we all have a past, present

4 See William Cosgrave, *Christian Living Today- Essays in Moral and Pastoral Theology.* The Columba Press, Dublin 2001, pp 16-22.

and future, that we live in time and move through time and in doing so change as persons, as groups and as communities, either by growing morally or sinking further into sin and diminishing morally. In addition, we belong to a particular society and culture and, consequently, we are socially and culturally conditioned. This has important implications for our moral lives as persons, groups and communities and for the morality of the actions we do or do not do.

In this context there arises also and naturally a stress on growth and maturity in the moral life. We are called to grow to the fullness of our potential as human persons and as groups and communities. Hence, we need to take a positive and dynamic attitude to ourselves and our moral development, not being content with being passive and static, but doing all we can to become the best person or group or community we can be.

UNDERSTANDING MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

When we reflect on the reality of responsibility, we find there are significant aspects or dimensions of it to be taken into account. Responsibility is a relatively new word in moral discourse. It was seldom used in earlier centuries but in recent times it is very much part of our everyday language, especially in moral matters. It is an important concept and can illuminate significant aspects of our moral lives and actions and those of the Church itself and of society, its agencies and members. Haring even says that: 'the central concept of Christian morality' is 'in the idea of responsibility.'[5]

Reflection on the word 'responsibility' itself quickly brings us to focus on the word 'response', which is central to the concept, as noted above. Here we are drawing on our experience of daily living and focusing on very familiar elements of it. Most of our actions in life have the nature of response to what someone else or some group has done in relation to us as persons. Whether their action is significant or not, we will very likely feel called to make some response that seems appropriate in the circumstances. And we will be aware that the action we are responding to was very probably a free action and so had a moral character. Our response, then, will be appropriate, hopefully, and also a free action on our part. Examples are abundant. They may range from responding to a friendly greeting to responding in listening mode to a sad and distressing account of a family breakup or to doing one's best to share the joy and delight of someone who has won a major prize or is celebrating their marriage or the birth of a first child. Niebuhr

5 Bernard Haring, C. SS. R., *The Law of Christ – Moral Theology for Priests and Laity,* Volume 1, The Mercier Press, Cork, 1961, p 49.

makes this point well (p 61): '… for the ethics of responsibility the *fitting* action, the one that fits into a total interaction as response and as anticipation of further response, is alone conducive to the good and alone is right.' For the Catholic, of course, the moral teaching of the Church will provide us with the appropriate guidance needed to ensure that we act at all times in a fully moral way.

It is in the context of such situations that involve two people or groups that the moral dimension of our relationships emerges. It is in such cases, as noted above, that we hear the moral call, the insistent demand to respond in an appropriate way. In fact it is here that the reality of moral obligation enters our lives and calls us to make a response that fits the situation or the invitation of the other to respond. On further reflection it will become clear that for both parties there will be essential elements that may be categorised in the words of one theologian as recognition, respect and response.[6] This is certainly true if the invitation and response are positive. They may not be, of course, and, then, there will be an element of what McDonagh calls threat rather than gift involved in the exchange. It will be important to note also that the moral call or the feeling of obligation will be experienced by both parties in the relationship: each will feel called to relate positively to the other, though what happens may at times be rather different on one or both sides.

In this context Niebuhr emphasises that an important factor will be how one interprets the action or actions to which one is responding. He says (p 63): 'We respond to these events in accordance with our interpretation. Such interpretation, it need scarcely be added, is not simply an affair of our conscious, and rational, mind but also of the deep memories that are buried within us, of feelings and intuitions that are only partly under our immediate control.'

This analysis will make it clear that in such situations there is responsibility on both parties in the relationship or exchange. It will be important to note that this does not imply that such responsibility is simply a burden or a problem for those involved. Often it will be the opposite as both parties relate together with pleasure and mutual appreciation. But sometimes there will be elements of negativity that may well prove burdensome to one or both parties. A lot will depend on the seriousness of the issues in the situation, the circumstances and the attitudes of those involved.

We may note also that the responsibility arising in such situations may well have an impact, positive or negative, on the relationship between the parties. That relationship is the context of

6 Enda McDonagh, *Gift and Call – Towards a Christian Theology of Morality*. Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1975, pp 40-43.

the responsible exchange and may have a significant effect on how the exchange develops.

It may be noted at this point that an ethic of responsibility is a very positive way of understanding the moral life and takes a quite different attitude to the world and its activities compared to the very traditional emphasis on withdrawal from that world in order to achieve advancement in the spiritual life. Jonsen puts it well: 'God calls individuals to himself, not by calling them away from the urgent needs of social and civic life, but by summoning them to work within the world, redeeming and reforming its structures so that all persons might live freely and responsibly. The moral life … is a response to God's invitation to live in the world … and to enter into the solemn undertaking of redeeming the world in concert with the creator.'[7]

THE DIMENSIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

As already noted, an obvious dimension or aspect of responsibility is one's ability to respond to some action that has reference to oneself. One has the ability to respond to such action and this is normally a free response. This is a precious human capacity and a basic element of one's moral life. Because one can so respond, one has the human dignity of being a free and moral person. So one can establish relationships with other individuals and groups and of course relate also to God and Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

This dimension or aspect of responsibility can enable one to enter into and establish a variety of relationships with other people. These can extend from superficial relationships in the workplace, in a sporting context or in a neighbourhood to deep and enriching relationships in marriage, in family life or in the pursuit of common goals, values or interests. Here one will be responding from different levels of one's personality and strengthening one's sense of responsibility in regard to initiating and nourishing relationships at many different levels in the future.

Accountability: Here arises the dimension of responsibility that is designated as accountability.[8] This means that being freely responsible in these contexts involves being accountable for how one behaves in the relationship. Thus one is answerable for one's actions and attitudes in this situation and so may deserve praise or blame for one's conduct. Here morality arises and one's responsibility becomes moral responsibility as one freely makes one's responses in the relationship or situation in question. In this

7 Albert R. Jonsen. 'Responsibility' in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, edited by John Macquarrie and James Childress. SCM Press, London, 1986, p 746.

8 Niebuhr, pp 63-65.

context there arises another aspect of one's responsibility, namely, one's sense of trustworthiness and dependability. Has one shown oneself to have these qualities or virtues on entering and living out these relationships? In other words, has one been responsible in relating to the other people in the relationship? This is a significant moral question and provides a test of one's moral quality as a free agent, of one's moral responsibility in relating to others. We can say with Haring: 'one's response is one's responsibility'.[9] For the religious person one is accountable not just to other people but also to God. This adds a deeper dimension to one's life and activity and also a more demanding sense of duty and responsibility. In addition, it provides a new and inspiring call to open oneself to God and to respond with energy, dedication and love to one's heavenly Father. The model here for the Christian is, of course, Jesus and his response to the Father's call that brought him even unto death.[10]

Revealing moral character: The exercise of moral responsibility as outlined above will tell us a great deal about the kind of person who is involved in any situation and his/her moral character. It will likely demonstrate certain stable attitudes and qualities or virtues or even their absence, thus revealing who the person is morally and what values and ideals he/she is committed to and can translate into appropriate action in relationships. Thus we see the quality of the moral response of the agent and get an insight into the moral character that provides the foundation and the source of that response. We have here, then, a central element of what we may call an ethic of responsibility.

One may express or understand this aspect or element of moral responsibility in terms of *responsibility as commitment.* When one takes on responsibility in some relationship, group or situation, then it is true to say that he/she has made a commitment to play a real and active part in promoting the good and development of the person(s) or values involved. One, thus, commits oneself to do this and so undertakes to make a response that will achieve this end. As Jonsen says: 'Responsible persons conscientiously and consciously commit themselves to a task or form of life and readily accept accountability for its success or failure.' In so doing, he adds, 'the moral quality of a person grows out of the commitments made and stood by: persons form their lives in certain ways and come to be identified by others as responsible for themselves and their actions. So it becomes clear that 'responsibility is … the basic ethical capacity of a person … assuming the moral quality of the value and disvalue of his mode of action.'[11]

9 *The Law of Christ,* Volume 1, p 47.

10 Ibid., pp 51-53.

11 Albert R. Jonsen, 'Responsibility', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Edited by John Macquarrie and James Childress. SCM Press 1986, London, p 547.

Here too the Christian will find the call of God in Jesus to be both loving and demanding. With the example of Jesus in mind as an encouragement and a challenge one will be energised to respond with one's whole heart and to the best of one's ability and thus reveal and also strengthen one's moral character and the quality of one's ability to exercise moral responsibility in the future.

Reflecting on this dimension of responsibility helps us to understand how and why Haring is able to say that responsibility is 'the central concept of Christian morality.'[12] Christian moral teaching, he says (p 52) "… centers, in grace-endowed fellowship of man with God, in the dialogue of word and response, in responsibility". He understands this in a religious sense, of course, so that for him the moral life of the Christian is basically one's response to God's word and love mediated through Jesus and the created world.[13]

At this point Niebuhr (p 65) ventures a definition: 'The idea or pattern of responsibility, then, may summarily and abstractly be defined as the idea of an agent's action as response to an action upon him in accordance with his interpretation of the latter action with his expectation of response to his response; and all of this in a continuing community of agents.'

RESPONSIBILITY AND MORAL VALUES

In our discussion so far little has been said about *what* specific values, principles, norms and ideals are required in one's moral life so that one lives in a truly responsible manner. In other words, the moral content of the ethic of the responsible person or group has not so far been well spelled out in our reflections. This, however, will be necessary in one's daily life. Different values and principles will be chosen by different people and groups. For the Catholic person the teaching of the Church will provide the essential principles, values, norms and ideals of the ethic of responsibility to be adopted. While one approaches and interprets the moral life of the Catholic in terms of responsibility and in an effort to make appropriate responses in whatever situation one is in, these responses should be made in terms of a positive response to the Church's moral teaching as one has come to know and accept that teaching. However, for some Catholics today there are difficulties here. These church members will have questions about some elements of church teaching, especially on the moral life, and may find it difficult to align themselves with the official positions the magisterium has adopted.

12 Ibid., p 49.

13 See Albert R. Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics*. Corpus Books, Washington/Cleveland, 1968, pp 91-92.

As indicated in this reference to the Church's teaching and its role in our lives as Catholics, the ethic of responsibility does not dispense with moral principles and rules. On the contrary, these principles and rules remain valid and binding so as to provide moral guidance for Catholics and others also in relation to their lives generally and to specific moral decisions that they may have to make. See Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics,* especially chapter 5.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR AND TOWARDS ONESELF

Each of us human persons has an innate and inalienable dignity that has to be respected, not just by other people, groups and institutions but by ourselves also. We can say, therefore, that each of us has a moral obligation or responsibility to ensure our dignity is respected, and also that one makes every effort to be and become the best person one can be, so as to enhance that dignity as much as possible. Essential for this will be a good degree of self-awareness. As one author says, 'self-knowledge … is essential to the responsible life'.[14] In Christian terms we are all children of God, loved by God and called by God, not just to do good and live as true disciples of Jesus, the Son of God, but also to seek to become a mature and fully developed son/daughter of the Father and brother/sister of Jesus the Lord. Here is our primary and most basic responsibility as persons and as Christians. Hopefully, one can appreciate this and make every effort over the years to work to become the best person one can be and the best disciple of Christ that is possible for one. Here one may quote the following enlightening insights: 'a person's highest dignity lies in his responsibility and this is not to be diminished lightly … A person may not be responsible for all of his characteristics, but he is responsible for the stance he takes towards them.'[15]

RESPONSIBILITY AND MAJOR PROBLEMS IN SOCIETY TODAY

So far in this essay our concern has been largely with the responsibility of individual persons and groups in relation to their activities or their failure to act. Now we move to a broader canvas and discuss some of the problems that beset the societies of the Western world and the impact of those problems on the poorer societies of the world at present. In regard to moral responsibility this raises the issue of collective responsibility on the part of

14 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self–An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*. Harper & Row, Publishers, Ney York, Evanston and London, 1963, p 16.

15 Bartholomew M. Kiely, S. J., *Psychology and Moral Theology – Lines of Convergence.* Gregorian University Press, Rome, 1980, p 246.

classes, companies and even nation states. Such responsibility is a complex matter. It is obviously a reality in our world as we hear more and more about the major social, economic, political and environmental evils that exist, in part at least due to the activity or inactivity of various groups, communities and even nation states in different parts of the globe. Our primary concern here will not be to assign moral responsibility for any of these evils. Rather we will confine ourselves largely to mentioning some of the more significant problems that our world suffers from, that are widely known and are highlighted especially by Pope Francis in his 2015 Encyclical Letter on climate change and related issues. Collective responsibility exists for these evils and it is mostly to be laid at the doors of Western agents. Being precise is far from easy in these matters and what is said in these pages would be very unlikely to have any effect or even come to the notice of those bearing the main responsibility.

We turn, then, to Pope Francis's 2015 Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'- On Care for our Common Home* about the environment and especially on climate change. Along with some commentaries and expositions of its basic teaching and its implications, it is possible to point out and comment on some of the major issues that dominate and damage not just the environment but also our society in the Western world and also the people of the Third World and their way of living. The Western world and especially international companies and many governments bear significant responsibility for the evil effects flowing from the present model of economic development that so dominates our Western society and impacts also on other societies around the world.[16]

In this context as Donal Dorr says, 'Pope Francis is very critical of the set of beliefs that underpin the economic system that is operative at present in almost every country in the world, and the fact that 'the market' is treated as though it were a god which must

16 See Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth – From Leo XIII to Pope Francis*. Revised Edition 2016. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, pp 126-129, 183-185, 476-477. Drawing on the Synod of Bishops 1971 he says (p 184): '… it is not true development at all, but rather a kind of exploitation … what is being directly exploited in this case is not other people but the resources of the Earth.' On page 477 Dorr says: 'Church leaders in all corners of the world must follow the lead of Pope Francis in insisting on the urgent need of a search for alternative styles of living and of organising society.' This book is a comprehensive and up to date volume on Catholic Social Teaching and its 548 pages are enlightening and very valuable reading for all.
See also Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice.* Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, and Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1984, pp 62-71.

be obeyed at all costs.[17] Francis refers to it as 'the deified market.'[18] In chapter one of his Encyclical the Pope outlines what is happening to our Common Home and where the responsibility for all the damage being done lies. It begins with pollution arising from many sources including fuels used for cooking and heating, transport, industrial fumes, substances that contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilisers, etc. (Para. 20). He mentions the hundreds of millions of tons of waste that are generated each year, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive, from many sources including clinical, electronic and industrial ones (Para. 21). He goes on to point up the disturbing warming of the climatic system due to greenhouse gases released mainly as a result of human activity but aggravated by 'a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels.'(Para.23).The loss of biodiversity is another major problem today and human interventions, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, are adding to this damage (Para. 34). The quality of human life is being eroded by this environmental deterioration, caused largely by the current models of economic development and the throwaway culture of which we are part (Para 43). All this deepens the gap between rich and poor with the latter suffering the gravest damage from these economic developments of the present time. Thus Francis makes a close link between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (Para. 49). One of the chief culprits here are the multinational companies who in the poor countries do 'what they would never do in developed countries or in the so-called First World (Para. 51). In short we can make the words of theologian Dermot Lane our own in this regard: 'modern late capitalism is one of the major causes of climate change … The triumph of market logic with its ethos of domination and fierce competition is paralysing almost all serious efforts to respond to climate change. An economy based on a philosophy of exploitation and extractivism of the earth's resources is running in the wrong direction.'[19]

Apart from the climate change effects we see from the above points that major responsibility for the social and economic evils in the societies of the Western world at present lies with easily identifiable companies and groups among us and also with the way in which our economic system is organised and operated. While

17 *Doctrine & Life*, Dominican Publications, Dublin, September 2019, p 25.

18 In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 56 and also in *Laudato Si'*, para. 56. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* by The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004 states (para. 349): "Faced with the concrete "risk of an 'idolatry' of the market", the Church's social doctrine underlines its limits, which are easily seen in its proven inability to satisfy important human needs, which require goods that "by their nature are not and cannot be mere commodities..."

19 *Doctrine & Life*, November 2017, pp 45-46, 44.

efforts are being made on many fronts to overcome these deeply rooted problems, it seems obvious that there are many unwilling to change anything in the economic system lest it reduce their profits. And so Pope Francis can say: 'we need only take a look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair, … we can see signs that things are now reaching breaking point', while there is no doubt that 'the present world system is certainly unsustainable' (*Laudato Si*', Para. 61).[20]

It is not difficult in all this discussion to see where the major *responsibility* lies for the damage being done, not just to the planet but also to vast numbers of people in our world, especially the poor in Western society and above all, the millions of poor in the Third World. We Christians can respond with Niebuhr:[21] 'Responsibility affirms: God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action.'

Niebuhr also sees the perfect response and the perfect responder in Jesus (p 167): 'he [Jesus] interprets all actions upon him as signs of the divine action of creation, government and salvation and so responds to them as to respond to divine action.' In relation to Jesus' whole outlook on moral living, our author affirms that '… the ethics of Jesus Christ, as the way of life of one who responds to the action of the universal God in all action, in whatever happens, is an ethics of universal responsibility. Conclusion

To present the moral life in general and also that of the Christian in terms of an *ethic of responsibility* is an illuminating but also a challenging approach. It gives us a positive and demanding understanding or model of moral living in present-day society. It calls all of us, individuals, groups and communities, to examine our way of living and as moral people to assess our responsibility for the effects of our activity on the quality of life in our societies, especially on those who are poor, and in particular, as Pope Francis insistently reminds us, on the welfare of the teeming populations of poor people in the Third World.

20 In this context a recent article in *Doctrine & Life,* March 2020 by David Begg, 'Justice Questions' – 'Economic Apostasy at Davos?' pp 36-45 is illuminating. It says in part (p 36): 'In the film *Wall Street*, Gordon Gekko, played by Michael Douglas, remarked that 'greed, for lack of a better term, is good.' This is fiction but it reflected a value system which has dominated the business and financial world for the last four decades. It is the core value of shareholder capitalism,' whose primary purpose is to make profit for the shareholders. Before 1970 the dominant value system was known as stakeholder capitalism, which was based on the idea that companies existed to serve the needs of a broader range of stakeholders – customers, suppliers, employees, and the economy – not just shareholders (p 36). 'Companies today face an existential choice. Either they wholeheartedly embrace 'stakeholder capitalism' and subscribe to the responsibilities that come with it, ... Or they stick to outdated 'shareholder capitalism' that prioritises short-term profit over everything else..'(p 38).

21 *The Responsible Self*, p 126.

The Covid-19 Crisis: is there a Christian Response?

Tom Kouijzer

March 2020 will be remembered as the month in which COVID-19 shook Irish society. Of course, we heard the reports from Wuhan in China and the efforts taken by Asian countries to curtail the spread of this new virus. It all seemed far away and separated from our everyday lives in Ireland. This changed on Saturday 29 February, when the National Public Health Emergency Team announced the first confirmed case of the virus in this country. But even then, there were few people who realised how this event would impact on society and radically change our way of life. From the closing of schools and universities on 12 March to the unprecedented measures that were announced on 27 of the same month, the impact has been great.

People are unable to visit members of their own family, many shops are closed, and social distancing measures have imposed a very different shape on our society. It seems increasingly likely that some form of restrictions will remain in place for the foreseeable future. The presence of the virus will change our way of life in deep and long-lasting ways. Understanding the need for these measures does not lessen their impact.

THE IMPACT ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

The COVID-19 crisis has a profound impact on religious practice. As it became impossible to publicly celebrate the Eucharist, parish teams had to find other ways to reach out to the faithful. The fact that Holy Week had to be celebrated within the limits imposed by the public health measures gave an extra impetus to parishes to be creative and find new ways to celebrate Easter. Many parishes use their webcams to broadcast their celebrations, while others had to improvise by live streaming their services and other religious content on Facebook and other social media platforms.

Tom Kouijzer is a Marist Priest. He is a PhD student in the Faculty of Theology, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

What proves to be more difficult is the provision of pastoral care to those who especially need it at this time. Social distancing measures and the request for the elderly to cocoon rules out the possibility of personal pastoral visits to a large section of the faithful. There is the possibility of using the telephone but nothing can substitute for direct personal contact between people. All involved in pastoral ministry are aware of the issues that have arisen around funerals and the grief of families who feel that the space they require to say farewell to their loved ones has been severely limited.

All of these effects are very sudden and immediate. They have a deep impact on our religious practice and force us to innovate in a quick and decisive manner in order to guarantee some form of pastoral and liturgical continuity. But the full impact of this crisis on our society will only become clear over time. It is still too early to comprehend fully what is happening to our way of life. The most immediate consequences, such as the inability to gather to celebrate the Eucharist, are but the first symptoms of something that cuts much deeper.

Of course, in the first place our thoughts are with those who got sick and those who passed away; we think of their families, and of the many health care professionals who heroically risk their own health in order to care for others. This includes hospital chaplains, who stand side by side with their colleagues and strive to offer pastoral care to those who are suffering with the illness and their families. But this crisis touches everyone, it affects the whole of society. Therefore, it is important to continue to reflect on this traumatic event as people of faith.

THE EXCLUSION OF DEATH

As a contribution to the reflection on the COVID-19 crisis I would like to offer some thoughts derived from the writings of Michel de Certeau, a French Jesuit and multi-disciplinary thinker who reflected deeply on the shape of modern culture.

Death, de Certeau argues, is normally excluded from the everyday language of Western society. Contemporary European culture is obsessed with "doing." Death confronts us with our fear of meaninglessness: "nothing can be said in a place where nothing more can be done."[1] Death is the great impossibility for contemporary Western culture because it "falls outside the *thinkable*, which is identified with what one can *do*."[2] Death is something we cannot explain, where our language falls short:

1 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 190. 2 Ibid.

> 'The dying person raises once again the question of the subject at the extreme frontier of inaction, at the very point where it is the most impertinent and the least bearable. In our society, the absence of work is non-sense; it is necessary to eliminate it in order for the discourse that tirelessly articulates tasks and constructs the Occidental story of "There's always something to do" to continue. The dying person is the lapse in this discourse. He is, and can only be, ob-scene. And hence censured, deprived of language, wrapped up in a shroud of silence: the unnamable'.[2]

De Certeau argues that the dying person is normally made invisible in Western culture, just as the reality of death itself is being repressed. Sure enough, there are places that are especially designated to speak about death. But these places are situated at the margins of culture and therefore outside of the normal social circulation:

> 'In a society that officially recognizes "rest" only in the forms of inertia or waste, death is given over, for example, to religious languages that are no longer current, returned to rites that are now empty of the beliefs that once resided in them'.[3]

Death is the place where we come up against our final limit. Associated with passivity, it is not expected to take centre stage. We know, of course, that death exists but it is not expected to disrupt the hustle and bustle of our everyday life, with its non-stop communication and endless activity and enjoyment. Religious language and practice, on the margins of contemporary culture, is one of the last places where we can still speak about death.

THE COVID-19 CRISIS

De Certeau argues that every culture has its blind spots. "The *other*" is what de Certeau calls those parts of reality that a particular culture or society excludes from its everyday understanding . By repressing death, contemporary Western culture has made it into its *other*. It is important to note that for de Certeau the *other* can never be truly eliminated and always resurfaces to question a culture's self-understanding and way of looking at life. This is especially true in moments of crisis, when we are confronted with what we cannot understand and control.

The current COVID-19 pandemic is causing such a crisis and forces us to question our understanding of the world. In this crisis the reality of death has broken into our everyday experience. It has

2 Ibid., 191.
3 Ibid., 192.

re-introduced death into our everyday language and experience. Not just in the form of the daily recurring press briefing by the Department of Health, in which we are confronted with the numbers of deaths and infections, but also by the paralyzing effects of the restrictions on our everyday life. Major parts of life have come to a standstill. This sudden lack of movement imposes an experience of inertia, which is reminiscent of death.

In a sense, the whole of society has entered the place of apparent meaninglessness where nothing can be said because nothing can be done. A place where our usual explanations have been forced to silence. Illness and death now dominate our daily conversation. Often masked by strange words that have intruded into our everyday language such as "COVID-19," "pandemic," "coronavirus," etc. We are all going through an experience of passiveness, an experience of mourning, and of loss. We are all entering the place of meaninglessness, where we can no longer *do* anything in the face of mortality and death. And while we hope that things will go back to normal, we have to take stock of the fact that such a traumatic intrusion of death into our life will have a lasting effect.

STUMBLING UPON A WHITE PAGE

In de Certeau's thought the traumatic encounter with the *other* opens up a new space. It forces us to re-think our beliefs and values. If we compare our normal way of understanding life to reading a text, then encountering the *other* is like stumbling upon a white page. When we encounter such a white page it is our tendency to fill it with more writing. In other words, we seek to colonize the page by filling it with what we already know. We eliminate what falls outside our "comfort zone" by explaining it away with our usual explanations about life.

This is what happens when we try to "solve" a traumatic event by explaining it in such a way that it becomes an extension of our familiar convictions. Some people will see the current crisis as the ultimate vindication of their political ideology, others as an indictment of individualisation, again others use it as proof for their theory on globalization, and so on. And while none of these responses are necessarily invalid, it would be wise to resist the temptation of filling the white page with more of the same. This prevents us from learning something new from this crisis.

A REFLECTIVE RESPONSE

Could there be a different response? I would like to suggest that the alternative would be to allow the emptiness of the white page to

question us on a deeper level. The COVID-19 crisis challenges us to face the reality of death and to sit with it in silence. This is the most difficult thing to do. It means resisting the temptation to come up with readymade answers. It means that we allow ourselves to be questioned by our inability to "do something about it." This response requires that we fully accept and live our experience of passivity and powerlessness. It would be a reflective, even contemplative, response.

In the language of de Certeau we can say that this alternative response means that we welcome the *other*. To welcome the *other* is to accept the limits of our understanding. By welcoming the *other* we allow ourselves to be questioned by what we cannot understand or control. It is reminiscent of the position taken by the Christian mystics of 16th and 17th century, whose texts de Certeau studied deeply. The mystic attitude was characterized by the will to move into the unknown, inspired by the belief that "there is always some *other*."[4] By opening themselves up to the unknown the mystics sought to enter into the great mystery, exceeding everyday life. For the mystics the ultimate *other* is God, who is always waiting for us beyond what we know and comprehend.

From the mystics we can learn that in the depths of the unknown there is the possibility of new life. This means that moments of crisis, however painful they may be, can be an opportunity to go beyond our cultural and individual blind spots to discover new depths. I do not suggest that death itself is something to be welcomed. But I do believe that the COVID-19 crisis offers an opportunity for a profound reflection on our relationship with ourselves, with the people around us, and with life itself. While this is frightening it is also an opportunity. Taking that opportunity requires boldness and, indeed, faith. To have faith, then, is to hope that by facing the unknown, even when it is painful and frightening, new ways of experiencing life can be discovered. It is too early to say what those news ways will be. We will only know if we allow this painful confrontation with death to question us in a profound way.

BEFRIENDING THE *OTHER*

Finally, I would suggest that this reflective response is the Christian response. To be a Christian is to befriend the *other*. De Certeau recognized this as the essential quality of the Christian life.[5] To live as a Christian is to make place for mystery and for the unknown.

4 Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 44.

5 Michel de Certeau and Jean-Marie Domenach, *Le Christianisme éclaté* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), 39-40.

As Christians we are called to make room for what exceeds our everyday understanding. Indeed, it is in the ultimate experience of what is *other* that we recognize the face of the one we call our Lord and our God. Born of the originating experience of Jesus, who completely gave himself over to the *Other* whom he called his Father, Christians believe that death masks a new life.

In this time of crisis, the Christian attitude of friendship with the *other* is especially important. It is a gift that Christians can share with the rest of society, with all who are struggling with this unsettling new reality. We have the language, the prayers, and the rituals that can help us enter into a space of deep reflection. As Christians we know that we need each other to reflect on the mystery, we need community. Let us listen, then, to other people as they try to give words to their experience of this difficult new reality and stand with them in solidarity.

But we must be careful. From Michel de Certeau we can learn a reluctance to fill the white page with the words of our usual answers, even if these answers are Christian. No explanation or teaching can capture the *other*. If we fill the open space with readymade explanations, we have lost our chance to engage in a deeper and more profound reflection. As Christians we have no reason to fear the unknown because we know that no matter how challenging our times may be, we will never be separated from the *Other*, in whom we recognize the loving face of our God.

Ecology and the Renewal of Theology. If it is true that integral ecology requires an integrated, trans-disciplinary approach, it is also equally true that integral ecology has far-reaching consequences for the way we do theology in the twenty-first century. Theology cannot stand by and watch the transformation required of other disciplines without putting its own house in order. Ecology must interrogate the way theology is done. Equally, theology must engage critically and constructively with ecology.

– Dermot A. Lane, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue: The Wisdom of Laudato Si',* (Dublin, Messenger Publications) p. 22.

Corona Virus, Passion and Parish Ministry

Pat Noonan

> *I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals … style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities* (Evangelii Gaudium #33).

When your priestly, episcopal or religious service to humanity begins to be pressed beyond the limits of the familiar you are likely to behave, to think and to respond differently. You may be jolted into questioning the values of your previous daily routine, values that once gave your life its meaning. The bible is full of these situations, especially in the lives of the prophets, who were so often asked to go far beyond, indeed, to break away from, their own previously comfortable lives.

Something else can happen to you too. The deeper you're sucked into a convulsing human drama, the more real you seem to become. The more you face yourself alone. The more you interpret and reinterpret your vocation. And the more you ponder the urgency, the perceptions, and the evangelical outlook and outreach of the institutions you represent. I think nowadays they call it a *reality check*. It affects pastoral ministry too. You can easily find yourself in a no-man's-land of church ministry and practice. For example in critical times of major social threat or change should ministers and priests remain in their church rectories, manses or presbyteries and leave 'politics' to the laity? At what point must we realise that it's time to act together?

When there is a tragic death, should we insist on ministering to the deceased of our own denomination only? Or should we use this as an occasion to preach our own church dogmas, deities and doctrines? Should we be unduly concerned about conformity, clerical decorum or the precision of rubrics when carrying

Pat Noonan writes books on God and ministry often from a non-Western perspective. His latest discussion book on racism and reconciliation intended for South African schools is called *Help! My Granny's Dog is a Racist.* Amazon. Website: www.patricknoonanbooks.org.za

out our duties to the troubled people of God in life threatening circumstances?

There is nothing in pastoral manuals about *'crisis ministry'*. When great human suffering strikes the parish or diocese and bangs urgently at grand presbytery doors what do we do? Traditionally, ministers and priests of the world are obliged to *discern* prayerfully what steps to take in any urgent pastoral situation. That's my own experience. Even as I write the Corona virus has brought the West, indeed the world, to its knees.

LESSONS FROM RECENT HISTORY

The following is an attempt to tease out some experiences of past ministry that took place, of necessity, in circumstances far beyond our control or imagination. It was during political unrest. Lockdown also happened in South Africa in this period. And the clergy rallied driven by prophetic voices that had been there unrecognised or that only emerged when crisis broke upon us. It's so important to recognise them at the right moment and not be diverted by jaded voices advocating traditional "prudence" even in abnormal times. The Holy Spirit, fortunately, doesn't work that way. Yes, during the uprisings in South Africa in the 1980s, we priests and ministers of all denominations did plan together; and together we prayed. We did take risks together; and we were arrested and taken to court together. Together we did fear the police and army, but together we never stopped trying.

And we did ecumenism – but we never called it ecumenism. We just did it because it was the right thing to do; it was the human thing to do; it was the Christian thing to do; it was the love thing to do; it was the compassion thing to do. As local church leaders we were expected to be out there in the forefront, at the cutting edge of apartheid society where God, we knew from Exodus 3:7, was the one who sees the misery, hears the cries and knows the suffering of His people.

Looking back much later, when the dust had settled on a new South Africa, it was clear to me that the success of our 'crisis ministry' was almost certainly due to the pastoral and ecumenical character of our initiatives.

The following discussion of emergency pastoral ministry is obviously not a blue print for all situations. Pastors will share, analyse, pray, listen and risk their own local solutions. The following are *seven* emergency ministries that worked during political shutdowns in South Africa.

Underpinning our apostolic service was, firstly, a *ministry of peace-making*, which implied, in the long term, trying to understand

and interpret the 'signs of the times' in the light of Luke 12 verse 56: 'You superficial people! You understand the signs of the earth and the sky, but you don't understand the present times.'

Secondly, we engaged in a *ministry of presence*, where priests and ministers frequently met under the auspices of a local branch of the South African Council of Churches to pastorally plan and coordinate our Christian witness on the streets, in order to keep pace with our fast-changing environment. Christian presence is so important in all situations of conflict even today.

During apartheid, especially in its final years when the system was unbundling and generally falling apart on the streets of South Africa the ministry of pastoral presence took on a new meaning. Ministers and priests constantly gathered community leaders together for crisis consultations, interpreting events daily with the people, organising community funerals after massacres and police killings, actively monitoring arrests, supporting treason trialists and generally being a public sign of hope and a "shepherding" presence in the streets.

Monitoring and "mentoring" society from our Christian perspective drew church people into a deeper spiritual togetherness, which has endured to this today.

Pope Francis vividly describes this ministry thus. "What is necessary is *proximity*: to embrace, kiss, touch, hug a son or a daughter. When the Church neglects this proximity, it is like a mother who communicates with her son (only) in a letter" Clearly this does not apply during the Corona virus period. But new forms of radical ministry do apply; and are called for.

Thirdly, we engaged in a *ministry of solidarity* with the poor and oppressed. They knew we were there for them. They and their leaders knew that when the government banned their meetings in schools and municipal halls that the church premises would be available. This was cutting-edge ministry.

Fourthly, we had a *ministry of intervention* which was a kind of 'clerical task force', on call twenty-four hours a day to intervene anywhere and at any time. We were called upon during riots, in clashes between police and people, as a compassionate and symbolic presence after sudden massacres, for hospital visitation of the injured and wounded.

There was also a more subtle priestly ministry. That of convincing people that freedom, yes, freedom, was *possible* and that the present turmoil might be ultimately connected to it.

It implied a *ministry of postulating a new order*, in our case 'regime change' – at a time when no one dared think that far ahead. A feature of this ministry was that of guiding resistance and dissent into active non-violent action and passive resistance.

It was a ministry of not just witnessing but opening the door to the beginning of the end of apartheid. As pastors and priests we knew that this was the ultimate peace-building solution for our country, based on John 10:10: 'I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.'

Finally, as black and white clergy involved in a rolling black uprising, *our united* public presence and ministry at key moments and places was in itself a powerful sign of present and future racial reconciliation. A *ministry of reconciliation*. I remain convinced that the common pastoral decisions, actions and liturgies we undertook in the 'eighties saved our townships, and the nation, from the bloodbath anticipated by the world media at the time of the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994.

In all of this the word 'ecumenism' wasn't mentioned. I said this above. Some churchmen or women didn't even know what the word meant. And they didn't care. They didn't come together because their church leaders told them to; they came together out of human necessity. Out of terrible need. Fighting the common enemy, apartheid, was enough to bring the churches out onto the streets. It became a *living* ecumenism. A *ministry of ecumenism*. We were united by a sense of compassion and concern for the excluded. We were united by faith, life and action. We were united by our opposition to sin, the sin of division, the sin of separateness. We were united by the spirit of Christ, who still crosses pastoral boundaries in his compassion for the underdog, the broken-hearted, the sick, the outsiders and the sinners.

It has been estimated that by 2025 most Christians will be living in the southern hemisphere and will be starting to determine the future of Christianity. Perhaps it is from there too that future ecumenism and interfaith dialogue will find *new* hope and *new* creative impetus.

Sixty million people in South Africa have never forgotten the *prophetic* role of the churches in their time of need. *Today* religious and laity are dying on the front lines of the Corona virus pandemic. They are the martyrs and saints of the future. They have taken the Maximilian Kolbe option to die so that others may live. Truly may they rest in peace.

The world awaits further daring Christian responses to the Corona virus because now we are "*doing theology at the coalface of experience*" (Redemptorist Bishop Kevin Dowling of South Africa). That makes a huge difference.

Homilies for August (A)

Joe McDonald

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time *August 2*

SHADOWLANDS

Learning a new language is usually exciting, perhaps challenging, but for the most part, it is essentially a life giving experience. Recently, we all found ourselves learning a new language, a language that we would rather not have had to learn. It was the language of virus. We learned a whole new raft of specialist words, and though specialist, they became common place, entering into everyday parlance. We are now all too familiar with pandemic, cocooning and social distancing. For many, at least for a while, it was a language laced with fear. We found ourselves almost paralysed with bewilderment. Gradually though, as we recovered ourselves, we began to ask the deeper questions: what's important to me? to whom do I matter? where is God? what is good for me? what really nourishes me?

At the Eucharistic table we are fed with the food beyond compare. In fact we are never fed with such rich fare. It is, as we have often said, the bread that lasts forever. We say this with confidence, precisely because at this table, Jesus gives us himself. In every Mass we encounter Jesus afresh. Today in our readings we glimpse Jesus in grief, albeit not so tangibly distressed as at the news of the death of his friend Lazarus. In his sadness for his cousin John he opts for the quiet. He is drawn to the lonely place. When the disciples refer to it as a lonely place that cannot provide sustenance for the people, his response surprises them as he tells them that the people do not need to go away.

They do not need to go elsewhere, or to anyone else. They have him. He is enough. He presents them with the invitation to the banquet. They will eat their fill. Full belly. Full heart. Full soul. Jesus presents himself as the answer to hunger, isolation and loneliness. In the liturgy of the Word today we experience the magnificent abundance of God. The Lord's hand is open wide in the

Joe McDonald is a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin. Address: Parochial House, Main Street, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

giving of himself to us. Absolutely nothing can come between us and God's love made visible in Christ. More pertinent than ever, in these days of uncertainty, of increased vulnerability, of wondering what can be relied on, we hear the whisper. It's the whisper most often heard at dawn or dusk. It's in the Shadowlands, where fear grows and cold gnaws at us that we discover that not only has he not abandoned us to this, he is there before us, ready to mind us. Jesus is in the lonely place before us and comforts us with the assurance that we need not look any further than him for solace.

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time *August 9*

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER

In recent months we have found ourselves bombarded with endless news. Of course we quickly discover that there is often little change between the news at one, the news at six and the news at nine! We also realise that it is the bad news that tends to make the headlines. During the worst days of Covid-19 , it was fitting and proper to bring us the heartbreaking news of terrible sickness and indeed death. Thankfully, in the main, this was done with sensitivity and varying degrees of compassion. Sadly, and to no one's surprise, we heard little of those who had recovered well from the virus or indeed those who hardly knew they had it in the first place. One of the increasingly difficult phenomena to deal with was that of fake news or false information. We are more discerning now than ever before about where we get our news. Perhaps as pilgrims in pandemic days we also have managed to ask ourselves where do I find God?

Where do we seek the Lord? Is it in the epic, the mighty, glorious technicolour or Dolby stereo? Yes. And is he there? Yes. Sometimes. Oftentimes though, he is so close to us, we actually miss him. Could it be that in the fever of the search all we need to do is stop, breathe and notice the gentle breeze around us, and within us, the Holy Breath of God? Chasing rainbows, turning into many a cul de sac and all the while a little more panicked, we appear unable to find what we are looking for. Surely it is at this juncture that we have the graced moment in the fever when we stop and allow him to find us? The Psalmist pleads, 'Let us see!' When we see, we see mercy, the greatest and only help we really need. Today's breaking open of the Word offers us yet another faith-filled question. How far are we prepared to go for our sisters and brothers? Sometimes where they need is most is in the increased choppiness of life. It is in, and through, the power of the Spirit

that we emerge as a voice of reassurance. In the terror of the night especially in the feverishness of the storm, or indeed pandemic, it appears that the Lord is not there. It is precisely in this apparent absence that we discover that he is in communion with the Father. It is within this communion that he alerts to our trouble and moves to cradle us even before we cry out.

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Times *August 16*

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?

One of my favourite movies is Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. It's not the best movie in the world but it has a marvellous cast including Sidney Potier, Spencer Tracy and the incomparable Katharine Hepburn. It is set in the nineteen sixties in the United States and it was with a heavy heart that I recently sat down to watch it again. My heart was indeed heavy with sadness and fear, and I still find it hard to believe that fifty years on that beautiful country is still rocked by issues of race. I unashamedly shed a tear as I listened to Tracy's final speech which is essentially about the triumph of love. Sad as it is, it is nevertheless true that the world is making heavy work of the fact that we are, though many, but one. This beautiful truth is at the centre of our readings today. A house of Prayer for all. All peoples praise you. Turning into God is offered to all. The climatic moment is in our gospel. It takes the form of a retort. In fact it is a retort offered to Jesus and whilst this may surprise, or indeed disturb us, the response of Jesus can characteristically wrong foot us.

The great retort is *great* because it is said from bended knee and packed with faith. Our lives are peppered with 'ah but..!' Usually its what precedes an excuse. Sometimes a plea. Now and again a grovel. In the case of the Canaanite woman we have the great, 'ah but!' It is indeed the great retort. It is rewarded with the grace and favour of the Lord himself. Her reverence, persistence and courage all impress Jesus and all the more because she speaks from the position of an outsider. It's good to ask ourselves what is the 'ah but' in my life? What shaping and tweaking do I need, with God's help, to transform the 'ah but' of my life from excuse or rationalisation into becoming a statement of faith, a gasp of hope? How come I am missing the beautiful and liberating love of God which says that in fact we are all coming to dinner. The banquet is open to all. The hint in today's gospel is that when we come to the table, not only might we be surprised at who is there before us, but amazed at the seat to which they have been allocated!

Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time *August 23*

SURPRISED BY JOY

One of several reasons why I am proud to hail from Belfast is that one of this troubled but noble city's proud boasts is C.S . Lewis. *Surprised by Joy* is at least in part his autobiography. It is also a story of conversion. This phrase has had a remarkable impact on me over a number of years. We all love a surprise. In a sense it's the welcome cousin of shock, whom nobody really wants. As well as the welcome and uplifting nature of surprise there is something particularly beautiful about joy. Apart from it being a gift of the Holy Spirit as we grow older wisdom teaches us that joy is to be desired even more than the much sought happiness. Happiness can be quite transient and a tad tinsel-like. Happiness often boasts razzmatazz but realistically how long can we sustain, nay endure, the whee down the slide. No, with the passing years we recognise the depth of joy. It is the substance of joy that anchors us. It is joy that steadies us. I can think of nothing more lovely than to be surprised by joy. This is exactly what happens in today's readings. The key. On the servants shoulder. It is the key to the House of David. Is this not the key to the eternal love of God? The big wow moment in the presence of God. This wow moment flagged for us in the readings and psalm act as a fitting trailer for the wow moment in Peter's life. The response of Jesus to Peter is one of the most beautiful lines in the gospels. Jesus is delighted for Peter. Jesus in joy honours Peter and the joy that is within him. He is not simply a happy man because what he has will remain in him. What is given to him is from God and will sustain him. Of course the delight of Jesus is rooted in the knowledge, understanding and profound love he has for Peter. The choosing of Peter is neither haphazard nor error. There is no surprise for Jesus in the encountering of a hot headed or impetuous Peter. Repeatedly Jesus resets Peter's approach. Yes there is a firmness in this but surely a firmness together with more than a hint of a smile. Peter's profession of faith has been a slow burn and hard won, with yet more testing to come. However it is the joy applauded by Jesus in today's gospel that will see Peter through fear, denial and the turning back in love to the Lord. It is this same joy that will empower him to strengthen his sisters and brothers in their own respective faith journey. Whilst there is of course more to the 'ssh' of Jesus not to tell anyone, for the moment, there is at least a hint that the said joy might be too much for some of us, or indeed all of us, some of the time. After all there is a thin line between shock and surprise.

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time *August 30*

BURNING LOVE

When we speak of having no choice, with regard to our love of God, it is greatly misunderstood. In fairness I think it is misunderstood because it is a rather ham fisted way of articulating a particular truth. It deserves better. In a very real sense we have choice. This is one of the awesome aspects of the Lord's love for us, the gift of free will. The notion of having no choice points to the compulsion, indeed the fire within us, that centres us and propels us on into deeper love and communion with God. This is of course costly. We gradually learn that it is in fact a condition costing not less than everything. There is indeed a high price for giving witness but is it not an inescapable truth that with the fire within us we have no choice? Does not our hearts burn within us when we encounter him on the road?

My soul yearns for God. This is in fact our deepest yearning. We may not always recognise it but it is, as Paul reminds us, both implanted and nurtured by the Holy Spirit. In our daily floundering around looking for happiness and fulfilment, it is in fact grace working within us that awakens us to the futility of so many cul de sacs, and brings us gradually to the Way. We glimpse true joy and peace in doing God's will. Yet to see clearly what God's desire is we have to put on the mind of Christ. This is the lens of truth. When we use this viewfinder we begin to see our poverty and indeed the poverty of so much of what is on offer. We begin to see that we are in fact surrounded by bling. It dawns on us that so much of what we invest our time and energy in, as Aquinas alludes to, is little more than straw. The breakthrough moment is when we realise that, without Jesus, we are very poor indeed. Surely this was one of the lessons of the recent pandemic days. Were we not thrown back on our fragility? Did we not discover afresh that we need each other? From a civil perspective we have been rightly applauded for a new level of civil solidarity but is there not something more? Jesus reminds Peter to look again. To listen anew. In doing this we glimpse the divine. We realise that for pilgrims, as opposed to tourists, there is more than solidarity, beautiful as it is. For us on our faith journey there is *communion*. Communion with each other as sisters and brothers rooted in Jesus. Whether in the glow of embers or a halloween like blaze the fire within us is ever present. It is of our essence.

Homilies for September (A)

Michael Collins

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time *September 6*

In the classic novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, the following statement is made by a character named Zosima: "Above all, don't lie to yourself. The one who lies to themselves and listens to their own lie comes to a point that they cannot distinguish the truth within themselves, or around them, and so loses all respect for themselves and for others. And having no respect they cease to love."

We all have the capacity for self-deception. This is particularly true when we experience hurt or when we perceive we have been wronged. Such hurt can speak so loudly that we lose the ability to hear anything else, let alone anybody else. This can make it difficult to distinguish what is really happening for ourselves not to talk of what is happening for another.

This is the wisdom of Jesus' advice to us his disciples. Put very simply he invites us to listen and to listen deeply. Listen to your heart and the wrong you believe you have experienced; it will reveal a lot more than what you initially hear or see. Hurt has a habit of resonating with other hurts and so we must listen carefully if we are to hear the individual notes amidst the sometimes noisy cacophony of our lives. While somebody may have hurt us and they may need to be called to account, they do not deserve to pay the price for all our hurts!!

Jesus then invites us to do something most challenging; to speak to the person who has hurt us. To give the other person an opportunity to hear our experience. As we are all observing life from different vantage points we tend to see things differently. Sometimes this needs to be acknowledged, sometimes it may need to be challenged and more times it needs to be respected. While we may not agree, we might be able to see and hear the full truth of the matter. This is important as our faith reminds us it is the truth that will set us free.

Michael Collins is a priest of the diocese of Killaloe. He is Director of Formation at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

Jesus is wise enough to know that strong or aggressive people can find it hard to stand on level ground with others. They may have a need to look down on the world and to avoid engaging in eye to eye or heart to heart conversations. Sometimes a third party helps bridge this gap. They hold the potential to neutralise the power difference. And so Jesus encourages us to bring others along as witnesses. This is the power of mediation, somebody outside the situation who enables us to name realities. A neutral party might hold the key to unlock that which entraps us.

Reality can be hard to accept. We or the other may never let go or admit fault. For this Jesus gives his most difficult but freeing advice – distance yourself . Otherwise you run the risk of losing respect for yourself and in the words of Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, we run the risk of losing the ability to love. Sometimes love calls us to let go as much as it calls us to hold on and embrace.

Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 13

At school, learning my seven times tables was a milestone. I'm not sure why, but seven times tables were always tricky. I can still remember reciting "seven times seven is forty nine" and while not understanding why, learning that it was both correct and true. Like learning to forgive, it took practice, a lot of practice.

Forgiveness does not come naturally to us as it requires a lot of letting go. How often we would love to forgive but something causes us to hold onto the hurt. Causes us to keep captive the potential gift that forgiveness can be for ourselves not to talk of for another.

To forgive means to let go of a lot more than just our sense of hurt. We may have to let go of a bruised ego or a constructed identity; who am I if I am not the injured party? Maybe we will have to let go of a lifetime narrative in which everything is so well scripted that there is no difficulty in seeing on what side of the argument different people lie. A bit like the disciples on that first Easter morning, forgiveness calls us to stop looking into the empty tombs of our lives and our relationship as all we will find is something lifeless. It invites us to change our gaze so as to see where new life, new hope and new opportunity are to be found. For those of us who risk forgiving another it is probably one of the most radically freeing thing we will do in our lives. Why? Because it mirrors the gift of continuous love and forgiveness offered to us by God. We need God's help to be our truest selves, gifting forgiveness as God gifts it.

So why so many times? Why 77 times 7? Surely once is enough to ask anybody make such an offering. And so it is, but it takes time and practice before we effect real change in our own hearts and before others truly believe they have been forgiven. It takes a lot of practice before radical change takes root in our lives. In the words of the music teacher "Perfect practice makes for perfect play". This is a universal wisdom – to embed a new practice let alone a new outlook we need to practice, practice, practice. And for something like forgiveness it may take a lot of practice. Hence 77 times 7.

Jesus is not imposing a difficult requirement on an already difficult situation. He is merely acknowledging what is required if the virus of hate and hurt is to be truly supressed. It needs to be bathed continually in Christian action, Christian love and Christian thought. In time we will realise that we are gifted much more than we ever gave. Forgiveness bestows freedom, this freedom brings us peace and this peace becomes the springboard from which we can go and live life to the full. The alternative is for us to hold ourselves and others frozen in a sterile and frosty past. Forgiving and forgiving often, is the pathway to deep faith, real hope and true love.

Twenty Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time *September 20*

Alcohol Anonymous has many wisdom statements that speak of our expectations of others being nothing more than "premeditated resentments". People do not always measure up to our expectations of them. Ultimately we have to learn to accept people for who they are. We may even need to accept situations for what they are. We may even need to grow in self-acceptance of ourselves, warts and all.

Expectations seem to be at the root of the tension we witness in our Gospel. The Landowner had an expectation that people would work in his vineyard for the price of one denarius. But as the day unfolded and new workers arrived, the expectations of those contracted early in the day seemed to change. No longer did they focus on their agreement and their initial expectation of one denarius. Their focus shifted to their fellow workers and what they recieved. Such a viewpoint transformed their initial expectation to deep seated resentment towards their fellow workers and towards the landowner. Expectations became resentment.

If we are honest we are no different. When we allow ourselves get distracted by what others have, what others did and what others received, we can grow blind to the gifts that we have recieved

in life. In the words of the Alcoholic Anonymous it is all about keeping the "magnifying mind" on my acceptance and off my expectations. For our serenity is directly proportional to our levels of acceptance.

Happiness is never achieved by getting more, getting ahead or being on a higher pedestal than everybody else. It is gratitude that makes us happy. The workers that were employed in the early morning could have received 100 denarius for their days work but if they were not grateful they would never have been happy. It is gratefulness that is the source of our happiness not the other way around.

There is a sense that the Landowner realises something important and valuable to him – people should be given the opportunity to work and they should receive a viable wage to keep themselves and their family. And so, everybody is offered a job and everybody is given a just wage. This is the gift within the gift, he has an opportunity and he chooses to avail of it in a radical manner.

The workers of the first shift grew to see their employment as an entitlement and not a gift. They failed to see the opportunity or the gift in which their fellow workers were gifted a job and a just wage.

Gratefulness is the key. Why? Because if you are grateful you are not fearful. If you are not fearful you will not be violent. If you are grateful you act out of a sense of surplus and not out of a sense of scarcity and so you will be willing to share.

This is the world view of the Landowner and the lens through which we are being encouraged to engage life. As the first step in tempering our expectations maybe this week we might hold onto only one expectation. The expectation that we will be grateful.

Twenty Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time *September 27*

Ernest Hemingway is reported to have said that "Today is only one day in all the days that will ever be. But what will happen in all the other days that ever come can depend on what you do today." This is as true for the two brothers we meet in our Gospel as it is for you and me. Think of our own yes's that ultimately weathered to a no. Or those times that our no's ultimately blossomed into a yes that made all the difference in our lives and in the lives of others.

What causes us like the brothers in our Gospel to change our mind? What causes us to agree one thing now and to end up doing something totally different later on? Why have we one logic today and another logic tomorrow? Why are there so many internal points of tension whereby we think one thing but we feel like doing

another? Why do we get caught between listening to our heads and following our hearts.

We can be quite logical about things; weighing up the pros and the cons so as to make decisions that seem utterly clear cut; that is until we have to live them. We have crystal clear clarity until we experience and feel the consequences of our choices. The head and the heart think differently, they compute and collate things differently. Ultimately life will bring us to the heart of the matter and it is here that we meet ourselves, God and others. It is to the heart of the matter that Jesus brings the chief priests and the elders with his question. He is revealing where their heart rests in relation to this matter. Because this is ultimately where their motivation lies. And the same is true for you and me as listeners to this Gospel story.

The heart may not always be the deciding factor but it is nearly always the governing factor in our lives. Why else did Jesus spend so much time encountering people at the heart or relational level? As God said to Samuel in the Old Testament, 'The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'. This is why Jesus summarised the law as to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." As with all acts of love it is about surrender not compliance. In the Beatitudes we are told "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God".

Ultimately what the two brothers saw in their hearts dictated their final decision. For the first brother, initially at any rate, the logical thing to do was to say "no". When engaged at the heart level, love called for something more. Changing his "no" to a "yes" resonated with something deeper in him – his love for his Father. The second son on pondering the request decided not to engage, not to help and changed his "yes" to a "no". Initially he knew that "yes" was the right answer but tending to his own needs and not his father's seems to resonate more strongly in his heart.

Ultimately what is in our hearts will eventually seep out. Maybe it is about allowing the reason of the head to inform the logic of the heart. Maybe it is about allowing the love of the heart to warm the cold logic of the mind. In this way we will engender a consistency whereby we will neither freeze people out or smother them in kindness. As Jesus encourages us elsewhere in the Gospel it will enable us to allow our "yes be yes and our no be no".

News and Views

Imagining Church and State in a Changing Environment. *Neal Carlin, Columba House, 11 Queen Street, Derry BT48 7EG, writes*

Dear Gerry,

When you wrote in the Furrow "Imagining Church and State in a Changing Environment" (Sept 2019) little did any of us know how changed we might be by the effects of this Covid 19 disease!

We get to read more these days and I got to reread the above article. It touches on such a broad subject. I would propose to touch on a couple of points as someone who has now reached eighty and has been pastorally involved since ordination in 1964.

What Kind of Church, you ask?

You quote Pope Francis as saying, 'Christianity begins not with an idea but with the encounter with the person of Jesus Christ'. This surely is the central issue if we are to talk about a working together 'as a network of believers sharing gifts for the development of God's kingdom', which is how I'd describe a Christian community or church, synodal or otherwise. The passion and fire of Pentecost that drove the first believers out of the room of fear to teach and be Christ incarnate, to continue to do what he did in love for the world, is obviously required.

As you rightly say this requires a paradigm shift whereby once again the gifts among the People of God may be exercised. The reading today at the liturgy, for example, depicts Stephen, who is assigned to serving as a deacon at tables, now however is an inspired preacher boldly confronting the killers of Jesus. These early Christians were enthused by the Savior whose love they felt deeply.

Sometimes I think we presuppose a faith and a relationship that simply is not there. Recently a man told me he had given up the Catholic faith. I asked him what that meant. He said, "I've stopped going to Mass." I replied, "and what, did you feel any sense of loss?" He was honest and replied, 'not really.' If, God forbid, your wife or child were to die would you feel anything? was my next question. He of course said he would be broken hearted. That is because a deep personal relationship is involved. But I told him he had not really given up the 'faith'. It seems to me he simply did

not have it in the first place! It begins as an encounter with Jesus Christ, the Pope says.

As has often been said, we Catholics Sacramentalise before we Evangelize. It is time to call it. Given the bad press we have had as a church institution, my sense is , Catholics would now be happy , even relieved to know that belief in a personal savior is our priority from now on and always ought to have been our priority. Surely the liturgy and morality follow on from our level of faith and trust.

As someone ordained in 1964, I recall the enthusiasm, energy, and expectations among us at the news from the Vatican Council. Yet the decrees of the Council and the joy of the gospel or reading the good news from the word of God, the bible, only took off for me after the experience of Baptism in the Spirit which we refer to as the Charismatic Movement in the early seventies. The power of belief in prayer and the guidance with courage to form a community of believers a few years later has given meaning to my life as a priest ever since. To see lay people, take over and exercise gifts of leadership leads me to propose that forming small Basic Christian Communities together with the parish pastoral council plans would be a way forward. Unless people really meet the Lord, like the two who 'stayed with him that evening', they will not be enthusiastically seeking others later to say, 'we have found the Messiah'(John chap 1)

In ensuring that each brick in the building of Christian community is a fired and strong brick, may I borrow imagery from a local problem here in Donegal. Mica was used in building blocks during the Celtic Tiger Boom times here, when speed and greed were of the essence. Houses now in their hundreds are in danger of falling apart. The material used for building bricks and blocks, together with insufficient cement, proved disastrous. In a similar way the concept of what being a Catholic Christian really means again is crucial before we talk about building the Body or the People of God. "You are living stones, built as an edifice of spirit, into a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ."(1 Peter 2,v 5)

The other question you rightly pose is about the obstacle to progress, *Clericalism.*

You again are so accurate in stating 'he atmosphere at clerical meetings can seem so heavy and dejected.' We tend to suffer from a group think or group attitude problem. An attitude is 'a predisposition to behave in given ways in given circumstances.' It is inbred, especially in diocesan clergy. Divergence or thinking outside the box is suspect even since seminary days.

You speak of clericalism as that "deep seated habit of our hearts" Yes, it is an inherited sense of entitlement to rule, to control, which

is so ingrained and sadly may be seen in younger priests also. Does this come from having to preach about the Lord even before we have met him at any deep personal level- the way repentant sinners and mystics do? Meeting Him entails the humility that can come from an experience of personal weakness and vulnerability. People who accept that they have feet of clay enjoy the grace of knowing him in his mercy, immense compassion, and love. This reminds me of the first few steps of the AA movement, experiencing powerlessness and then handing over to the Higher Power.

Gerry, as someone who has worked here at our alcoholic recovery Centre, White Oaks, for the past twenty years, let me compare this sickness of clericalism to a disease, which helps us not to blame or judge the individual. The residents at our Centre will recover if they get to respond to the Grace of the Higher Power after accepting their own powerlessness over the alcoholism or substance abuse. Then the second step of "coming to believe in a power greater than myself that can save me from insanity" is followed by the daily handing over to the Higher Power, surrendering. There most find the serenity to cope daily in contented sobriety.

Enablers or co-dependents are those relations who have unwittingly supported the addict in the past Believe it or not they require a 12 step programme also to deal with their problem as alcoholism is a family disease. With the help of Al -anon groups, family members get to do their steps if they are to ever get to live serene and contented lives. And here is the point, after years of addiction to the power of clericalism , the laity are also conditioned not to act responsibility or use their gifts .Too many good lay members see themselves as "helping father" and seem unaware of the dignity and calling entailed in their baptism**.** They are enablers or co-dependents .In my view they will have to undergo an education and a spiritual renewal formation with their clergy if the proper use of gifts is to evolve. Otherwise they may well, in newfound roles, imitate what they did not like in the cleric!

A bishop sent a priest friend of his to see me when I lived for twenty years in the hermitage at St. Anthony's. The priest from the South of Ireland was "stuck" for ideas for renewal of the parish. I asked him if he had a pastoral council. He said he had tried that, but it did not work. He said that a few lay people in leadership simply wanted to control everything! My obvious question was, where do you think they learned that kind of leadership style? The *paradigm shift* will need grace and work!

Finally, you say 'we (clergy) are being asked to put aside our skepticism, even our cynicism about change'. It may well come from a sense of not wanting to take responsibility or even feeling inadequate and untrained in spiritual directing. As I travelled

around the country in the early eighties to speak at charismatic gatherings, thankfully I met many priests who were open to change and sought help in the power of the Holy Spirit. Many however, before the clerical abuse scandals were exposed, were indeed cynical. They would joke about the freedom and ways of praying the prayer group had. Did they think themselves superior to these good people who opened and read their bibles, looking for food they were not being given by their shepherds? The people have that sixth sense, the *sensus fidelium*, Barnabas Ahern used to refer to, which allowed them to know what was true from what was false. As clergy we need to learn from them occasionally. May we all be led by the Holy Spirit in the New thing.

Desert Experience. Thomas Merton knew the desert well. The Desert Fathers and Mothers inspired his books and his way of life. He knew the desert of depression just as well as the chosen desert of the monastery and its daily practice of contemplative meditation. His words go to the heart of the desert experience, and to the heart of what prayer itself is. Merton celebrates the fact that eventually we find ourselves with no resources of our own left to call on. It is then that we find the gateway to true prayer, precisely because we no longer have a clear sense of purpose or agency. We don't know what we're doing or how to do it.

– Jim Green, *Giving Up without Giving Up,* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum) p. 164.

New Books

Reasons to Hope. Werner G. Jeanrond. London: T. & T. Clark, 2020. ISBN 978-0-5676-6894-3.

'Hope is an essential gift to human life. Nobody can live without hope. As long as we live, we entertain hope for our own future and our future with others'. These opening lines of the *Preface* are both pertinent and poignant in the presence of a Pandemic. Examining 'the theology of hope from a Christian perspective', the author approaches his topic from the perspective of love rather than faith, asserting that 'faith and hope are dependent on love'. Drawing from his previous book *A Theology of Love* he lists six genres – theological and philosophical, biographical and spiritual, historical and political – as sources to support this study.

Divided into nine chapters he starts with the statement 'hope dies last', looking at the spectrum of hope ranging from its human experience to the scriptural expressions. His understanding of theology as 'a relational science' rooted in the revelation of God's love underpins his undertaking to present and ponder 'different approaches to the phenomenon of hope and to the Christian praxis of hope'. Chapter 2, 'Hoping for salvation', covers a number of voices considered central to this conversation, from scripture and the early church through Augustine and Aquinas to Jürgen Moltmann. Noting the 'shifting horizons' this survey supplies, he deals with whether we should consider hope as the desire for salvation or human and divine reconciliation. This discussion leads to a discernment of love as awaiting 'salvation of the individual person from this fallen world' or 'the transformation of this universe into the reign of God, reconciled through a network of just and powerful divinely inspired love relationships'. Chapter 4 explores 'three eschatological programmes' through the lens of individual/community link with God, looking at the writings of Josef Ratzinger/Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, the American Lutheran theologian Robert W. Jenson and the Australian Catholic theologian Anthony Kelly. Noting that 'any approach to hope, Christian or otherwise, occurs in a complex web of memories, repressions, expectations and fears' Walter Jeanrond offers an exploration of what he considers 'the intricate relationship between memory and hope' in Chapter 5 which draws on the biographical and historical genres mentioned in the *Preface*.

Chapter 6, 'Death and hope', aims 'to retrieve an appropriate sense of death that allows the development of a culture of hope'. Taking the closing line of Eberhard Jüngel's 'celebrated book on death' as his point of departure – 'The essential nature of death is relationlessness'

– Jeanrond looks to linking death and love to retrieve hope. Arguing that 'love is the God-given horizon through which people, cultures and religious traditions can be encountered, understood, explored, assessed and transformed' the author argues that 'love is the eschatological force par excellence' which embraces all aspects of earthly existence, including the ecological. Seeing the Christian commandment to love as calling for a commitment to 'take the challenge of otherness and of God's radical otherness very seriously indeed', Jeanrond asks for a relational openness on the part of Christians that requires a critical and self-critical response. He argues that in an era of inter-religious dialogue the command to love demands that disciples of Jesus of Nazareth enter into 'the much wider network of human communities in and beyond any narrowly defined *Christian* horizon or identity construction'. However, while dealing with life, love also demands that Christians delve into death, dealing with issues of identity and immortality. Contending that 'the care of the soul is more central to Christian discipleship than the wish of maintaining and defending some orthodoxy of doctrines and catechisms', the concluding line of this central chapter claims that 'the care of the soul happens in the work of love'.

After a historical survey of theological avenues to 'judgement, heaven and hell', in Chapter 7 the author argues for an approach to the 'afterlife' from the perspective of love rather than faith, in keeping with the book's fundamental stance. Thus 'the transformative nature of love' would point out 'God's ultimate commitment to creation and reconciliation' rather than a guarantee of 'lack and fulfilment, reward and punishment, however much elaborated in Christological and/or trinitarian terms'. In the author's estimation ending with love ensures that love is not looked on as a means to salvation but as the way of sharing in and showing the praxis of love and the promise of judgement premised on the love of God. Chapter 8 considers 'the political dimension of hope' in the context of Europe, commencing with the crisis in the European project. Looking to the future he lists 'overcoming tribalism and populism in the religious, cultural, social, economic and political spheres of our lives' as a priority in which 'the Christian praxis of hope – alongside Jewish, Muslim and other approaches to the praxis of hope' – will play a central and critical role.

Chapter 9 takes the title of the book as its topic. Reminding readers that his 'point of departure has been the primacy of love over hope and faith', he attempts '*to gather the fragments*, so to speak, presented in the previous eight chapters, in order to explore the different but related trajectories of love in terms of their potential for present and future acts of hope'. This accent on *acts* is applied in a number of arenas, namely love of neighbour, love of God and God's creation, love of self, leading him to look at salvation and the statement that 'the existence of evil and of evil structures remains a challenge for all forms of hope in God [while] at the same time, the experience of evil points us also to the urgency of ever-greater acts of love, forgiveness and reconciliation'. 'Inter-hope dialogue'

itemises hospitality and empathy as avenues for the 'constructive and imaginative openness to meeting others and of exploring together with others the virtues of love, hope and faith' while indicating that 'a hermeneutics of love is interested in the dynamic encounter and its particular eschatological openness to transcendence, conversion and transformation'. This interest invites theologians to investigate these virtues as infused, involving the grace of God's involvement.

Ending with 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer's radical hope', Jeanrond quotes from his radical expression of hope in God: 'Yet, should you wish to let us enjoy once more this world and the glory of the sun, we should like to recall the past; and our life will then be totally yours'. In a time when we are particularly inclined to 'recall the past', the virtue of hope inspired by love invites us to look to the future that God holds out so that our lives may 'then be totally yours'. As Covid-19 makes no distinction in its application and devastation on the basis of gender or geography, creed or country, the only accessible antidote lies in the love that respects both our littleness and likeness, leading to expressions of love of neighbour and self that renew in us reasons to hope.

With ample footnotes and bibliography, index of both names subjects as well as acknowledgements of pieces that helped the author prepare for this book, this is a very well presented and pertinent publication and, hopefully, both the length of this review and the range of quotes from it will lead readers to the work itself .

St Patrick's College, Maynooth Kevin O'Gorman, SMA

After Suicide – *There's Hope for Them and for You.* Chris Alar, MIC and Jason Lewis, MIC. Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press.ISBN 978-1-59614-434-7.

Two stories in this book bring the title alive that both reveal the pain and loss experienced by family members because of the death of a loved one through suicide and the need for hope.

Every community in Ireland is all too familiar with the sadness and pain of suicide. In the years from 2000 to 2011 deaths in Ireland through suicide ranged from 486 to 544. During 2016 the number of suicides was 437 (www.cso.ie). These are not just statistics – they bring to our hearts the intense sadness, grief and untold pain of families.

Fr. Chris shares his own experience of losing his grandmother through suicide when he was a young man in college. It was a time when he was not actively practicing his faith, "nor was he even slightly aware of the full impact of God's love and mercy" (p.52).

The other touching story is of a family who lost their daughter through suicide (Chapter 3) and where they too found hope in the mercy and love of God in praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

The authors explore and expand the Church's teaching on suicide and

share how Jesus' revelations to St. Faustina on Divine Mercy have helped many in their grief. The concept of 'time' when it comes to the power of prayer offers great hope. Fr. Chris can pray for his grandmother today and the power of the prayer touches the time of her death.

The authors offers those bereaved through suicide three guides towards hope and healing on the journey of grief: to admit you are powerless over the loss of your loved one; to come to trust in Jesus, the Divine Mercy, who restores your lives to manageability; and to decide to entrust your lives and your loved one to the loving care and protection of God. This book offers hope in the midst of devastating pain and it provides a pastoral understanding and offers spiritual HOPE to those who died through suicide and their bereaved families.

Pieta House 1800247247 or text HELP to 51444
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 18002738255
Samaritans – Call free: 116123

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth Brian Kavanagh

The Outlaw Christ: The Response, in poetry, to the question Who do you say that I am? John F. Deane. Dublin: Columba Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-78218-366-2.

This book has its origin in an invitation to take up the Teilhard de Chardin Research Fellowship in Catholic Studies for the Fall Semester of 2016 at Loyola University, Chicago. The material and its presentation reflect this origin and cover a range of issues that touch not only on poetry, but also on philosophy and theology. There is a series of chapters dedicated mostly to poets, but with a few intermittent chapters on philosophers and pastors (such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, and Teilhard de Chardin). In general, however, the book is an exploration of poetry in terms of the evidence therein for a relationship to Christ, exploring and delineating the contours of this connection. Reading through the text (which quotes generously from the poetry) is a welcome opportunity to (re-) discover fresh and sometimes forgotten voices. Less well-known figures such as Phineas Fletcher and John Clare are surveyed alongside better-known poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins and R.S. Thomas. The outstanding chapters are on John Donne (two, in fact), Emily Dickinson, and Pádraig Daly. The chapter on Daly is a particularly insightful and rewarding read, in which one meets 'the most sustained attempt at serious religious poetry in Ireland' (p. 257). The vicissitudes of our times are reflected in a number of stunning poems from Daly in terms of subject matter, language-craft, and religious insight. In addition to Deane's own commentary, there are a few short pieces (scattered throughout with further details included in an Appendix) written by some students who participated in the lecture course at Loyola. References to De Chardin's ideas are to be had throughout,

particularly in regard to the ideas of 'evolution' and 'cosmogenesis'; at times, this material is somewhat intrusive and uncritical in an otherwise thought-provoking discussion. There are a few minor typos, notably the reference to 'page 00' (p. 211); and I was bemused to read of hare-coursing being described as 'releasing a rabbit' to the dogs (p. 273).

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth MICHAEL A. CONWAY

Raphael's World. Michael Collins. Dublin: Messenger Publication. 2020. ISBN 978 1 78812 123 1.

The Dublin priest and author Michael Collins has written several award -winning books in recent years. This latest publication on the life and times of Raphael Sanzio of Urbino [1483-1520] deserves accolades too. It is published to coincide with the 500 th anniversary of the death of the 'divine painter' who was one of the greatest artists of the Italian Renaissance and whose legacy continues to generate wonder and awe. During his life- time he was sought out by Popes, Kings and the European aristocracy to embellish their residences with his outrageously gifted creations.

The book is divided into ten chapters and an epilogue and plots the journey of Raphael from his home town of Urbino to Perugia, Florence and eventually Rome where he settled under the patronage of Pope Julius 11. The author clearly sets out, in the first chapter, the historical background of 15 th. century Italy with its complex web of rivalries and alliances between states and cities. Later chapters outline the beginnings of the revival of Rome under the de' Medici family before the restoration of the Papal States which enabled the continuation of the rebuilding of Rome. The fact that, for three quarters of the fourteenth century, seven French Popes had lived in France had contributed to Rome's decline and provided plenty opportunity for artists like Raphael, Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci to leave their mark as it was restored and beautified.

The political intrigues of the Papal Court during this time are well known – noble families vying for power, lavish lifestyles, murder, simony, exile, military alliances – and provide the context in which Raphael and other artists worked. Collins gives a very accessible account of these realities without overwhelming the reader. The achievements, struggles and high points of Raphael's life are well documented and clearly chronicled over several chapters. Pope Leo X, who had succeed Julius 11, gave Raphael many commissions that enabled the artist to give expression to his wonderful creativity and genius. Raphael's achievements are all the more noteworthy when we remember that he hadn't reached the age of forty when he died. One of the many strengths of this publication is the number of beautiful colour images in every chapter that include images of Rome, the Sistine Chapel and several Popes. The cover and inside cover are quite eye catching in their detail and colour. The publication

concludes with a very helpful List of Illustrations. A very informative and beautifully presented book that introduces the reader to an artist that has enriched the world.

Cork P. J. McAuliffe

Catechism of the Catholic Church with Theological Commentary. Rino Fisichella. Huntington, In: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-68192-274-4.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church was provisionally published in 1992, with the definitive edition published in 1997. In the eyes of many it was an extremely important event in the life of the Catholic Church. Indeed when Pope Benedict XVI called a Year of Faith for 2013, it not only marked the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II but also marked "the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* … an authentic fruit of the Second Vatican Council … produced in collaboration with all the bishops of the Catholic Church" (*Porta Fidei* 4).

Since 1992 the *Catechism* has been translated into many languages and a multiplicity of editions are available. It has been a steady bestseller in the Catholic book category. This particular volume being reviewed is not the first commentary on the *Catechism* available in English. Michael J. Walsh edited a multi-authored *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liturgical Press, 1994) and Aidan Nichols authored a two volume commentary *The Splendour of Doctrine* (T & T Clark, 1995) and *The Service of Glory* (T & T Clark, 1997). However this volume is different to other editions in that practically speaking it contains two books; it contains the full text of the latest edition of the *Catechism* (including Pope Francis' revised version of number 2267 on the death penalty), as well as the theological commentary (which makes up 647 pages of the volume's total 1,440 pages). This particular commentary is different to earlier commentaries in that it's editor, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, is president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization and this edition is co-published with the Vatican Publishing House and is promoted as an official initiative of the Pontifical Council on their website. This is where the ambiguous nature of the work becomes apparent. It is clear that the two halves of the volume are different, the text of the *Catechism* is typeset in two columns and the Commentary is typeset in a single column. Moreover the volume does not have an introduction. After the table of contents, it starts straight into the official text of the *Catechism.* Then at the half-way mark it changes over to the Commentary, with the indexes of the *Catechism* at the end of the volume. I was disappointed by this lack of clarity in the volume. The volume is an English edition of an Italian original. However the OSV edition does not advertise the fact that it's Commentary is translated from an Italian edition nor does it acknowledge any translators.

I happen to have two Italian editions of the work on my bookshelf. The first, published by PIEMME in 1993 and edited by Rino Fisichella when he was at the Lateran University, the second is the 2017 revision on which the OSV edition is based. Twenty of the sixty plus articles in the Commentary are taken from the first edition, the other articles are new compositions. Most surprisingly the English translation omits the Preface by Pope Francis and the general introduction by Fisichella from the 2017 Italian edition. These would have removed a lot of the ambiguity surrounding the volume. The status of the commentary in the Italian edition is still a little confusing and even there it would have been good to underline that the Commentary is *not* a document of the official Magisterium of the Church. Rather this edition should be considered as being akin to the various commentaries on the *Code of Canon Law* which contain both the text of the *Code* accompanied by a commentary. But given that the commentary is in a different section of the book (and not on the same page as is the case in the canon law commentaries), it might also have been better to publish it in two volumes in a single slip case.

The above observations ought not to detract from the Commentary itself. Forty two experts have written these essays. Many of these are renowned theologians including Cardinals Ladaria, Schönborn and Mendonça among many others. Some of the better essays, such as that of de la Potterie (who died in 2003) on the *Catechism*'s use of Scripture carried over from the original 1993 Italian edition to the 2017 Italian edition to the 2020 English one. A note to this effect would be helpful. Most of the various essays are longer than ten pages and provide solid explanations of the different sections of the *Catechism*, as well as some articles on catechisms in general, catechesis and the history of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

OSV has produced a handsome hard-covered volume that is well typeset and is printed on high quality paper. The whole content fits nicely into a single volume. My suggestion of publishing it in two separate volumes was to help underline the different genres and authority of the two halves of the work. The Commentary is very well written and covers all the various sections of the *Catechism*. As it stands, I would wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone interested in studying Catholicism. It would also be a very good volume to read before one starts a course in academic theology. However I hope that OSV will include the introductory material in future editions and clarify the "unofficial" status of the Commentary (perhaps even adding an indefinite article to the title to specify that the second half of the volume is "A" theological commentary on the *Catechism* and not simply the *Catechism* "with Theological Commentary" as the current edition is entitled). If the mentioned editorial shortcomings are corrected, I would be able to give it an absolute recommendation. In the meantime it is still a very useful volume, but the buyer needs to appreciate the relationship between its two halves.

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth NEIL XAVIER O'DONOGHUE

DCU
Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

SCOIL NA DIAGACHTA, NA FEALSÚNACHTA, AGUS AN CHEOIL
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND MUSIC

MA in Theology and World Religions

Taught by staff with international reputations in their fields, this programme welcomes students from varied religious and secular backgrounds.

Key topics explored on the programme include:

- Ecumenical perspectives on key theological questions
- Sacred texts and languages like Hebrew, Greek and Arabic
- Interreligious dialogue between Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism
- Politics and Religion in the 21st century
- Literature and World Religions

A flexible programme delivered over one or two evenings per week to suit those with careers and other commitments.

PAC Codes: DC693 (One Year, Full-Time)
DC694 (Two Years, Part-Time)

Partial Scholarships available, please contact:

Dr Joseph Rivera
E joseph.rivera@dcu.ie
dcu.ie/DC693 dcu.ie/DC694

The Furrow

Help secure a bright future for

The Furrow

by remembering the journal in your will,

or

by making a donation.

The entire journal is available online.