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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Gerry O'Hanlon
The Light from the
Southern Cross

Neil Xavier O'Donoghue
Redeemably Awful

Patrick H. Daly
The Secular Priest in the
Thought of Pope Francis

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Brian Cosgrove
Metaphysical Horizons

Sean O'Connell
Redemption as Freedom
Now

Kevin O'Gorman
Serving a Wounded World

October 2020
€4.50 (inc. VAT)

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The Furrow

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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 Britain 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 Light from the Southern Cross – for Ireland too?

Gerry O’Hanlon

As I noted in a recent article here,¹ the reform of the Catholic Church envisaged by Pope Francis is faced with the challenge of translating the rhetoric and theology of synodality into institutional shape and the practical nuts and bolts of parish and diocesan life. As Francis himself put it in an address marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (2015), synodality ‘... is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice’. And in the same address, when commenting on some of the means required to effect this translation of vision into local, regional, national and universal levels, he noted that ‘... these means, even when they prove *wearisome*, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing’, since there is no other way that the Church can ‘keep connected to the “base” and start from the people and their daily problems’, so that ‘... a synodal Church can begin to take shape’ (my emphasis).

A recent document (May 1st 2020) from Australia entitled ‘The Light from the Southern Cross’ is the most thorough-going attempt I have seen yet in this necessary move from rhetoric to institutional reality. As such it is both interesting in itself, but also for its implications world-wide and here in Ireland too. It is not always an easy read because of its often technical nature (‘wearisome’), but its implications are, I believe, ground-breaking and exciting.

GENESIS

The document derives from the Australian Catholic Church, and, more particularly, from a group called the Governance Review Project Team (GRPT). This group had been set up by the Implementation Advisory Group (IAG), which was in turn established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and Catholic Religious of Australia (CRA), in response

¹ O’Hanlon, Church Reform: Taking Stock, *The Furrow*, 71, June 2020, 323-332

Gerry O’Hanlon SJ, is author of *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis: A Synodal Catholic Church in Ireland?*, published by Messenger Publications, Dublin.

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to a critique of Church governance by the Royal Commission. That commission was established by the Australian Government to investigate child sexual abuse in Australia.

The bishops and religious who sponsored the document have decided not to publish it formally yet, but it has been released to *La Croix International* who commissioned distinguished N. American ecclesiologist Richard Gaillardetz² to comment on it, and it is now effectively in the public domain.

The focus of the report is on church governance and on a response to the Royal Commission ‘in light of Catholic ecclesiology’ and ‘through a Gospel lens’, but also incorporating best practice and theory from the civil domain. The authors envisage that their review of governance in the Australian Catholic Church might also be of use to the Plenary Council of the Australian Church (already in preparation, with more than 250, 000 people contributing to 17,500 written submissions – 6.5.1), due to take place in 2020 and 2021 but now postponed due to Covid-19. They also hope that their review can be of help to the Catholic Church worldwide.

The GRPT consists of about a dozen members, lay and clerical, male and female, with considerable expertise in many fields, including legal (both civil and canon law), theological, political science and governance. Among its members is well-known theologian and journalist with *La Croix International* Massimo Faggioli.

CONTENT

Scripturally and theologically the document draws on themes like the Church as the Pilgrim People of God, collegial and synodal in nature, with attention to the ‘sense of the faithful’ (*sensus fidei fidelium*). It is called *as* the Body of Christ (with many parts), imbued by the Spirit to act as steward of God’s gift to the world, in service of humankind’s call to bring about God’s kingdom on this earth which, like we humans, is in its own way also made in God’s image and likeness. The approach is very much inspired by Francis himself – the church as field-hospital, a ‘poor church for the poor’, missionary in nature and constituted by synodality, resistant to the dominant clericalism - but also by Vatican II’s understanding of the Church as in service of the Kingdom, for the world, not for itself.

Within this theological framework, and drawing on Catholic Social Teaching as well, certain principles, values, practices and

2 Richard Gaillardetz, *La Croix International*, June 3 and 4, 2020, including access to the document itself, <https://international.la-croix.com/news/may-the-global-church-discover-light-from-the-southern-cross/12490>; and Joshua J. McElwee on same document, <https://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2020/06/the-light-from-the-southern-cross/>

culture are highlighted which focus on the main theme at issue, that of governance (5.1). These include subsidiarity, stewardship, synodality, dialogue, reflection, co-responsibility and discernment. In addition the document notes that we must take seriously, under the rubric of a culture of leadership, ‘... the expectations of contemporary culture in terms of transparency, accountability, inclusion, participation and diversity’ (5.1.2). These expectations, the document argues cogently, are entirely compatible with gospel values. They result in considerable detail of administration and pastoral practice, two realities which again, the document argues, contrary to popular opinion, are entirely compatible (7.6.8 and *passim*) – good pastoral practice requires sound administration, as the sexual abuse crisis has so clearly demonstrated.

The sources of the 86 specific recommendations that arise from the review are, then, *twofold*: a gospel lens and theology, especially ecclesiology, on the one hand, but also the tenets of good civil corporate governance on the other. Civil bodies referenced in this context include the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (5.3.5), the Australian Institute of Company Directors, the Australian Financial Exchange, the Governance Institute of Australia, and Standards Australia (5.4.2).

These recommendations extend to the national, diocesan and local/parish levels, with implications for the universal church and for the Catholic Church here in Ireland. I will offer a flavour of what they involve as perhaps the best way of concretizing the significance of this important document.

RECOMMENDATIONS (2.7)

There is *first* (n 3) the overarching recommendation ‘that the ecclesial governance principles of collegiality, synodality, subsidiarity, stewardship, dialogue, discernment, participation and good leadership be reflected in the governance structures and decision-making processes of dioceses, parishes and church agencies’. This is to include ‘integrity, accountability and transparency in the administration and governance practices of all church bodies’ (n 4). Safeguarding is a concern throughout.

These general principles begin to bite when one puts them into practice at different levels. First, with regard to *ad limina* visits of bishops to Rome, there are recommendations about ‘prior consultation within the diocese, including with the diocesan pastoral council, about the content of the *ad limina* report’ (n 7.2), ‘publication of non-confidential elements of the *ad limina* report to the local community’ (n 7.3) and ‘communication of non-confidential elements of the conduct and outcomes of the *ad limina*

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visit by bishops on their return' (n 7.5). One can see here how the values of transparency and accountability begin to have traction, a feature of the whole report. It notes many times that the authority of both priests but particularly bishops has been excessively personalized so that an unhealthy culture of secrecy surrounds its exercise. How much do we in Ireland know about the *ad limina* visits of bishops to Rome?

This is once again to the fore in the recommendations that follow about the appointment of diocesan bishops – the process should be apparent to all the People of God, there should be a consultation process including an analysis of the needs of the diocese and a discernment of the *terna* that includes clergy and a large number of lay people (nn 8 and 9).

It has often been argued that Canon 129 of the New Code of Canon Law precludes lay people from exercising serious decision making powers. The document, rather than calling for a revision of the Code, calls instead for an interpretation of its meaning in a more liberal direction (n 13).

In many of the recommendation there are calls for lay people, and in particular women, to be included in diocesan and parochial leadership and governance. And so, there is the recommendation that 'the appointment of lay women and men to senior decision-making bodies be accelerated' (n 15.1); 'that women take a critical role in relation to the selection and formation of seminarians and participate in the evaluations team deciding suitability for ordination' (n 18) and- again, note how this one bites! - 'that lay persons with appropriate expertise be involved in decisions regarding the placement of priests in parishes' (n 19).

As I noted, running through the review is a critique of clericalism, and in particular the lack of transparency and accountability around the authority of bishops and priests. This is addressed again in the context of the formation of candidates for the priesthood, where a more collaborative model of priesthood is proposed, and it is recommended that 'all Church leaders take steps, whenever the opportunity presents itself, to educate about the dangers of clericalism and to make changes to practices that foster an unhealthy culture. These opportunities include, but are not limited to, seminary curricula and ongoing professional development for clergy and lay people' (n 34).

With regard to the Conference of Bishops in Australia (ACBC) it is recommended that its operations be more accountable, inclusive and transparent through an expansion of its advisory membership and public communication of non-confidential agendas, internal reports and major decisions (n 42); that canon 391 be changed to include mandatory consultation with the diocesan pastoral council

and the council of priests before making particular law (n 45); that ‘lay advisors, female and male attend council of priests’ and college of consultors’ meeting with the right to participate fully in all discussion and not as mere auditors’ (n 46); and that each diocese be obliged to ‘have a diocesan pastoral council or close equivalent’ (n 50).

Again, the relentless focus on inclusivity, accountability and transparency is emphasised by the recommendation on diocesan synods: ‘that within five years following the closing session of the Plenary Council 2020-21 each diocese conduct a diocesan synod and every ten years thereafter’ (n 56).

At a *parish level* the same principles pertain and specific recommendations are made to operationalize them. And so it is recommended ‘that each parish articulate and enact clearly structured and transparent, prayerful, synodal processes in which the faithful of the parish have the opportunity to bring forth their ideas, and contribution towards the vision and activities of the parish. These may include, but are not limited to, an annual parish meeting to which all parishioners are invited’ (n 68). With regard to the issue of parish ‘clusters’ and the like – also a matter of concern in Australia with the reduction of numbers and the ageing of clergy- it is recommended that ‘in developing proposals to reconfigure parishes, the people in each parish or group of parishes affected by a proposal be consulted and provided with opportunities to meet together to discuss options’ (n 70). Parish councils should be mandatory – ‘that each diocesan bishop mandate parish councils in the parishes of his diocese’ (n 74), and clergy appointments, as noted, should be made by the bishop in a consultation that should include ‘lay women and men’ (n 83).

ANALYSIS

It is of course true that this document does not yet have high authoritative status, coming as it does from what is, in the final analysis, merely a committee, and subject to discernment by the Bishops and Religious who sponsored it. However, it is commissioned by an authoritative body and, at the very least, is a good indicator of how the wind is blowing.

This is so in particular because its approach is relatively conservative. What I mean by this is that for the most part (with the exception of some suggested tweaking of canon law), it accepts the current doctrinal *status quo*, and simply draws out the implications of current doctrine for governance when viewed through a synodal lens. This relatively conservative stance is arguably more likely, then, to gain the acceptance of the bishops and, ultimately, of the

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Vatican itself, in its sober and careful presentation of the case for what are quite radical moves towards more inclusive governance.

These moves do not for the most part, as my June article proposed, move from advocating a more deliberative as opposed to consultative role for laity, but they do advocate for more *mandatory* (as opposed to discretionary) consultation – a step along the way?

Where there is a decided move towards a more mandatory role for laity – and, interestingly, a call for church law (canon 129) to be changed or at least be interpreted more liberally- is in the encouragement to appoint laity (women as well as men) to positions where jurisdictional authority may be exercised.

I simply note here that over the longer haul it will *not* be possible to separate church governance and teaching in the way this review does owing to its specific terms of reference: the *sensus fidei* and the role of laity as both prophet and king applies to both teaching and governance. This will be vital when, for example, further solutions are sought to the problematic issue of the under-representation of women in positions of authority, a reality pointed out many times by the document. Inevitably this will lead to further consideration of the issue of ordination, as is happening with respect to diaconate and in all likelihood may also happen with regard to priesthood. Some of these matters have already been considered by the Amazon Synod and all of them are likely to be treated by the ‘binding synodal process’ at present in train in the German church.

It remains true, finally, that this focus on institutional governance only makes sense if founded on, and is a function of, our encounter with Jesus Christ and our search to deepen it, not least in our care for one another and our planet earth. Given our contemporary culture, it is only through a more inclusive, participatory and transparent institution that we can hope to create the kind of assemblies and spaces where God may be sought and shared in the dialogical, conversational exchange of stories and experience which faith requires in an environment which is more and more spontaneously secular in outlook. Without this foundational concern all our institutional re-building will be in vain: with it we can hope to fashion a new language with which to express and communicate the good news of the gospel to one another and to our contemporaries.

CONCLUSION

There are clear implications for the Catholic Church in Ireland arising from this document.

It has become somewhat of a self-fulfilling truism that many

of us *priests* are, unsurprisingly, somewhat demoralised and, as an ageing cohort, we are unlikely to have the energy for what might seem like the more onerous administration and form-filling, box-ticking bureaucracy required to implement the best practices entailed in a more transparent, accountable shape of Church. Besides, many of us – and not only those more elderly- have been imbued with a ‘Lone Ranger’ model of authority which really does find it ‘wearisome’ to share power with others.

But, you know, this is far from the whole truth. There are many instances all over Ireland of priests and parishes moving in the direction outlined by this review, and we need to find ways of learning from one another, both from successful practice and from obstacles and failures that have arisen. Perhaps most of all we need to pray for the *personal conversion* in our own relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, admitting our weakness, our lack of knowledge and even energy at times, and allow our imaginations to be fired by a different model of church more suited to our age and more likely to embody the ideals which inspired us to become priests in the first place so many years ago in a different cultural context. That personal conversion is what leads to the cultural change that can more easily facilitate institutional re-shaping of the kind the document outlines. And we will quickly find that there are so many competent and professional lay people who are more than ready and able to help with institutional renewal.

And this will be the challenge for *laity*: to overcome that co-dependency which can characterize their relationship with clericalism, and, with the aid of suitable formation when required, take up their rightful role in exercising their own charisms within church governance.³

The crucial challenge just now, however, is for our *bishops*, that they would provide the leadership that is required. After the 2020 summer meeting of the Irish Episcopal Conference a statement was issued in which it was stated, *inter alia*, that the ‘... Bishops welcome the announcement by Pope Francis in March that the theme (of the October 2022 Synod of Bishops) will be: *For a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission*’. They went on to reflect on the timeliness of this synod and ‘... how in recent years in Ireland many bishops have organised assemblies, gatherings and deep-listening processes in their dioceses to help encourage a more synodal, missionary Church throughout the island – a Church which fosters greater “communion, participation and mission” for the benefit of all’.

3 Neal Carlin, *Imaging Church and State in a Changing Environment*, *The Furrow*, 71, July/August 2020, 442-445

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I think, *first*, one must welcome this statement by the Conference and its unambiguous affirmation of the synodal thrust characteristic of the pontificate of Francis and its adoption as policy in Ireland. The bishops are right, *secondly*, to draw attention to the enormous amount of good work already done along these lines in individual dioceses, usually with great professionalism and a high degree of participation. There is, then, much to build on. However, *thirdly*, it remains the case that most Irish Catholics would be quite unaware of the enormous paradigm shift in the rhetoric of the bishops embracing as a body this synodal model of church. This is surely because, in contrast with the Plenary Council in Australia and this review document in particular, the binding synodal process in Germany, the Amazon synod and the insistent teaching of Pope Francis, the response of our bishops as a collective is still rather bland and timid.

The document 'The Light from the Southern Cross' illustrates what it takes to translate rhetoric into institutional reality. It would need, of course, to be adapted to the specific local reality pertaining in Ireland, north and south, and especially to our respective civil and criminal legal codes, and the particularities of the cultural world that we inhabit. This, and the sharing of best practice and experiences of obstacles already referred to, can surely best be undertaken in the kind of exercise that the Australian Church is now involved in, with such enormous consultative buy-in by the faithful and with appropriate expert help, in convoking, preparing for and going through the process of their Plenary Council. Some such national assembly or council of the Irish Church, building on the good work done at diocesan level identified by the Bishops, would surely galvanize latent energies and provide momentum for the renewal and reform of the Irish Church which the Bishops, like all of us, desire?

The light of the Southern Cross refers to a stellar constellation in the skies that has particular resonance in the cultural traditions of Indigenous Australians, and indeed has liberationist symbolic meaning for all Australians. Indeed, at the core of all Christian paschal experience is the reality of God's glory, resplendent in the seeming hopeless tragedy of the cross. It is fitting, then, that out of the crisis of child sexual abuse and the terrible suffering involved for victims/survivors and families, something good, some resurrectional radiance, might emanate. Our situation in Ireland is, in many ways, similar to that of Australia. Can we, laity, priests, religious and bishops take up the hopes and challenges offered by this document in re-shaping the Irish Catholic Church?

Redeemably Awful: The Challenges of the Extraordinary Form

Neil Xavier O'Donoghue

I have nothing against the Extraordinary Form. While I believe that the current liturgical books of the Ordinary Form as renewed after Vatican II are a better expression of the Catholic Faith and Tradition, I am in no way offended by people who want to use the older 1962 editions of the liturgical books. In my opinion the Extraordinary Form is like my grandfather's Morris Minor, it was a beautiful car and I can well understand those who like vintage cars and are willing to invest the time, talent and treasure to keep them on the road, but for my purposes (as well as for the vast majority of people) the Toyota Yaris Hybrid that I drive is a more practical fit today.

I make no bones of the fact that I personally consider the liturgical rites as expressed in the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite to be far superior for current liturgical celebrations than the same rites as expressed in the Extraordinary Form. Indeed, the whole point of this series of articles is to encourage us to celebrate the current liturgical rites in a worthy manner. But in no way do I want to demean the Church's heritage. The multiplicity of different expressions of the Roman Rite between Trent and Vatican II nourished the spiritual lives of countless millions of Christians and accompanied the evangelization of vast territories of the Americas, Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Pacific.

Many people do not appreciate that these rites changed dramatically in the centuries between Trent and Vatican II. While the ritual books themselves that had been prepared after Trent were not revised, the way they were celebrated and the experience of Catholics differed radically in different times and place. Styles such as the Baroque and liturgical movements such as the Jesuit's reworking of church architecture so that everyone in the church could see the high altar, had a huge effect on people's lived experience of the liturgy. Additionally papal initiatives, such

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

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as Pius X's promotion of frequent Communion, were to change popular participation in the liturgy.¹

Although the liturgical books revised by Pius V offered different liturgical possibilities and had been implemented in various ways, by the time Vatican II came it was clear that these books needed to be revised. The young Joseph Ratzinger was to comment in his journal of the Council that "the liturgy had become a rigid, fixed and firmly encrusted system ... out of touch with genuine piety... [where the people] were united with the priest only by being in the same church with him."² John XXIII decided to follow the example of Pius V at the Council of Trent. He asked the bishops at the Council to agree on some principles of liturgical reform that were to be carried out by a commission appointed by the pope after the Council. The overwhelming majority of the world's bishops were in favour of the liturgical renewal and virtually all parishers in the world were happy to adopt the new liturgical books.

However, given that the Catholic Church comprises of countless souls throughout the world, nobody should be surprised that some people did not like the newer rites. For many reasons some people preferred the old rite. Undoubtedly some of the initial support for the Tridentine books came from strange sources. In 1971 Pope Paul VI granted what was known as the Agatha Christie Indult to Cardinal Heenan of Westminster which allowed the continued use of the Tridentine rite after the current Missal was published. This was in response to a petition published in the *Times* of London by a group of cultural figures, the most prominent of whom was the Anglican Agatha Christie. This petition stated that it had no interest in the Tridentine form of the liturgy as a "religious or spiritual experience" of Catholics. They asked for the Tridentine Mass to be preserved as a *cultural* object, given that it had inspired many works of artists, composers and authors.

Other groups had more *spiritual* motives, such as the French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and the Society of St. Pius X which formally broke with the Catholic Church in 1988. A rejection of the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite was not the only reason that

1 For a history of the liturgy in this time period, see James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today*. 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003). For more on Pius X's reform, see Joseph Dougherty, *From Altar-Throne to Table: The Campaign for Frequent Holy Communion in the Catholic Church* (Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

2 Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1966, new edition 2009), 131-132. In fairness to Ratzinger, while he has never renounced the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, in more recent years he said that he wasn't able to foresee the negative side of the liturgical movement that almost destroyed it from within. See, Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 57.

they left the Church, but it did contribute to their leaving and is perhaps the most recognizable characteristic of their movement. The Vatican is still trying to reintegrate the movement into the Church with a clear desire for unity and making every allowance possible for them. Sometimes these efforts give a higher profile to the group than they might otherwise deserve. In fact, they are a tiny splinter group when compared to the Catholic Church. Vatican reporter John Allen has pointed out that “the Society of St. Pius X claims a global following of around 1 million, which, if true, would represent .01 percent of the full Catholic population of 1.2 billion.”³

As well as these more exotic movements, some Catholics have maintained *both* communion with the Catholic Church and a love of the Tridentine liturgy. These were particularly encouraged by Pope Benedict XVI’s 2007 *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*. This gave permission for priests to celebrate using the 1962 edition of the *Roman Missal* and other associated liturgical books. In the years since 2007 many groups within the Church have started using these older books. Many other Catholics have criticized this and there have even been petitions addressed to Pope Francis asking him to rescind the permission to use the older books.

I will never sign such a petition. I have no problem with people whose spirituality is helped by the older forms. My belief is that the Catholic Church is big enough to have liturgical variations. Indeed we must promote as many different liturgical options and styles as is practical, hoping to attract as many people as possible to the Church. If a liturgical form is in communion with the great Catholic tradition and those who use it hold to the Catholic Faith, then I am more than happy to have them in the Church.

In real terms those who have spoken with their feet and are going to Masses celebrated in the Extraordinary Form within the Catholic Church are probably not far off the 0.01% of the Lefebvrians. Numerically they pose no possible threat to other Catholics. In general, they gather in small communities and put a lot of work into the liturgy. The pre-Conciliar liturgies are extremely difficult to celebrate properly. If a group of Catholics are willing to spend time and effort to form a Gregorian schola and to raise the money to fund the old style vestments and other liturgical paraphernalia, I say more power to them. I am happy to see any group in the Church fostering *meaningful* liturgical celebrations. Indeed rather than persecuting these lovers of the Extraordinary Form, I think they should be encouraged.

3 John Allen, Jr., “Why détente between Rome and traditionalists was always a pipe dream,” March 19, 2015 available at <https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/03/why-detente-between-rome-and-traditionalists-was-always-a-pipe-dream/>

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However, my support has two important *caveats* (and I would share these concerns about any other group that has a particular liturgical style). Firstly, there is no room for any group in the Church to make a gnostic claim to be the only true Catholics or that somehow or other they are more Catholic than anyone else. Liturgical diversity is a wonderful thing but no particular liturgical rite or tradition can contain the whole Christian mystery. However, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, “diversity must not damage unity. It must express only fidelity to the common faith, to the sacramental signs that the Church has received from Christ, and to hierarchical communion” (1206).

The other caveat I have is the related tendency to try to “correct” the Ordinary Form by adopting elements of the Extraordinary Form and incorporating them into the current form of the Eucharistic liturgy. This is often called the ‘*reform of the reform.*’ Indeed, some high ranking bishops and cardinals (particularly those who work in the Roman Curia and have no pastoral responsibilities) have promoted this ‘reform.’ In particular, a speech that Cardinal Sarah gave in London in July 2016 was ‘incorrectly interpreted, as if [it was] intended to announce new indications different to those given so far in the liturgical rules and in the words of the Pope regarding ... the ordinary rite of the Mass.’ Pope Francis summoned the Cardinal to the Vatican to discuss the confusion that followed his speech and the Vatican released a statement lamenting the confusion and stating how Pope Francis and Cardinal Sarah agreed that ‘it is better to avoid using the expression ‘reform of the reform’ with reference to the liturgy, given that it may at times give rise to error.’⁴

CONCLUSION

There is a lot we can learn from the followers of the Extraordinary Form. We ought to imitate their love of the liturgy and their commitment to its celebration. We ought to study the Ordinary Form with the same zeal, but be wary of throwing stones at other Catholics who celebrate an approved form of the liturgy in Communion with the Successor of Peter. There is plenty of craziness among followers of the Ordinary Form to occupy our concerns. Indeed, often when we see a news report of a liturgy in Ireland’s secular press it is because a priest performed some bizarre stunt during the liturgy. Over the last few months we have seen a priest processing down the aisle after Christmas Mass on

4 The text of the Holy See Press Office Communiqué can be found at <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/07/11/0515/01177.html#en>

an electric scooter that he received from Santa Clause for being a good boy. We have seen a priest playing the anthem for Liverpool as the closing hymn of the Mass on the day after they won the Premier League and telling supporters of rival teams to ‘suck this up.’ We are no strangers to priests performing strange rituals during Wedding celebrations, usurping the normal prominence of the Bride (not to mention Jesus Christ’s role at the centre of every Sacrament). All of this is in some vain quest for relevance, forgetting that the Church and her Gospel are the most relevant thing in all of human history. There is more to liturgy than saying the black and doing the red, but this is the bare minimum that a celebrant must follow. We ought to seek to remove the log from our own eyes before attempting to remove the splinter from the eyes of those who legitimately use the Extraordinary Form.

Christian Hope. What do we hope for in this strange time of lockdown? Hope is a strange Christian attitude, but incredibly important. It places us between the now and the not-yet. Can you remember all the way back to Pre-Virus, when we had never heard of Corona (or Zoom, for that matter)? Do you recall how simple things were then, in contrast to this extraordinary moment when it is suddenly no longer possible to plan, and all we can do is live one day at a time? So “hope” is what gets us through the darkness; and it is not the same as being “optimistic”. Our source of hope is not the gloomy insight that “things can’t possibly get any worse; so they must get better”. Rather it is the entirely cheerful certainty that God has raised Jesus from the dead, so everything is all right, no matter how dark things may appear.

- Matthew Betts (ed.), *God in the Time of Covid-19* (Kent: Carmelite Charitable Trust) p. 35.

The Secular Priest in the Thought of Pope Francis

Patrick H. Daly

Pope Francis is a Jesuit and when future historians come to write about and assess his tenure as Bishop of Rome many will doubtless see his membership of the Society of Jesus as the defining factor in interpreting both his personality and his pontificate. Before entering the Jesuit noviciate in March 1958, Jorge Bergoglio had already spent three years in the diocesan seminary of Buenos Aires with a view to becoming a secular priest of his home diocese. Thirty years as a professed Jesuit intervened but ever since his appointment as Auxiliary (1992) and subsequently Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1998, most of his day-to-day contacts will have been with secular clergy, his fellow-workers as bishop and those for whom, again as bishop, he had direct and immediate pastoral care. On becoming pope in 2013 the secular clergy of the Diocese of Rome will have replaced those of Buenos Aires as both his direct fellow-workers and those who make the most immediate claim on his pastoral affections. A majority of the curial officials who cooperate with Pope Francis in the exercise of his Petrine ministry, and a large majority of the world's bishops on whose collegial support he depends in his pastoral care of the universal Church, also belong to the ranks of the secular clergy. It is interesting therefore to reflect on how history's first Jesuit pope views the diocesan/secular clergy who form the majority of priests both within his own diocese of Rome and in dioceses across the world.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Right from the outset the Jesuits, more than any other order, have enjoyed a particularly positive relationship with the *diocesan clergy*. Ignatius of Loyola's elder brother was a parish priest in the Basque country and the first three Frenchmen who joined the newly founded Society were already ordained, each on his own patrimony, but as secular priests: Peter Faber, Paschase Bröuet and

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

Claude Jay. The Society was barely finding its feet when Ignatius delegated some of his early companions to run and supervise spiritual and academic formation in colleges – not yet seminaries on the Tridentine model – which trained clerics destined for holy orders: the Germanicum-Hungaricum still functions as a Roman seminary preparing priests for the German-speaking world and continues to be run by the Jesuits, while the Collegio Romano, particularly dear to the heart of Ignatius, trained candidates for the priesthood in the dioceses of Italy, later to become the Gregorian University, also still run by the Jesuits.¹ In 17th century France the Jesuits ran twenty-five of the country's diocesan seminaries right up to the suppression of the Society in 1762.² Right into the mid-twentieth century the Irish Jesuits had an apostolic school at Mungret and their English confreres ran a similar institution at Osterly, both of which educated boys in such a way as to equip them for studies at major seminary.

The Jesuits, not least in the United Kingdom and Ireland, gained an intimate knowledge of the apostolate and working practices of the secular clergy through preaching parish missions. The photo albums of Father Francis Brown SJ, who spent many years on the parish mission team of the Jesuits, bear eloquent witness to the extent of the Jesuits' home mission activity: hardly a parish or townland in Ireland has escaped his lens. One of the books every Irish and American seminarian had on his shelf in the 1950's and 60's was *The Seminarian at his Prie-Dieu* by another Irish Jesuit, Father Robert Nash SJ.

Moreover, many distinguished secular priests down the ages had initially tried their vocation as Jesuits. Marie-Dominique Lacordaire and Felicité de Lamennais, the two most influential secular priests in 19th century France [even if Lacordaire's fame rests with his subsequent re-introduction of the Dominicans to his native country] flirted with a Jesuit calling. The celebrated 19th century Flemish social activist Priester Adolf Daens transferred to the diocesan seminary in Gent on the eve of ordination as a Jesuit, while the Gaelic lexicographer and tAthar Patrick Dineen, ordained as a Jesuit, became a priest of the Dublin Diocese. Moreover, closer to our day, Hans-Urs Von Balthasar had been ordained as a Jesuit but in 1956 was incardinated as a secular priest in the Diocese of Chur, while Cardinal John Foley, a curial cardinal from Philadelphia who died in 2011, had passed through the Jesuit novitiate before transferring to the seminary and being ordained as a secular priest. There was also traffic the other way. Father

1 O'MALLEY, *The First Jesuits*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., London, 1993, pp. 233 - 36

2 LAUNAY, Marcel, *Les Séminaires français au XIX et XX siècles*, Editions du Cerf, Paris 2003, p. 16

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James Aloysius Cullen SJ had been ordained for the Diocese of Ferns in October 1864 and in 1881 entered the Jesuits: he was to found the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* (still Ireland's most popular devotional magazine) and the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association. Father Rupert Mayer SJ, who so bravely defied the Nazis in Munich during the war years, was ordained as a secular priest in the Diocese of Rottenburg in 1899 and, after serving two years as a curate, entered the Society of Jesus.

Bearing this strong historical association in mind, remembering the many ways in which Jesuits supported the formation of secular priests and became intimately acquainted with their parochial apostolate, and sensitive to the fact that Pope Francis worked far more with the secular clergy of his native Argentina than with his Jesuit confreres, it is not unfair to say that the Holy Father's reflection on the role of the priest in the contemporary Church and the profile of his apostolate which he has outlined since 2013, demonstrates a *preferential option* for the diocesan clergy³.

A review of the homilies Pope Francis has preached at priestly ordinations since becoming Bishop of Rome as well as the lengthier homilies he has preached at the Holy Thursday Chrism Mass over the past seven years, in addition to a number of other key documents, provide us with a rich, pastorally driven vision of the diocesan priesthood which puts before priests, be they ordinands, priests in the service of the Diocese of Rome or the world's secular clergy an inspiring set of ideals.⁴ The homilies present a challenging ideal which indicates that Pope Francis sets the bar of priestly attainment high but which displays a deep affection for the parochial clergy and an appreciation of their ministry. It is important to emphasise this fact as, on his own admission, Pope Francis has been frequently accused of being excessively hard on priests.

ORDINATION HOMILIES

Since becoming Bishop of Rome in 2013, Pope Francis has conferred priestly Orders on transitional deacons from the Rome Diocese in St. Peter's Basilica on the fourth Sunday of Easter each year. [Being ordained by the Pope gives the new priests

3 It is interesting to compare the vision of the priesthood we find in Pope Francis' teaching as first Jesuit as pope with the idea Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits, had of the priesthood: VECHTEL, Klaus SJ, "Das Priesterbild bei Ignatius von Loyola" in: Thomas Gertler, Stephen Kessler u. Willi Lambert (Hg.) *Zur größten Ehre Gottes. Ignatius Loyola neu entdeckt für die Theologie der Gegenwart*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2006, S. 199-217.

4 The homilies of Pope Francis are all easily accessible in English translation on the website: <http://w2.vatican.va>

the privilege of having the top button of their soutane red]. Pope Francis also celebrated a priestly ordination on Friday 1 December 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Ordination is a lengthy liturgy, especially when there are several ordinands, so the Pope keeps his ordination homilies short. He relies heavily on the ordination sermon provided in the Roman Pontifical, yet each year he adds telling glosses or chooses to highlight one or other feature of the priestly vocation for special attention.

The set text provided by the Pontifical, familiar to all priests and bishops, can best be summarised briefly. The priesthood of all believers is first flagged up, the specific calling to the ministerial priesthood and the relationship between the bishop and his fellow-workers set in high relief. Christ, the unique and universal Priest is the model of all priests and the triptych of his identity as priest, prophet and king defines the priest's calling to *celebrate* the liturgy and rituals of the Church, to *proclaim*, preach and teach the Faith, and to *shepherd* the flock taken from the people of God confided to his care. The sacramental ministry the future priest will exercise is briefly described. In both his preaching of the word and his sacramental ministry the priest is challenged – and this is something Pope Francis chooses to emphasise – to believe himself what he prescribes for others and to see to it that his own life is consistent with the values embodied in the sacraments he administers. In several of his ordination homilies Pope Francis exhorts those he is ordaining to be faithful to the Liturgy of the Hours and to remember that an integral part of their calling is to pray for the Church and all the world's people.

Right from the outset of his pontificate, Pope Francis urged new priests to be *merciful* both in the confessional and outside. Their relationships with everyone should have the willingness to forgive and to stretch the parameters of mercy as the permanent default of his ministry. “Never tire of being merciful”, the Holy Father cautioned in 2013, his first ordination liturgy as Pope. Perhaps Pope Francis remembered that his 17th century Jesuit confreres were the main adversaries of Jansenism, but in 2014 he again impressed on the ordinands that they must never tire of being merciful and that only by entering their new ministry through Christ's wounds could they ever bring the grace of healing to wounded humanity.

Central to Pope Francis' first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* was the *ministry of the word* and in particular the priest's homily – pithy, direct and comprehensible – and its meticulous preparation. In the ordination homily of 2015 he challenges the ordinands to situate what they preach in their lives and, as if he were borrowing from John Henry Newman, suggested to them that

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a homily would only strike home if it were a case of heart speaking to heart. In a touching tribute to their grandmothers, mothers or those {often nuns, although not said explicitly} who taught them catechism, the Holy Father reminded those whom he was about to ordain how much, in terms of their knowledge of God's Word and their familiarity with the scriptures, they owed to those who shared their Christian faith with them.

The Jesuit school master breaks through in a number of Pope Francis' homilies to those ordinands who will be "his" priests as Bishop of Rome: rather than caress their egos, he punctures any bubble of self-importance they may feel on this ordination day. In 2015 he reminded them that a bishop took a "risk" in ordaining them. He did not want priests who strutted like peacocks nor did he want clergy who were functionaries or "state clerics" [was he thinking of those many priests in Europe who depend on the State for their income?]. In a time when so many parishes have permanent deacons, pastoral workers and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, Pope Francis was quite emphatic in 2017 in his counsel to young priests: when it comes to the sick, go and visit them *yourselves*. The final up-beat advice the Pope offers to the newly ordained – like the Jesuit rectors of my youth at prize-giving – is that, throughout their lives, the joy with which they exercise their priestly ministry should be infectious and that they should never tire of doing good.

In the ordination homily which Pope Francis preached in Bangladesh, he acknowledged that the ordinands had family, friends and parishioners from their home dioceses who were present: he appealed to the laity to pray for their priests and to support them in every way they could.

CHRISM MASS HOMILIES

The homilies Pope Francis preached at the Holy Thursday Chrism Mass are all focused exclusively on the calling of the priest. Over the years they present a vision of the priest's vocation that is more nuanced, pastorally rooted and driven by the personal experience of a bishop, acutely aware of his own *priestly* identity, who lets the priest in him come to the surface, even as Bishop of Rome. He is no longer constrained by the strait-jacket of the Pontifical. His primary audience each year at the Chrism Mass is the clergy of the Diocese of Rome, even though clearly he will be aware that many other priests – religious and secular from across the world, students at the Roman academies or curial officials – will also be in the congregation. Even if he only acknowledges the presence of laity in the congregation by the briefest of passing references, the

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Pope will be aware that those to whom the priests minister are also present in large numbers. In the Chrism Mass homily Pope Francis outlines his vision of the identity and calling of the priest with *cura animarum*.

The Chrism Mass homilies are more prolix, one idea borrows another without an obvious logic, the prose is more lyrical and it articulates Pope Francis' *feelings* about the priesthood, intuitions which are the fruit of personal pastoral experience and an enthusiasm about the priesthood untainted by any hint of cynicism. That an elderly man, who clearly recollects the joy of anticipation of his first Mass, his first Confession or his first Baptism which he felt on the day of his ordination, should speak with such infectious joy about his priestly ministry is very striking. There is no grand sacramental theology, there is no reference to the structural or hierarchical context within which the diocesan clergy exercise their ministry nor is there much scriptural underpinning of the points the Pope is making about the priestly role. The tone is decidedly more avuncular than magisterial.

The oils of catechumens, the sick and chrism are consecrated at the Chrism Mass and for Pope Francis the priest is anointed with chrism so that he can go and anoint others. For the Pope the priest may well use oil yet he anoints with love and with the dynamic energy his own familiarity with the word of God provides. He insists that the preaching of the priest – at the Chrism Mass homiletics is given a wide berth – transmit news that is “good” so that his people, on leaving Mass, may feel the better for having been there. The people will trust their priest if they feel he knows them, that he anticipates their needs and prays on their behalf – he is always a step ahead of his people in his intercessory prayer. And the priest knows his flock's needs because he is so close to them. For Pope Francis the Catholic priesthood is profoundly incarnational, it comes into its own when the priest smells of his sheep, so close is he to them.

In his homily at the Chrism Mass of 2015 Pope Francis displayed his greatest empathy with those priests working at the coal face of parochial ministry, the pastors of the Roman parishes and their curates. Like Jesus who felt his harassed apostles needed to get away and rest, so too the Holy Father insists that priestly work is exhausting and priests are often very tired. So, rest is imperative, and he puts it to parishioners that they should be vigilant concerning the priest's welfare. The sheep too must be attentive to the needs of the exhausted shepherd.

The expectations of the priest are fairly classic, the profile sketched by Pope Francis too is quite conventional, yet the almost exclusively *pastoral* context in which he situates the work

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of the priest and the scant regard for the ecclesial setting within which most secular priests operate strike a new departure for a pontiff who sees the Church as a whole and all its ministers as primarily “missionary”. In his very first Chrism Mass homily a mere fortnight after his election as pope, borrowing an idea from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pope Francis insisted that, like Jesus, the priest was above all else a *man for others*.

OTHER SOURCES

A year into his pontificate Pope Francis met with and addressed the parish priests of the Diocese of Rome. More than any others, these are his co-workers in his ministry as shepherd of the flock committed to his specific care when he was inducted as Bishop of Rome. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis had focused on the priest’s calling as minister of the Word. In speaking to the pastors of the Roman parish communities he chose to prioritise their role as ministers of *reconciliation*. His focus is more on the disposition and attitude of the priest-confessor, his concern is for the vulnerability and feelings of the penitent. For this Holy Father, it is the generosity with which forgiveness is granted and the knowledge to the penitent of its almost profligate availability that matters most. It is the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation as a service to the penitent that is central to Francis’ thought and that too must be the priest’ main concern. He counsels against *rigorism* and *laxism*: the latter short-changes the teaching of the Church, the former wounds the sensibility of the vulnerable penitent who has exposed his wounds.

The 160th anniversary of the death of St. John Marie Vianney, patron saint of parish priests and of the diocesan clergy, offered Pope Francis an opportunity to expound at greater length a vision of the priesthood with *cura animarum* at its heart. Even if the papal letter, issued on 4 August 2019, was addressed to “all priests” it is clear from the outset that its addressees are the *parochial* clergy, the foot-soldiers of the Church working in the trenches. The letter displays great empathy with the priest and his struggles – struggles in his ministry, struggles in the inner sanctum of his heart – and reveals an understanding of the weariness constant fidelity to the tread-mill of priestly pastoral commitment inflicts on even the most robust of priestly souls. A solution for Pope Francis is regular recollection of the day of priestly ordination, of the life-long commitments made – even if the pontiff never refers to celibacy as such – and of the initial enthusiasm the ordinands felt at the moment they realized they were called and again at the moment they were anointed with chrism on the day of their ordination.

CONCLUSION

Pope Francis was up-front in acknowledging that, unwittingly or not, he had created an impression that he was hard on not only the priests of his diocese but on the secular clergy world-wide. He was honest in admitting that this seeming harshness had repeatedly been drawn to his attention. This candour oddly enough makes the sincerity of his appreciation of the priest's ministry, the empathy he regularly displays with the priest's struggles and his reminder to priests to put the interests, feelings and desire for salvation of those to whom they minister always to the forefront of their endeavours all the more striking. His is a vision of the priest as general practitioner working in the local church as field hospital, strewn with the little people wounded by life and, sometimes to his regret, wounded and overlooked by the Church. It is a vision of the priesthood which will resonate with most Catholics and to which only the most hardened humanist could take exception. With forgiveness as his default option, the priest comforts, heals and encourages, never under-selling the Church's teaching but making apostolic charity his life-long commitment. One does wonder why Pope Francis, whose own priesthood was forged by his years of exposure to the Ignatian tradition, did not invite the newly ordained to set their sights on: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*.

There are few traces of his Jesuit formation or of Ignatian spirituality in Pope Francis' reflections on the priesthood. Nor are many of the other ecclesiastical *topoi* which so frequently occur in the magisterial allocutions of Pope John Paul II, e.g. *Alter Christus*, resorted to by Francis. It is as if he deliberately avoids them and challenges the priest to establish his own profile. Pope Francis directs his random, deeply personal and challenging observations on the priestly calling primarily to the diocesan clergy and those with *cura animarum*. These are the priests whose ranks he originally set out to join, these are the priests with whom he has mostly worked with and, as bishop in both Buenos Aires and in Rome, they are *his* priests. Francis' reflection on their pastoral calling is a boost to the world's secular priests and yet his message is equally applicable to all in Holy Orders and can only but be of assistance to them in the salvation of souls – of others and of their own.

Love-energy: activating the energies of love as an ecological response

Niamh Brennan

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a French Jesuit as well as a paleontologist of significant academic repute. For Teilhard, the world was a spiritual as much as a physical reality and this union of both spiritual and material was especially observable in the human. Love was central to Teilhard's evolutionary vision and he optimistically believed that the universe was moving towards deeper spiritualisation and deeper 'amortization'. In Teilhard's view the universe as it develops through time is undergoing a transformation through this spiritual growth and development. Part of what constitutes and facilitates this growth was his idea of 'human energy'¹ most explicitly expressed in his book of the same name and of which love energy has the potential to play a large part.

THE 'SENSE OF THE EARTH'

In this book Teilhard speaks about the '*sense of the earth*'. The '*sense of the earth*' is "the passionate sense of common destiny that draws the thinking fraction [consciousness] of life ever further forward"². What this refers to is how humanity is unified not by family, country or race, but by the earth. With the discovery through the sciences of our shared origins (13.8 billion years ago) in addition to the discovery of time and history (Earth has an age and a history and the universe has an age and a history), we have learned that the universe is not static or 'fixed' but developing. Teilhard believed that as the universe develops so too is human psychology changing and that a new 'force' shaped by this understanding of 'common destiny' is emerging. This force has come 'just in time' he writes to

1 De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *Human Energy*. Great Britain: Collins, 1962

2 Ibid.,p 31

Niamh Brennan is a lecturer and writer in the area of cosmology, ecology and spirituality. She is author of 'The human in the Universe' and co-author with Greg Morter of '*The Universe Story in Science and Myth*'. She is currently completing her PhD in Trinity College, Dublin. e-mail: niamhbrennan@hotmail.com

control, excite and order the ‘newly freed’ energies of human unity, research and love. Through these three ‘newly freed’ energies and with this sense of common destiny, Teilhard believed humanity to be building a ‘spirit of the earth’.

In order to understand this force of human energy and its power to effect change, it is necessary to explain these *three* energies.

ENERGY OF HUMAN UNITY

The *first* of these ‘newly freed’ energies exercised on earth through the human is the energy of human unity. This is similar to the idea of a common destiny. Teilhard’s point is that the individual often instinctively seems to isolate and to distance herself from her fellow human being. This he attributes to a reluctance or nervousness when faced with a task of expansion. Teilhard goes on to state how our powers increase if, for example, in research or competition we feel affection, comradeship or team spirit. There is personal fulfilment and illumination on being admitted to and sharing in a common endeavour and spirit. For Teilhard such brief and pale illuminations give us a glimmering insight into the huge “power of joy and action”³ that is humanity and what Teilhard names the “human layer” of earth⁴.

As humans, we suffer and vegetate in our isolation and so we need a ‘higher impulse’ to force us beyond that dead point at which we become static. This ‘sense of the earth’ or common destiny Teilhard calls the irresistible pressure for uniting in a common enthusiasm. Pressure can be read in two ways, the pressure of the increasingly urgent ecological crisis⁵ and the innate pressure ‘to belong’ to something more than my own being. In our contemporary context the earth is evolving as a unit and humanity, whether we accept it or not, is involved in a common fate. Later Thomas Berry would articulate it much more clearly when he stated ‘we go into the future as a single sacred earth community – or we do not go into the future at all.’

ENERGY OF RESEARCH

The *second* newly freed energy is the ‘energy of research.’ Teilhard viewed research and, in particular, scientific research as one of

3 Ibid. p 35

4 Teilhard uses the term ‘human layer’, and his is very much a collective interpretation of humanity. In other writings he uses the words species or phylum, cf. *The Human Phenomenon*. Teilhard was hugely anthropocentric in his view and indeed held an often unwarranted optimism about humanity and the history of humanity

5 This is not a pressure that Teilhard would have included, being unaware of the possibility of such an ecological crisis, in addition to the fact that his views did not include the other than human community and remained singularly anthropocentric.

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the highest functions of humanity, which he believed illustrated, through its constant pressure and probing of reality, a supreme faith in 'Being'. This desire to 'know' was for Teilhard a form of worship. It also emphasised for Teilhard that the world functions through the production of living beings. At the same time, and this is most relevant today and thus worth inclusion, the human has in a manner become *subordinate* to these productions. Not only the computer, the machine, construction and money but also things which are considered luxuries or curiosities such as transport, travel and 'things'. Teilhard writes and it merits reproduction in full:

'Too much iron, too much wheat, too many automobiles – but also too many books, too many observations; and also too many diplomas, technicians and workmen – and even too many children. The world cannot function without producing living beings, food, ideas. But its production is more and more patently exceeding its powers of absorption and assimilation. Here again, as in the case of love, we must ask what this excess production means. Is the world condemned as it grows to automatic death by stifling beneath its own excessive weight?'⁶

Teilhard's confidence in an earth unaffected by such gross production is troubling and indeed out-dated. His view that the world functions by producing living beings and the insight that these living beings share a common destiny is the point we are concerned with. It is this common destiny or 'sense of the earth' that provides humanity with the reason he states for their abundance of love and ways in which to effect it. In other words, the earth ties us unbidden to a common home, environment and quality of life. We drink the same water, breathe the same air, share the same sunlight and walk on the same land, the land that grows *all* our food. Our destiny is unavoidably involved. Our interaction and involvement, in terms of research, production and development will impact not just on human life but on the planet in its entirety.

ENERGY OF LOVE

For Teilhard, *love* is the attractive force of the world and the way in which it seeks unification. Not only does love make possible and help to deepen personal development but Teilhard also saw it as necessary for the spiritual development of the world. Teilhard believed love, as human psychology, to be undergoing a change of state and so needing to be studied like any other phenomenon. In

6 Ibid., p37

The Human Phenomenon he defines it simply as “the affinity of one being for another”⁷. He writes that “if some internal propensity to unite did not exist, even in the molecule...it would be impossible for love to appear higher up in ourselves”⁸. This indicates that the attractive energy of love has always been present, however latent, in the universe.

THE EVOLUTION OF LOVE

Teilhard attempts to trace a brief outline of the *evolution* of this attractive force of love. He argues that at the level of the molecule, love is not a distinguishable element from the molecule but can be understood as chemical activity or relationships. It holds together the atoms that make the molecule up. It is a primitive and functional form of love and also worth noting, a practical form. Gradually through time, this attraction evolves. It becomes slightly more distinct although for a long period of time it remains confused with the function of reproduction. With the arrival of the mammal, it takes on a more explicitly identifiable form in the act of parental care and concern. With hominisation⁹, there are further developments.

Initially however, love is in Teilhard’s word ‘restricted’. This is so as it is only associated with, understood as, and moralised about in relation to producing children and the propagation of humanity. However because there is less need and desire today (in some societies) to propagate the species, love is free Teilhard argues to *serve* a much larger function. He writes that:

‘love ... has hitherto been excluded from any rational systematization of the energy of man [sic]. Empirically, morality has succeeded more or less successfully in codifying its practice with a view to the maintenance and material propagation of the race. But has anyone seriously thought that beneath this turbulent power (which is nevertheless well known to be the inspirer of genius, the arts and all poetry), a formidable creative urge has remained in reserve, and that man will only be truly man from the day when he has not only checked, but transformed, utilized and liberated it? Today, for our century avid to lose no energy and to control the most intimate psychological mechanism, light seems to be beginning to break. Love, like thought, is still in full growth in the noosphere. The excess of its growing energies

7 De Chardin Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. Appleton-Weber, Sarah (ed.). Great Britain: Sussex Academic Press, 2003, p188

8 Ibid.

9 The process of becoming human, the evolutionary development of human characteristics that differentiate hominids from primate ancestors

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over the daily diminishing needs of human propagation becomes every day more manifest. And love is therefore tending in a purely hominized form, to fill a much larger function than the simple urge to reproduction.’¹⁰

Here Teilhard describes love not only as something unique but as an energy inherent in the cosmos that is uniting people on a level that is *not* primarily physical but contributing toward an evolution of greater consciousness. The universe evolves in a physical manner but it is also increasing in consciousness and it is love that holds the key to this development. This love is most present in the realisation of our relatedness and so plays out in the way in which we relate to each other – human to human, human to earth and human to divine. Love for Teilhard is the most universal, the most powerful and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces. However, in restricting our understanding of it to the human world it has been reduced to a level of empiricism which is influenced by conceptions of matter that are out of date. The understanding of love has become too ‘static’ and ‘spiritualised’, too divorced from its cosmic roots, from natural passion, in which all love, including the love of God, has its starting point.”¹¹ Love, Teilhard insists, must finally be recognised as the cosmic force that it is.

‘Socially, in science, business and public affairs, men pretend not to know it, though under the surface it is everywhere. Huge, ubiquitous and always unsubdued – this world force seems to have defeated all hopes of understanding and governing it. It is therefore allowed to run everywhere beneath our civilization. We are conscious of it, but all we ask of it is to amuse us, or not to harm us. Is it truly possible for humanity to continue to live and grow without asking itself how much truth and energy it is losing by neglecting its incredible power of love?’¹²

Love has transformed from an energy that is a basic binding attraction, to that which procreates, to that which ‘cares and takes care of’, to that which through the self-reflective human can *choose* to be expressed for no apparent biological end but for the joy of entering more deeply into being.

ACTIVATING THE ENERGY OF LOVE

I turn now to the concept of energy and I wish here to emphasis a point made by R. Wayne Kraft. He explains how we can perceive the effects of energy but not energy itself. No one can see a calorie

10 *Human Energy*, p 129

11 King, Ursula. Love – A Higher Form of Human Energy in the work of Teilhard de Chardin and Sorokin’ *Zygon*, vol. 39, no. 1, March 2004, p 86

12 *Human Energy*, p32

or feel a footpound. We can't hear a joule or touch a kilowatt. Thus energy is, in some manner, a mental construct. Physical energy is not tangible but it is however, very real. Food and fuel are *sources* of energy but they are not energy. For example, when we eat bread, we receive energy. But the bread is not energy. The bread is simply food – a source of energy. Wind that doesn't perform some kind of an action is not energy only an air current. A transformation must occur from the potential or actual energy source to the receiver in order to speak about energy in a meaningful way. An action, activity or transformation is necessary because energy is dynamic.

THE SEARCH FOR ENERGY

Historically our human quest for energy has led to ever older, more powerful and simpler sources of energy. Wood (biomass) was first used between 200,000 and 1.5 million years ago. Wood was substituted for coal around 1000 years ago and in the Industrial Revolution coal became the primary energy source. At this time the population was increasing as was the need for energy. The forests were disappearing with the onslaught of industry and coal seemed more plentiful, so increasingly more industries became dependent on it. The fossil fuels (petroleum/oil and natural gas) came much later in the late 1800's and early 1900's. In 1859 Edward L Drake drilled the world's first oil well in Texas which began the modern oil industry. In the past few decades only we have moved into the area of nuclear energy whose source is atomic. Nuclear power uses sustained nuclear fission (division) to generate heat and electricity. Most nuclear power points are powered by uranium and it remains a very controversial activity.

The point here is that the energy sources or 'resources' exploited first are historically the youngest. However, as the world has developed we have begun to use older and older sources. Trees on the surface of the planet have an age of decades or centuries. Fossil fuels formed with the earth are millions of years old. Uranium was formed around 6 billion years ago in supernova explosions but whose radioactive decay provides the main source of heat inside earth and can be found in rocks and the earth's crust. Hydrogen is the oldest and was formed when the universe was created, 13.8 billion years ago. So there is a pattern, humankind in our need and desire for energy to sustain life inevitably seeks more and more ancient sources. As we have moved from food to wood, to coal, to oil, to natural gas, to uranium, and to hydrogen, the energy density rises sharply. Energy density is the quantity or the amount of energy released per kilogram of substance when the fuel is burned and so older sources are more powerful. The older

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sources are also simpler in their structure and make-up. However as we now also know, they are *non-renewable*, except for wood. In short, our world of Big Business and Industry that encourages a compulsive consumerism is being quite literally consumed by this thirst for physical energy and material things. The tragedy of this is that those who benefit most from this energy consumption make up a small fraction of the global population while it is the planet and most particularly the poor who suffer the consequences.¹⁴

LOVE: THE MOST ANCIENT ENERGY

And this returns us to love. The universe is a single unfolding of energy and matter in time and space. It is a spiritual and a physical reality that is becoming more expressed through time. As Teilhard believed and argued, it is increasing its growth in love and spirit – or at least it has the potential to, a potential that resides in my own personal *choices* and actions. On a planet in the midst of the 6th mass extinction, rising sea levels, global warming, and unconscionable disparities between rich and poor, never have my actions and choices held more significance. In his encyclical letter '*Laudato Si*'¹³ Pope Francis calls us to such a realisation. He states that never has our common home been so mistreated by human activity as it has been in the past two hundred years. The earth “burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor”¹⁴. The devastation of our natural environment affects the soil, water, air and all forms of life, even the processes of life itself. It affects our social environment and, finally, it affects our spirit. Thomas Berry writes that a degraded outer world leads to a degraded inner world, while Pope Francis accentuates this vital connection between our natural landscape and our spiritual landscape when he writes that “the external deserts are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast”.¹⁵

The world was a spiritual reality long before the arrival of the human. The world had an attractive force of love long before the arrival of the human. It is a strange irony that it has taken the sciences to point out our single destiny as earth and human. But it is precisely at this time that the energy of *unity, research* and most significantly, *love* are needed. Human unity and human research are an epi-phenomenon of the human, but love is what brought us into being, sustains us in being and holds together the entire cosmic process. To begin to activate this energy is to trust in that which goes beneath language and concepts, to trust in the great

13 Pope Francis. *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home*. Veritas, 2015

14 Ibid.,p9

15 Ibid., p109

unfolding of this all-encompassing cosmic mystery. *We* did not invent, construct or create love. We merely allow it to be activated within us and hopefully to pass it on. In 1 John 4:7 19 it states that “we love because God loved us first”. In terms of the universe, we could not love as human beings, if love and the ability to love were not already an intrinsic part of the universe, of that which formed and shaped us providing us with our desire and our need to love and to be loved. It cannot be described or measured in physical terms and yet it is an energy because it is a power. It can effect change and it can control the lower forms of energy. Perhaps it is the most ancient of energies. But one thing remains without doubt, by neglecting it we ignore one of the most powerful tools left to us.

*“The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire.”*¹⁶

16 De Chardin, Teilhard. *Toward the Future*. N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, p85-86

Divine Precept? The non-ordination of women is the customary practice of the Church but it is not “Tradition” in the strong sense of the term. It is not a “Tradition” unmistakably “received” from Christ and the apostles which immutably reveals the will of God for his Church for all ages. It is not one of those “things without which the deposit [of faith] cannot be properly safeguarded and explained.” The practice and presumption of the non-ordinability of women is a matter of ecclesiastical law and not one of divine precept. That law is reformable. Women have been and can be ordained in the Catholic Church

– John O’Brien, *Women’s Ordination in the Catholic Church*, (Oregon: Cascade Books) p. 194.

Lectio Divina on the Book of the Apocalypse

Stefan Gillow Reynolds

'There was silence in heaven for about half an hour'
(Revelation 8:1)

The last book of the Bible is an unusual choice for contemplative reading, however, the times we are in prompted my choice this Lent. One thing one can never say about this book is that it is boring! It is probably one of those books of the Bible which St Benedict in his Rule would have advised *not* to read in the late evening as it would kindle the imagination and 'fears of the night.' 'Such books,' he says, however, 'should be read at other times' (Rule 42:3-4). Still, I went at it with a study guide for, especially with a book like this with a kaleidoscope of imagery, it is easy to mis-read and look for fulfilment of prophecies when we hardly know what they are referring to. So before Lectio I had to do some background reading. Jean-Pierre Prévost's excellent book *How to Read the Apocalypse* (NY: Crossroad, 1993) addresses the question: What time of history is 'Revelation' relevant to?

The consensus of Biblical scholarship nowadays shows that there are *three* strands woven together in the Book of Revelation: the *pastoral*, the *liturgical* and the *historio-prophetic*. These themes or motifs cross over at many times in the text. The pastoral is central in the 'letters to the Churches' in the opening chapters. The author John of Patmos is an elder of those communities but he is in exile, imprisoned on the isle of Patmos. Literary differences make identity of the authorship of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel (i.e., John) questionable, though there are some similarities in theology and literary style. Nevertheless it is likely that Revelation is rightly to be associated with the larger Johannine tradition (i.e., the community to which the Fourth Gospel and the three canonical Letters of John were written). At the very least, the Book

Stefan Gillow Reynolds works in Hospitality in Mount Melleray. He is author of *Living with the Mind of Christ: Mindfulness in Christian Spirituality* and *The Wisdom of Love in the Song of Songs*.

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of Revelation seems to have been significantly influenced by the tradition of John the Evangelist, since it contains some significant vocabulary found also in the Gospel of John (e.g. the Lamb (Rev. 1:29, 5:12), living water (7:17), manna (2:17), Word (19:13) etc.). It is possible, then, that the Book of Revelation was written by an admirer of John the Evangelist and thus, named for him.

Moreover, like the author of the Forth Gospel this elder is also a contemplative and a mystic. The book starts by saying he was “in the spirit on the Lord’s day” (1:10). Later, he is invited into heaven and is again “in the spirit” (4:2). There he participates in a heavenly liturgy. This is the *second* major theme of the book. It is a book which has more liturgical refrains than any other in the Bible. It has been seen as a window into the early Christian liturgy. Throughout the Book of Revelation adoration and contemplation is woven between the historio-prophetic drama. This is the *third* major theme. The historical setting for the book is the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Domitian in the mid 90’s of the first century. This is when the book was written. The book’s main object is to strengthen the faith of those who were being persecuted or going through hard times in any way. It says, don’t lose faith or lose heart if things seem to go wrong.

The Greek word ‘apokalupsis’ means ‘unveiling’ and the author seems to feel that what he sees is relevant for all times. The book makes clear what has recently happened and unveils the future. There are allusions to the major persecution at the time of Nero twenty-five years before. The infamous ‘number of the beast’ is a Jewish numerical code for ‘Nero Caesar’. The book also takes history forward foretelling the destruction of the Roman Empire. Babylon is the code for Rome – the former being the ancient enemy of Israel. So the prophesies are tied in to what *had happened* in the Old Testament. The seven heads of the dragon and of the beast are the seven hills on which Rome was built. John of Patmos disguises the criticism of the Empire so as to not aggravate the persecution.

LECTIO

These *three themes* have to be somewhere at the back of our mind if we use this complex book for Lectio. If we read the book slowly and prayerfully for ourselves, we may see (like I did) that the *fruits* also came in three forms.

Firstly, the book carries both a challenge and a consolation. This is the pastoral side. The challenge is to refocus our attention on Christ as the Lord of history. Even in times of crisis, when the future seems fearful or unknown, what is unveiled is within God’s providence. What lies hidden behind events is not so much

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conspiracy theories of some malevolent intent but God's sovereign care. The challenge is to give more attention to the *good* that comes out of evil and to recognise that goodness is greater than any evil. Sometimes when all seems awry the inherent goodness of people comes to the fore. The unveiling that the Book of Apocalypse shows is that, despite all the suffering and appearances of disorder, goodness is always stronger.

The *second* fruit for Lectio is the rich Christological language in the text which can help focus our prayer and devotion (as it has enriched the liturgy). The opening line makes clear that John's Apocalypse is about 'A revelation of Jesus Christ ...; Despite many attempts by Christian preachers over the centuries to make the Book of Revelation about the 'Beast' and about identifying the 'End Times,' the book is ultimately about neither but rather about 'the First and the Last', 'the Alpha and the Omega'. From start to finish *Jesus* remains the core, centre and focus of the book. John's Apocalypse identifies more Christological titles than any other book of the New Testament, each of them a spring-board to contemplation. As well as those just mentioned we have: The Faithful Witness, The Lamb that was Slain, The True One, Son of Man, He who Holds the Seven Stars, King of kings, Lord of lords, The One who walks among the Seven Golden Lamps, The One who is Alive and yet was Dead, Word of God, He who Opens, The Amen, The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, The Root of David, Rider of the White Horse, First Born from the Dead, The Bright Morning Star. Just to take one of these at a time is enough to enrich a whole period of meditation.

Thirdly, if part of our prayer life is to hold the situation of the world in our hearts, and intercede, then the Book of Revelation helps us focus on *concrete* situations. Like the gospels this book refuses to give a precise date of the End Times, and thus encourages the reader to focus on the present moment, not on what could happen if... but on the real needs of people now. We are not called to prophesy the future but to *discern* the sign of the times. That is what we are going through now. Such a stance helps keep compassion for what is, rather than theories about what might be, central to our prayer. This helps to lead prayer from the mind (trying to work out what will happen) to the heart (living with God's action – and as God's action - in concrete situations).

Being vigilant for the Master's coming doesn't mean being preoccupied with the date of the 'End', as some Christians have insisted on doing despite Jesus' warning that 'No one knows the day or hour...; (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36). In fact, nowhere in Revelation does Jesus tell us who will be responsible for the End. The end is not left in human hands, but in the hands of a loving, faithful

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God. Praying with this book can help us to see that this situation of Pandemic is 'the end of the world as we know it,' but such an end that we can hope and pray, and believer, will bring about a new beginning.

The Book of Revelation does not shrink from confronting all that oppresses humanity, all that is death-dealing, all that is 'anti-Christ.' Rather, like the birth pangs of labour, the suffering we endure now is not a punishment but the promise of a newness. It points to 'the New Jerusalem', 'the salvation of the Lamb' renewal of life, never to 'The End.'

THE NUMBER SEVEN

On this theme, I was drawn in my Lectio to meditate on the number seven in the Book. The monsters that have seven heads (as we have seen, a coded reference to the centre of the persecuting Empire). However, more often seven is used to express completeness. Six is a symbol of falling short of the mark and of worldliness. Symbolically, the world was created in seven days. To miss the Sabbath, the day of rest, was to stay within secular time, to refer to things only in terms of *this* world. Seven opens us to *sacred* time. The trials recorded in Revelation are of seven seals, seven trumpets and then seven vials. These trials symbolise the un-making of things, the 'undoing' of the seven days of creation. The lights of heaven are extinguished, the seas roll back, animals and humans are purged. The accounts are frightening. It depicts creation in reverse, the unravelling of order. However, the message of consolation is that this destruction paves the way for a greater goodness. It made me look in hope for what may come out of crisis.

The seventh of each of these trials represents the recapitulation, where, like in Genesis, God stops the show, to show all is well. In Revelation, unlike Genesis, however, it is not the making but the breaking apart of things that is happening. Yet destruction is also part of God's creativity for it allows *new birth*. 'Behold,' the book concludes, 'I make all things new!' (21:5).

SILENCE

The breaking of the seventh seal particularly drew my attention. It shows that the final response to any crisis is silence. '*There was silence in heaven for about half an hour*' (8:1). It reminded me of my meditation practice, and of something John Main OSB once wrote:

'As we are unformed Christ is formed in us. As we enter the silence within us we are entering a void in which we are unmade.'

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We cannot remain the person we were or thought we were. But we are in fact not being destroyed but awakened to the eternally fresh source of our being. We become aware that we are being created. We are springing from the Creator's hand and returning to him in love.'

The curious thing is the specificity about the time of silence in the last unveiling. This is a breaking in of sacred time, of Kairos, into history which is measured chronologically. This time 'of about half an hour' comes as a conclusion to an account of the heavenly liturgy in Ch.7. This may reflect how the early Christian community had a period of silence ('of about half an hour') at the end of their liturgy which, unlike its heavenly prototype, was performed within the confines of time. A period of silence that brought home to those participating the completion of God's action, a taste of God's Sabbath rest. In the Book of Revelation history, liturgy and spiritual injunction are woven together. What happens in *time* shares in what it *eternal*.

The message I seemed to get from reading the book slowly during the time of lockdown was, 'Do not fear'. Before the opening of the seventh seal it is announced that it will be on earth as it is in heaven:

The lamb at the centre of the heavenly throne will be the shepherd, and he will bring us to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (7:17).

The silence 'for about half an hour' is a response to the realization that God is in control. What seems like destruction is part of creation. We will be shown 'a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away' (21:1). The unmaking of the old and worn world order leads to something better: "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (12:4).

CONCLUSION

At this time of pandemic I was, therefore, curiously reassured by meditating on the Book of Apocalypse; i) nothing happens without God's providence, ii) despite all appearances the powers of evil in the world never have the upper hand, iii) what seems like destruction is a breaking open so that something new may be born, iv) the ragged events of time are tearings in the veil that shrouds the mystery of God's plan. What is revealed, in glimpses, is *love*. The tree of life and the holy city are seen by John of Patmos 'coming

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down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (21:2). At this time of pandemic it is the healing of love that we are waiting for. Revelation ends with an invitation to "the Tree of Life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." (22:2)

A time of silence 'for about half an hour' during the day, preferably morning and evening, helps us dip into the completion of God's plan. Liturgy - in the opening of the last seal - finds its fulfilment in silence. A seal is not broken as an end in itself but to open a scroll. The breaking described in the Book of Revelation announces a story of new life. John of Patmos begins his Revelation by being 'in the spirit.' That is what we do in meditation. We find our own spirit, 'our lifeline to the Spirit of God,' as John Main puts it. "The Spirit bears witness to our spirit," St Paul writes (Rom 8:16). John of Patmos says that the prayer of the Spirit and the liturgy of heaven is but one word: 'The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'.' A prayer-word echoed in every prayer here on earth that what is in heaven may be here below. 'Let everyone who hears say, 'Come'.' The lamb who is on the heavenly throne and yet is shepherd here below reassures us, at the very end of the book, 'Surely I am coming soon. Amen, *Maranatha!*' (22:20).

Inner Change. Societal changes occur when we change on the inside. Just as happiness is an inside job, so also is societal change an inside job. In one of his morning homilies, Pope Francis remarked that the 'peace of the people is sown in the heart'. What he meant was that what's on the inside spills over to the outside.

– Jim Maher, SJ, *Pathways to a Decision*, (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p. 53.

Metaphysical Horizons: on Being Blessed in One's Choice of Reading

Brian Cosgrove

Not long before my seventeenth birthday, as I was about to commence my first year as an undergraduate at Queen's, in Belfast, some eager impulse drove me to seek out and enter the University Bookshop, which was situated quite close to the campus. I had an obscure notion of some of the books I wanted to get hold of: one author on my mental list was Plato. In the previous academic year, my final year at school, I had been fortunate enough to be introduced to Shelley's magnificent elegy for Keats, 'Adonais', and I had been bowled over by the Platonism in the poem, which had inspired some of the most unforgettable imagery I had encountered up to that time:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, earth's shadows fly:
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments ...

(ll. 460-64)

I had an old-fashioned edition, which was generously annotated, and I devoured the notes with that appetite for knowledge which exists in the young. In one of the notes on this specific passage I could read that 'according to the Platonic philosophy everything on earth was but a shadow of which the archetype existed in the heavens'. But the opposition between the One (or the archetype) and the Many (the manifold phenomena which we take to be 'real') is poetically reconfigured by the poet's rich and unexpected extrapolation of that basic opposition into the antithetical images of the 'many-coloured' dome and the 'white radiance' of eternity.

Such, in any case, was the background to my purchase in the bookshop of Plato's *Symposium* (in English translation, of course:

Brian Cosgrove is Professor Emeritus of MU Maynooth, and was head of the English Department for some fourteen years before retiring in 2006.

I never had the privilege of learning Greek). One of its appeals was quite simply that it was quite short; rather shorter than, for example, *The Republic*. I read it closely and avidly, and as I read became, I would say, a devout Platonist. I was later to notice how frequently the word 'transcendence' featured in my vocabulary. What I should stress above all is this: that it was unquestionably through my reading of *The Symposium*, however amateur and under-informed that may have been, that I was convincingly introduced to the great possibility that, independently of any Catholic teaching, there was or might be a genuine metaphysical dimension to human experience.

In due course I was led back to the type of literature that seemed to accord most readily with a broadly Platonic view of life: that is, the literature, especially the poetry, of the English Romantics. Shelley is probably the most overtly Platonic of those poets: and I knew pretty well what he was getting at when I came across a quotation from a letter of early November 1818 to his friend Thomas Love Peacock: 'I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object'.¹ Wordsworth may at first sight appear to be more committed to 'the present and tangible object'; for one of the best-known anecdotes relating to his childhood, as recounted by himself to Isabella Fenwick late in life (in 1843), is this: 'Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from [an] abyss of idealism to the reality'.² But this anecdote yields two large and rather different implications: yes, Wordsworth was conservative and empirical in his urge to hold on to the real; but he was also gifted with an intense Imagination which threatened to dissolve that reality. His near-contemporary, the more radically visionary William Blake, was quite misguided in suggesting that Wordsworth was dominated by Nature at the expense of Imagination or vision. Rather, he sought to reconcile the two in what he termed a 'spousal union' (for the more philosophically idealist Blake, an impossible compromise with material reality). And Wordsworth's ambition to 'see into the life of things' ('Tintern Abbey', l. 49) is his equivalent to Shelley's habit of seeking a dimension 'beyond the present and tangible object'.

As for Wordsworth's many encounters with the mysterious 'presence' he encountered in nature, one of his more explicit statements is found in these famous lines in 'Tintern Abbey':

1 *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Volume II: Shelley in Italy*, ed. Frederick Jones (Oxford, 1964), p. 47.

2 In most annotated editions of Wordsworth, the Fenwick anecdote is often given, at greater length, as either an introduction or as an annotation to the 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'. One reliable source is *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford 1940-49), IV, 463.

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And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that ...
... rolls through all things.

(ll. 93-102)

It was once fashionable to point to this as an example of Wordsworth's pantheism, but it is now, perhaps more accurately, seen as 'panvitalism': the acknowledgement that 'One Life' (not necessarily identical with the natural creation) pervades all things. That said, the kind of experience evoked in the passage, while seemingly an experience of the numinous, need not necessarily be seen as transcendent. In any case, Wordsworth repeatedly takes the view that we do have experiences of what is literally the ineffable, in the sense that no words or utterance can describe them. He is close to the tradition of mysticism when at one point in *The Prelude* he speaks of how the 'soul' remembers 'how she felt, but what she felt/Remembers not ...'

There is no doubt that Romanticism arose in large part as a reaction against both the rationalism of the Enlightenment; and the prestige of Newtonian science, which in any case was enlisted in the Enlightenment project. Along with rationalism came a spirit of free enquiry which offered possibilities of self-liberation; but it also encouraged scepticism. Deism replaced Christian belief, which led to a sense of an absentee deity, not one who might be manifest as a vital presence. In a rationally ordered world, there was no need for a God (assuming one wished to retain belief in such a figure) acting supernaturally within the universe. And of course it is against such a background that we should assess the passage quoted earlier from 'Tintern Abbey'.

The activity of science and scientific research was greatly facilitated by seventeenth-century Descartes' dualism whereby the *cogito* (the thinking self) was seen as an entity separate from what Descartes called the *res extensa*, that is, circumambient reality or the cosmos. The establishment of an objective cosmos stimulated the researches undertaken by science and scientific enquiry, the cosmos in its entirety lying available open to human analysis and exploitation. The tragic consequences of such a change were memorably summarised by a Belgian commentator on Romanticism in a work published in 1939: Albert Béguin. He

speaks of how henceforth man was ‘shut up in his own isolation in the face of an objective nature’; thus, we lost contact with ‘the dynamic power which is the vital bond of the cosmos’, and along with that were cut off from ‘both the formative influence on our physical beings and the source of our loftiest inspirations’.³

Wordsworth is even more forthright in his rejection of this ‘objective nature’ which entirely leaves out of account that ‘dynamic power’ which he had encountered in his own formative experiences of nature. Again and again in his masterpiece, *The Prelude*, he attempts to describe such personal encounters with the natural world, recurrently admitting that he would need ‘Colours and words that are unknown to man’ (*Prelude*, XI, 310) to do justice to his visionary experience. In a sequence in the final book of *The Prelude*, he first of all pays tribute to those ‘higher minds’ who live ‘in a world of life’ because they are ‘By sensible impressions not enthralled ...’ (ll. 90, 102-03). He saves his clearest, bluntest denunciation of the merely empirical – what he terms ‘the laws of vulgar sense’ – for a passage some forty lines later. He could not be clearer as to the dire consequences if we adopt that sadly limited perspective: for we

substitute a universe of death,
The falsest of all worlds, in place of that
Which is divine and true.

(XIII, 139-43)⁴

*

In his monumental work, *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor traces the rise of secularism in the modern world. The first sentence of his opening chapter includes the question he sets out to answer: ‘why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?’⁵ Among the usual suspects touched on by Taylor are science (the ‘new philosophy’ for the seventeenth century and beyond), and Enlightenment rationalism. Romanticism questioned much of the Enlightenment project; and in a post-Newtonian culture it took issue with the dominance of

3 *L’Ame Romantique et le Rêve* (2nd ed., 1939; repr. 1967), p. 78. Quotation translated from the original French.

4 I have quoted throughout from the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, but it is worth referring at this point to the slightly fuller and possibly more eloquent version of this passage as it appeared in the 1850 version: ‘substitute a universe of death/For that which moves with light and life informed, /Actual, divine, and true’ (XIV, 160-62).

5 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (2007; The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 25.

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scientism, later to be identified as positivism when it emerged in the mid-nineteenth century (positivism can be regarded as an extreme form of empiricism : one dictionary definition calls it ‘a philosophical system recognizing only that which can be scientifically verified or which is capable of logical or mathematical proof, and therefore rejecting metaphysics and theism’). In their range of responses Romanticism emphatically reinstated the metaphysical, and a (predominantly non-Christian) sense of the divine. It is thus possible to see the numerous prestigious writers who contributed to the Romantic way of viewing the world as the last great pan-European collective outside Christianity to oppose the secularisation of Western society. As one who taught English Romantic literature for many years, I believe myself to have been truly privileged.

Christ, Creation and Poetry. It has been too easy over the centuries to dismiss the Christ from any hold over and love in the wonders and beauty of creation. I have always held that poetry ought to be engaged in this area, questioning ecology and Christian faith. I was introduced to a book in French, in the year 1965, a small book, that transformed my instinctive love of this earth into a new faith; that book was called *La messe sur le monde (Mass on the World)*, written by a Jesuit priest called Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose work in the early twenty-first century has become central to Christian belief and Christian action.

– John F. Deane, *The Outlaw Christ*, 2020, (Dublin: Columba Books) p. 12.

Redemption as Freedom Now

– *How African Americans recognised in the Cross what European Imperialism had forgotten*

Sean O Conaill

“The cross stands at the centre of the Christian faith of African-Americans because Jesus’ suffering was similar to their American experience. Just as Jesus Christ was crucified, so were blacks lynched. In the American experience, the cross is the lynching tree.” James H. Cone

REDEMPTION AS FREEDOM IN THE ROMAN WORLD

Nothing is clearer in the New Testament than that its authors passionately believed that they had been ‘set free’ in their own time by the Easter events – and that the same freedom would be experienced – in the present – by all who believed.

How else could Paul say of the resurrected Jesus: “Now this Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Cor 3: 17) To recognise Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah was – for Paul and those who listened to him – to see him as a liberator in the fullest sense of that word, even under the ever-dangerous Pax Romana.

Since to ‘redeem’ was literally to pay the full cost of the freeing of a Roman slave, to call Jesus ‘redeemer’ was to proclaim him as one who had bought self-respect for all who believed in him, whatever ‘the world’ – the ever-violent Roman World – might think. It was also therefore to claim that he had freed them from the delusion that this world had any final power of judgement over them. *And that this world was passing away.*

Given that this is what redemption originally meant – the conviction that through belief in the Resurrection the Christian had *already* been raised from death to life with Christ Jesus (*Eph 2: 6*) – can we truly say we understand Christian Redemption today

Sean O Conaill lives at 2 Greenhill Road, Coleraine, N. Ireland BT51 3JE

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if we see ‘freedom’ as something achievable only via politics and ‘armed struggle’, and Redemption as a mere possibility of life after death?

When we say at Mass “by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free” do we make time to reflect on what we mean by that? What does it mean to call Jesus ‘Redeemer’ – Liberator – in our own time and place? Not much, it seems, if we compare youthful Irish enthusiasm for the 2016 commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising with levels of attendance by the same generation at Christian Easter ceremonies in the same year. Two millennia of Church and secular history have kicked the proposed benefits of Christian redemption way down the road – literally into eternity.

And yet increasingly those same generations are *imprisoned* by fears for their own future in this life – fears that the unexpected onset of a viral pandemic in early 2020 and then tales of tundra on fire and permafrost melting in the Siberian Arctic by July will do nothing to allay. Even if the educational ‘normality’ of 2019 could be restored, that too was imposing a straitjacket that was overburdening Ireland’s mental health services for young people in the same year. Oppression is experienced electronically by too many young people these times – as ‘trolling’ 24/7. A fiercely competitive achievement culture in the workplace, and in academia, adds yet another layer of pressure to the vast uncertainties of the moment.

As for reliance upon politics alone to deliver freedom, the killing of George Floyd, an African American, in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020 reminded all of us that in the world’s supposedly most politically liberated society the starkest oppression still threatens too many. Unexpectedly in early June 2020 the US Black civil rights movement of my own early adulthood took on another dimension when I was sent photos of the three white children of a close friend – not yet out of grade (i.e. primary) school – holding up their own posters for Black Lives Matter on a street in the Boston conurbation.

How, I asked myself, could that have happened if Martin Luther King had not risked sudden death every day and night of a solid twelve years (1956-1968) – as the stand-out target for US white supremacist hatred? And how could he have done that if the most sacred book of the white enslavers of his ancestors had not conveyed to his own people a message those same captors had neither seen nor expected: that the uplifted Christian cross offers wordless reassurance and constant support to the most oppressed of the earth – even if the figure on it is usually depicted as white?

As explained marvellously by James Cone in *The Cross and the*

Lynching Tree,¹ for African Americans traumatised by the worst lynching era in the USA (c.1865-1945) – when an estimated 5,000-7,000 of their people were murdered in the most contemptuous way² – the Christian cross had nevertheless birthed for many an enduring hope. Martin Luther King’s own father had witnessed such a lynching – and yet had taught his son that it is always those who do the lynching who are on the wrong side of history.

Surely that invites a different ‘take’ on the meaning of the Cross from the one still blessed by the Catholic Catechism? The late eleventh century teaching of St Anselm of Canterbury – that Jesus suffered crucifixion to repay to his Father a debt of honour on our behalf, a debt incurred by our sins that our own sufferings cannot satisfy – has totally lost traction as ‘Good News’ for younger generations today. Is that surprising when the same understanding does not inspire convinced evangelical preaching from their clergy?

The reason the word ‘honour’ is itself theologically problematic should be especially obvious just now. Honour is the opposite of shame, and in every era, in all contexts, it is always the power-seekers who claim the right to shame others. Daily the US Trump administration wields this weapon mercilessly, by word and action. Just as ‘the Donald’ is always right and perfect and admirable – busy from the early hours on Twitter in the proving of his superiority – *the vindication of his honour* – anyone who challenges that claim is always ‘dumb’ and asking to be insulted.

That in this very purpose of self-aggrandisement President Trump (on June 1st, 2020) would flaunt a Christian bible outside a Christian church – as a means of identifying supporters of Black Lives Matter with enemies of ‘law and order’, and of Christianity – raises an important question about the origins of that mindset. What theology – what understanding of the Christian message – *underlies* the alignment of so many self-identifying Christians with the cause of a person so clearly self-infatuated and so visibly indifferent to the grossest injustice and suffering?

Could it be that in retaining the notion that God is tied inexorably to the necessity of vindicating his own honour, and in thinking of Redemption as merely rescue from Hell after death, we make ourselves blind to the fact that we thereby theologically licence egotism – biblical pride – the tendency to hunger after glory or celebrity in this very same unjust world?

Given that on the contrary Jesus identified with the slave – the one least glorified – and was called liberator of the poor-in-spirit

1 *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James H Cone, Orbis Books, 2013

2 ‘At least 2,000 more black people were lynched by white mobs than previously reported, new research finds’, Washington Post, USA, June 15th, 2020

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(i.e. those we now call depressed) by his own closest followers – was there no downside to extolling the Trinity as some kind of cosmic debt-collection agency, and to explaining the Crucifixion as the means by which one member of that Trinity pays off the balance of a debt of honour to another?

Is it not the meaning of the Cross and the Creed that on the contrary God's love dismisses human misconceptions of honour, to prove that it is the least regarded – those who carry most of the oppressive burden of human ambition – who are always most deserving of respect? And that no one's dignity can in fact be enhanced by shaming another to win attention – or lost in the suffering of an act intended to shame? Was it not above all to convey this teaching that the Gospel events took place – to relativise all human judgement and to help us to be reliant instead, in the very worst experiences of human misjudgement, upon the judgement of the Father?

Was that not the far more liberating teaching that Martin Luther King received, correctly, from the Cross and the Gospel – a teaching not received by the white European adventurers and colonial landowners who had enslaved and lynched his own people?

And could it be that through the descendants of those enslaved by Europeans who had lost the full meaning of Redemption our theology – our understanding – is being re-attuned to the ever-liberating message of the Cross – that God is never on the side of vanity and oppression, and always with those who, like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and John Lewis, risk their lives in the cause of a world in which everyone is respected as truly equal in dignity, and therefore also truly free?

Have white people who flaunt the Bible, and who yet still fearfully bid for white supremacy, pondered yet on why the African American people that white men enslaved could find in the same book the wellspring of their firmest conviction: that God, and therefore the future too, were on their side?

Or ever pondered on the most important lesson we can learn from the past: that supremacy never delivers freedom?

WHY SUPREMACY NEVER DELIVERS FREEDOM

This person's life does not matter: that, surely, was the message that Rome had always intended to convey by crucifixion. Empires built on military conquest are always also pyramids of honour and shame in which the least honourable must always be kept in their place. This, surely – the imperative to avoid shame – was why Peter had taken his master aside to remonstrate when warned of what was to happen in Jerusalem.

And this was also why news of the Resurrection became the foundation of the church: for believers this news destroyed utterly the most intimidating power of Rome – the power to make anyone *feel* ashamed simply by brutalising them. For the first Christian generation that world was truly ‘passing away’ – because Jesus had indeed ‘overcome’ a world that attached honour to conquest and cruelty rather than to compassion, to self-giving and to mutual service (*John 16: 33*).

That this world did not pass away with the speed originally expected, and generations of Christians suffered under later Roman persecution, helps to explain why, after the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, Christian bishops approved the tale told by the victors: that their Caesarian leader, Constantine, had received before battle a heavenly sign of the favour of the God of the Christians, in a vision of the Chi Ro symbol and the legend ‘In hoc signo vinces’. (*In this sign you will conquer*).

Tragically it is also clear why this new alliance of *cross* and *sword* would leave the church reliant upon a military elite – and lead in time to a European imperialism that would attach greater honour to militarily successful Europeans. Henry II’s Anglo-Norman perception of the Irish as culturally and spiritually backward by the twelfth century was apparently shared by the popes of his era – so the European perception of dark-skinned Africans as in even greater need of ‘Christian civilisation’ followed easily in later centuries. Horrifically, their enslavement could all too easily be excused by their captors in the name of ‘Christendom’ and the bogus cause of ‘saving savages from Hell’.

Quite obviously by then the ancient Roman pyramid of esteem had been replaced by one that was *nominally* Christian yet was also awarding shame and honour differentially – in complete contradiction to the letter attributed to James the apostle (*James 2: 1-7*). The feudal pyramid of the middle ages was also a shaming pyramid of dignity and deference, with greatest honour accorded to kings – to whom any erring subject owed satisfaction for any insult, especially any hint of rebellion. In that context, the Anselmian reframing of the Crucifixion as a redemption of the human sin-debt to the Father added divine sanction to that same pyramid and to that understanding of honour and shame. The God described as ever-forgiving father in the parable of the Prodigal Son had been re-made in the image of a medieval monarch, ever-jealous of his impugned honour.

The implications of this for the meaning of *baptism* are obvious. Born into a society that taught them, as Julius Caesar had been taught, that honour was to be acquired from the world, how were Christians now to understand that equality of dignity – i.e. of

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honour – had already been received through Baptism? Necessarily that sacrament now had trivial significance in comparison with Ordination, the gateway to the church's own aristocratic pyramid of dignity. That this left the *merely* baptised in pursuit of honour via military, or later, mercantile effort, was to place less militarily advanced societies outside Europe in the greatest possible danger. When Christendom came to Africa the cross and the bible were all too often accompanied by the sword, the gun and the shackle – a clear betrayal of the Lord who had died rather than kill or imprison and had summarised the Gospel in a single great commandment of love. Africans were seen by the greediest as 'black gold' – valuable merely as a commodity.

And yet, although far too many considered themselves free to behave in this way, the elusiveness of 'freedom' for Europeans themselves, even for the most 'successful', was grimly obvious to some by the mid-1800s – the century of greatest European global power. Nowhere is this more brilliantly illustrated than in Charles Dickens's serial novel *Little Dorrit* (1855-57).³ Set mostly in London (then the world's busiest commercial hub) the novel illustrates especially the paradox of the Victorian empire 'on which the sun never set' – an empire resting squarely on the wealth acquired in the slaving era.

In this story Amy Dorrit, the daughter of William Dorrit, has been born in the Marshalsea prison, London, for debtors – where her 'ruined' genteel father has languished for decades in the waning hope of release by a relative. She has no personal sense of shame over this circumstance, but this is not true of William. Amy sadly watches her father delude himself with the fantasy that he has somehow become a 'somebody' again as he is paraded to visitors as 'Father of the Marshalsea' the prison's longest serving and most venerable resident. From these he looks for small 'testimonials' of esteem – money gifts – much in the manner of Queen Victoria graciously receiving jewels or perfumes from distant parts of the empire.

When it is discovered by one of those visitors that William Dorrit is in truth heir to a vast fortune, trapped until then in the London legal labyrinth, the Dorrits are all released to a life of splendour – and soon they undertake a continental tour in the most genteel fashion of the era. Eventually, in a rented Venetian villa, William Dorrit is eager to know who else from England may be in the city – so that he can receive them as witnesses to his newly proven grandeur. Suddenly, already wearied by her father's attempts to ensure that she is properly 'polished' for the role known these times as that of the 'socialite', Amy awakens to this insight:

3 *Little Dorrit*, Charles Dickens, 1855-57 – (Book II, Chapter VII)

REDEMPTION AS FREEDOM NOW

A perfect fury for making acquaintances on whom to impress their riches and importance has seized the House of Dorrit... It appeared on the whole, to Little Dorrit herself, that this same society in which they now lived greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea.

TRUE FREEDOM

In this short passage the reason for the elusiveness of *true* freedom in any modern society is unveiled. If we can only become ‘somebodies’ in our own eyes via the attention shown to us by others, we must always be at the mercy of those others, never finally free of the fear that we are nobodies – the fear of shame.⁴ It is this, Dickens suggests, that is our true prison, the true root of all evil – for the wealth that William Dorrit thinks he needs to establish his own importance is obviously the wealth that had come to London from an empire that had enslaved millions.

Donald Trump and too many others in our time are all too clearly bound hand and foot by the very same mistake. At the root of all money addiction and attention-seeking lies the mistake of supposing there is no other route to self-respect than the winning of the approval and admiration – or at least the servility and fear – of others. As Trump’s own daily routine attests, that admiration must constantly be kept ‘topped up’ by the claiming of yet further achievement and the denial of all fault or failure – even while the toll of Covid-19 is falling heaviest on the same African American community, disproportionately exposed to infection (often without any health insurance cover) in the most vulnerable sectors of society.

Those who think celebrity and domination the only safe route to freedom need to ask themselves what Ancient Rome accomplished by crucifying 6,000 enslaved followers of Spartacus, along the Appian Way, c.71 BCE – and how within a century that means of winning freedom from fear was to be overthrown by an entirely different understanding of the Kingdom of God. And if in our own era and context our young people are telling us that Christian faith and practice are ‘irrelevant to their lives’, what then is it that our Christian schools are teaching?

HARD QUESTIONS

If those younger generations are truly at the mercy of the Internet – in desperate pursuit of ‘likes’ or ‘viral recognition’ or the ‘killer app’

4 See, for example, *imposter syndrome* - the fear of exposure as frauds that many ‘successful’ people are subject to, without due cause.

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– or heading toward depression through fear of academic failure – or troubled by trolling or bullying (i.e. shaming) or ‘ransom porn’ – what reason have we to suppose that we have conveyed to them what the earliest uneducated Christians understood from the very shortest version of the Creed – that by our Baptism the shaming power of the world has been broken, and that it is to retain that sense of our own inherent and equal dignity – entirely irrespective of our economic status – that we share and practise a Christian faith?

If we cannot be sure of the answer to this question – and are apparently afraid to find out through systematic research⁵ – what reason do we in Ireland have to believe that our faith schools are in truth still governed by a Catholic or Christian ethos rather than by the dominant ethos of the unredeemed secular and Trumpian world – the mindset in which by default we start out as ‘nobodies’, ever-worried that our lives will be ‘ruined’ if we are somehow cheated of media-confirmed ‘success’?

And if, in some Christian schools, any racial or other minority is being insulted and bullied, is that not a further reason for questioning whether those who have mentored the bullies have themselves fully understood ‘Redemption’? Given that the cause of Black Lives Matter has justly found welcome among so many young white people everywhere, including Ireland, is it not time for older generations to reflect on the extraordinary power of the Gospel to sustain and uplift an oppressed people, despite the very worst that we white Christians have done?

CONCLUSION

The arc of history will indeed bend again towards justice if Christians everywhere can in that way rediscover the earliest understanding of the Cross and the Creed. A world that awards dignity unequally to ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ is always also a shaming world and therefore mistaken, unredeemed and passing away – even if it calls itself Christendom. Our adventure is always to affirm and realise together the equal and infinite dignity of all. Why else would the Creed insist that it is the living Lord who judges us, not the world that calls us ‘losers’ until we have jostled our way to the top of something, or ‘gone viral’, to prove otherwise?

So much is to be gained from an hour or so of pondering the miracle of African American trust in, and restoration by, the Cross – and then from further time spent on deepening our understanding of that story! It will always be the oppressed who read the Bible

5 *Faith Formation and Fear of Shame*, S O’Conaill, The Furrow, July/August 2017 (also at <https://seanoconaill.com>)

correctly. Those who flaunt it without reading it, in pursuit of supremacy, are always the most foolish, for the *future* lies with the opposing spirit of humility and service - that Spirit that is too rich in consciousness of God's equal regard for everyone to ever be in need of global media acclaim.

The Life-giving Word. The apostolic exhortation issued by Pope Benedict XVI after the synod on the Word of God in 2010 states that 'the liturgy is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives: he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond' (*Verbum Domini*, 52), and it goes on to state that Christ, truly present under the species of bread and wine, is analogously present in the word proclaimed in the liturgy' (VD, 56). At every Mass we are fed from the table of the word and the table of the Eucharist. Prayerful reflection on the readings to be proclaimed at Mass disposes us to receive the word as bread of life more fruitfully when it is offering to us in the liturgy.

- Martin Hogan, *You Have the Words of Eternal Life*, (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p.3.

Homilies for November (A)

Edmond Cullinan

Solemnity of All Saints

November 1

Rev 7: 2-4, 9-14; 1 Jn 3: 1-3; Mt 5: 1-12

This feast-day actually began in Ireland as the pagan feast of Samhain. So, this day is Ireland's contribution to the liturgical calendar of the Church. What our pre-Christian ancestors were celebrating on this day was the fact that, as they understood it, there was a very thin veil between this world that we can see and an invisible world which we cannot see. They saw this other world as inhabited by the souls of their ancestors, and also by an assembly of spiritual beings, some benign, others malevolent, that could have their influence on human affairs.

Surely, the basic intuition of our ancestors was correct? There is another realm we cannot see. There are angels and saints. The early missionaries took over the pagan festival and gave it a Christian interpretation. And so, we have the Feast of All Saints. What is the message of this feast for us today? It is that the Lord wants us all to be saints. Does this seem impossible? It is certainly challenging, but not impossible. Jesus has given us the formula in today's Gospel.

Each of the Beatitudes begins with the Greek word *Makarioi*, the plural of *Makarios*. This means a real inner fulfilment and contentment. In English it is translated as "Happy" or "Blessed." It is not a superficial experience of "feeling happy," but something deep and lasting. The Beatitude "Blessed are those who mourn" shows that this deep inner peace is still there even when one is feeling sad. It is a peace that comes from knowing that we are loved by God, despite what life throws at us. We may be suffering bereavement or loss, but we are comforted by the fact that God is with us in the midst of it all.

The First Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," concerns our relationship with God. We do not have any spiritual riches to present to God. Rather, we depend on him for everything, including

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

any good we do. It can also be translated: “Blessed are they who know their need of God.” It is about being humble.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, are people who really care about justice. They are the people who change society for the better, like those who helped to abolish slavery. The pure in heart are those who do not do things for mixed motives. Those who suffer persecution are the people who are willing to persevere when the going gets tough.

Jesus said: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.” Three of the Beatitudes, in particular, seem to echo this invitation: Blessed are the gentle; Blessed are the merciful; Blessed are the peacemakers. They are about how we treat other people. We have opportunities to practise them every day. They are, in fact, about being like Jesus. In the Beatitudes Jesus has given us a portrait of himself. We are not to pick and choose between them, but if we live in him and he in us, we will be putting the Beatitudes into practise. That is what it means to be a saint.

All Souls Day

November 2

Wis 3: 1-9; Rom 6: 3-9; Mt 25: 31-46

Yesterday we celebrated the feast of all those who have made it across the finishing line, to use St Paul’s metaphor of life as a race. Today our focus is on those who have died, but who still have a bit of the journey to complete before they enter into eternal bliss. All Souls Day is a day when we express our solidarity with those who, like ourselves, are still on the way. Its message is a wonderfully encouraging one, because it tells us that, even beyond death, we can still grow in love.

It is natural for us to try to imagine what it is like to be going through this transition from the earthly mortal life, with which we are familiar, to life with God in eternity. We have no experience of this other life, so we cannot describe it. The efforts of poets and artists to depict it have been mostly unhelpful. However, our faith does have something to tell us about what happens to the dead. This is expressed in the liturgy.

A good place to start is with today’s first reading. “The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God. No torment shall ever touch them.” The virtuous and the not-so-virtuous are in God’s hands. He is not interested in tormenting anyone. What God is interested in is that human beings may have life and have it to the full. God wants us to experience his love and share it with others. After death we are confronted with the God of love. This must be an overwhelming experience. We know that in life when we meet a really good or

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saintly person, we feel humble, we feel unworthy. We may even feel embarrassment when we compare some of the shoddy things we have done to this person's generosity and selflessness. Meeting God, the ultimate Goodness must have a similar effect on the person who has just died.

"If they experienced punishment as people see it, their hope was rich with immortality." The punishments we experience in this life are simply the result of cause and effect. If we do something bad, it has bad consequences and we have to live with the result. The punishment is not something added on, like a parking fine. We know that God is not vindictive. If the dead experience pain, it is the pain associated with growth. It is the kind of pain accepted gladly as part of a healing process.

From the earliest centuries Christians have prayed for the dead. We pray for the dead in the same way that we pray for the living. In the Body of Christ, which is the Church, we all support each other in prayer. We are all united by the Holy Spirit who prays in us. We pray for the dead with great serenity, knowing that they are in the care of our loving God and that whatever process they are going through is one of healing and growth, bringing them to the fullness of life.

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 8

Wis 6: 12-16; 1 Thess 4: 13-17; Mt 25: 1-13

Waiting for the bride is something we are familiar with at weddings. In the parable we have just listened to there is a welcoming party of young ladies. Their job is to escort the newly married couple into the bridegroom's house where the reception will take place. The marriage itself would have taken place earlier at the home of the bride. If the bride's home was some distance from where the couple were going to live, the journey could take some time. Maybe they would call in on relatives on the way. In any case, there are ten girls designated to carry lamps for a ceremonial entry into the couple's new home. Five of them are wise and five are foolish. It is clear that the foolish ones did not prepare adequately for their role. Perhaps they did not take it seriously enough. The wise ones, on the other hand, were well prepared and had foreseen the possibility that there might be a delay.

It seems a simple enough story. The message seems to be straightforward. If you take on a job, you need to prepare for it properly. I am inclined to think, however, that there is more to it than that. In his stories Jesus usually had a pointed message for his contemporaries. In this story, Jesus himself is the bridegroom,

just as God is often portrayed by the prophets as the Bridegroom of Israel. Jesus is telling his contemporaries that they must respond to his coming. They must grasp the opportunity he is offering to be reconciled to God and follow his way: “Repent and believe the good news.”

What is the message for us? We too must be ready to respond to the Lord when he comes. In other words, we must be awake to the demands that are made on us every day as followers of Christ. He comes to us in the needs of those around us, the members of our family, the people we work with and, maybe, the awkward people who put our patience to the test. Our hearts need to be awake to respond, to show love. The oil in the story could stand for charity.

In the parable, the ones who got it right are said to be *wise*. In the first reading we are told that wisdom is found by those who look for her. The five wise virgins are people who live by wisdom. It has become second nature to them to do the sensible and prudent thing. Wisdom is the art of right living. It is a gift of God, but it is a gift that is received by those who are willing to learn. If we accept the teaching of Jesus and put it into practice, we will be wise. We will do the loving thing when the occasion arises.

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 15

Prov 31: 10-13, 19-20; 1 Thess 5: 1-6; Mt 25: 14-30

The message of the parable of the talents is clear enough at an individual level. We are not to bury our talents. We are to use them. This is not as simple as it sounds, because often we do not know what our talents are until we are put in a situation where a particular talent is needed. You might never have thought that you had a talent for leadership until you were pushed into a situation where someone had to take control. Parents often overestimate the abilities of their children and put too much pressure on them. Teachers sometimes do the opposite and are surprised when an unpromising student does well.

We can also read the parable at a collective level. What are the talents in our community, in our parish, in the wider Church? Are there groups of people whose talents are *not* being employed? We don't see very many younger people involved in the Church. Is this because we have not gone out and invited them in? Jesus called his disciples. He did not wait for them to come to him. He said: “You did not choose me; it is I who chose you.”

The first reading sings the praises of the perfect wife. Who can find her? Who, indeed, or the perfect husband, for that matter? Many women find this reading patronising, because it is a man's

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view of what a wife should be. We have not heard what the woman herself thinks. Women's talents have not been sufficiently recognised in the Church. Women's insights into Scripture and theology are not shared sufficiently. We are impoverished as a result. New ways need to be found to give women positions of leadership in the Church.

There is a lack of confidence today among believers. This is despite the very positive leadership being given by Pope Francis and others. It is a failure to trust in the Lord. It is also a failure to accept the trust that God has shown in us by entrusting the work of his Son to us. Where the man in the parable, who was given one talent, went wrong was that he was too cautious. He was afraid of making a mistake. We need to be adventurous and courageous in finding new ways to enable women and young people to use their talents in the service of the Christian community.

Solemnity of Christ the King

November 22

Ezek 34: 11-12, 15-17; 1 Cor 15: 20-26, 28; Mt 25: 31-46

We tend to think of the prophets as people who can predict the future. This is because they talk a lot about the future, like Martin Luther King who said he had a dream. His dream was of a future where black children and white children would play together and grow up in a society where everyone would be treated equally. That was a vision of how the future could be. It was not a prediction, but a hope. It was all the more powerful for that. It was not something inevitable that would happen anyway, whether we worked for it or not. It was a vision of what could be achieved if we want to bring it about. Martin Luther King was a true prophet, because he inspired people with a vision. A prophet is someone for whom the present is influenced by a vision of a better future, not determined by the past.

We celebrate Our Lord Jesus Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. Of those titles the one he would have identified with during his earthly ministry would have been that of prophet. Jesus was the greatest of all the prophets. The vision of the future that he presented is called the Kingdom of God. What this means is the way that God wants the world to be. It is described very well in the Preface of today's Mass: "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace."

Perhaps the term kingdom is a bit misleading. We tend to think of a kingdom as a place, like the United Kingdom. Or we might think of it as a state of affairs: how things are. The problem with both of these ideas is that they are static. The Kingdom of God,

as proclaimed by Jesus, is more like a movement. It is something growing, like the mustard seed or like the seed the man sowed in his field and it was growing night and day, even while he was asleep.

We who are baptised already belong to the Kingdom of God. We are part of the great movement that Jesus has set in motion. He has given us values to live by. The practical application of these values is spelt out in today's Gospel. We are to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. We are to welcome the stranger and clothe the naked. We are to visit the sick and those in prison. Justice, love and peace could be said to be things that everyone wants. They are gifts from God. They are gifts we should pray for. But God also wants us to do our part. God is bringing about His Kingdom in the world. We have our part to play in what he is doing.

First Sunday of Advent (Year B)

November 29

Is 63: 16-17, 19; 1 Cor 1: 3-9; Mk 13: 33-37

Some of you will be familiar with detective novels. If the writer is very skilled, you don't find out until the end of the story who committed the crime: "whodunnit." I find that if I read the story a second time all sorts of details make sense, because now I know how the story will end. All stories have an ending and it is the ending that makes sense of the whole story. It is the same with music. A song ends on the right note. A symphony has a finale; it does not just peter out.

The History of Salvation is the great story of which God is the author. It too has an ending. Not only does it have an ending, but we have already been told what the ending is. Christ will come again. There will be a final judgement and the Kingdom of God will be finally established. The early Christians thought that the second coming of Christ would happen in their lifetime. This gave a certain urgency to living the Christian life and to not getting bogged down in worldly affairs.

As the centuries went by, the expected return of Christ got pushed further and further into the future. In our own day it seems to have been pushed so far ahead that we no longer think about it. This is a pity. If we think of life as a journey, then every journey has a destination and that is what gives purpose and meaning to the journey. Jesus has already reached the destination and he is coming to meet us from there. He is waiting for us in order that he may be complete in his mystical body.

We live now between the two comings of Christ. His first coming was his birth into the world as a person in history, Jesus

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of Nazareth, a single individual. In his second coming, Christ will reveal that he has united all things in himself. He will inaugurate the new creation in which the limitations of the present creation will be overcome. There will be no more death, sickness or evil. God will be all in all: that is to say, that created reality will be totally transparent to the presence of God.

The message of Advent is that, despite the wars, famines and catastrophes, history is going somewhere. There will be a happy ending. Good will triumph over evil. We are waiting in hope for Christ to be revealed, Christ in his members, Christ the centre of a renewed creation.

A Global Reach. In the global Church, Fr Peyton was a priest of significant influence. At the Second Vatican Council he successfully lobbied the bishops to have statements on family prayer included in two influential documents, the 'Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World' or *Gaudium et Spes*, and the 'Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity', *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Furthermore, it was a letter from Fr Peyton which prompted Pope Paul VI to issue *Marialis Cultus*, an Apostolic Exhortation – 'For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary' – in 1974.

– Tom Mulligan, *The Rosary Priest*, (Dublin: Veritas) 2018. p. 14/15.

Featured Review

*Serving a Wounded World**

Kevin O’Gorman

Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity is a co-publication of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches, published in August. Subtitled *A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During Covid-19 and Beyond* its cover carries the symbol of the now familiar facemask within a heart held by the embrace of entwined hands. The *Preamble* sets out the provenance and purpose of the document as a joint call ‘for Christians to love and serve our fellow human beings in a world in which the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted widespread suffering’ in collaboration ‘with those who profess and practice religions that are different from our own or consider themselves unaffiliated to any particular faith tradition’. In a world wounded by the pandemic but also by many other wounds’ the Good Samaritan is identified as an exemplar of ‘the true meaning of service and solidarity’ with the parable named after this person presenting a challenge to ‘Christians to think about how to live in a world wounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, and by the scourge of religious intolerance, discrimination, racism, economic and ecological injustice and many other sins’. With this list of evils it is clear that a *Before* can also be sadly added to the subtitle. While challenged by the call to see and ‘be surprised by Christ-like compassion in action’, we are comforted by the ‘hope that is central to our faith and the way we live it out, when we realise that it is Christ himself, as the unexpected ‘other’ who is offering His help to the wounded one’. This Christological interpretation of the parable and the interaction between the persons at its heart opens a vision of universal salvation in the global context and crisis of the pandemic.

The Current Crisis picks up on this and presents with pathos the pathway through the pandemic ‘that Christians, as well as

* *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity*. 27 August 2020. Available for downloading at 2020 WCC Publications/PCID

Kevin O’Gorman, SMA, is a Lecturer in Moral Theology at St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

people of all faiths and goodwill, are collaborating to construct [with] a culture of compassion, reaching out to the needy and the vulnerable with material, psychological and spiritual assistance, at the individual as well as institutional levels'. The sense of fragility and frailty sensed by many at this time serves to highlight the shared difficulties of environmental destruction and deepening inequality. This section of the document is both a snapshot of the present reality and a statement of the solidarity sown and shown in subscription to the common good. It also affords 'a time for discovering new forms of solidarity for rethinking the post-COVID-19 world'. *Solidarity Sustained by Hope* follows this account and affirms Christian hope for the coming of God's Kingdom which, while 'pointing us beyond the present world', is, 'at the same time leading us to follow Christ in service of this world and its flourishing'. This Christian eschatology embraces and engages with all moral efforts for a healthy, just and peaceful existence on earth. Emphasising that nobody is entirely immune from the effects of COVID-19 is not an exercise in futility but an expression that 'we need universal and shared ethical and spiritual values to inject a new hope into the pandemic-ravaged world'. This hope also holds an awareness of the need for action 'in building a new social order at the local, regional, national, and international levels'.

Our Basis for Interreligious Solidarity outlines the Christian foundation of faith in the Trinity as the foundation for such solidarity, viz. creation and compassion,. *Firstly*, creation both confers on all people an 'equal dignity that does not have to be earned' and challenges all to assume responsibility in caring for the wellbeing of others. This 'fundamental connectedness and shared origin matter many times more than perceived divisions constructed by humans'. *Secondly*, the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ takes compassion 'to its healing extreme, in love that surpasses our understanding'. Called to imitate Christ, the global Good Samaritan., 'we recognise that the virtues of mercy and compassion for all who are suffering resonate in other religious traditions, which also have rich examples of generosity and concern for those most in need'. *Thirdly*, the scale of Jesus' suffering shows a solidarity with the suffering of humanity and its history which opens the way to salvation seen in the Resurrection which 'is proof and assurance that love is stronger than any woundedness, however deep, and that death will not have the final word'. *Fourthly*, the Holy Spirit is the bond that brings together people of faith, bearing gifts for 'building people up'.

Principles presents the values that proceed from the collaborative dialogue between the Pontifical Council and the

World Council as they propose to act ‘together with all people of faith and goodwill’. *Humility and vulnerability* are described as basic biblical values which bring both openness to others and the offering of oneself in service of justice, even to the end of sacrifice. Rooted in the recognition of the Incarnation, *respect* is relating to people as ‘subjects of their own stories’, recognising the reality of social and cultural situations to shape these narratives. *Community, compassion, and the common good* are the ‘impetus for our solidarity in building just and inclusive communities’, impelled by Jesus’ identification with the marginalised and outcast. *Dialogue and mutual learning* are not optional if openness is to be real and not notional, illustrated in the injunction that ‘we need to be ready to have our lives changed to the same extent that we are seeking to change the lives of others: for example, when migrants and refugees are welcomed, both they and their host communities can be transformed’. *Repentance and renewal* recognise the need for both ongoing conversion and confession of complicity in all forms of abuse of others and the environment. This process also ‘helps us to reject the idea that God chooses some people to prosper, and some to suffer, based on their worth or actions’. *Gratitude and generosity* are the economy of the Gospel, exhorting us ‘to put our whole lives on the line in service to a wounded world’. *Love* ‘keeps our faith and our mission alive’, looking to care for the least and ‘also working towards the kingdom promised to us in and through Christ, where the last shall be first – in marked contrast to the empires of our times’.

Recommendations are sevenfold, starting with the call to discover ‘ways of bearing witness’ to suffering and adopting a stance of ‘holding accountable the people and structures behind this suffering’. Promoting ‘a culture of inclusivism which celebrates difference as God’s gift’ involves using social media to increase positive communication. Nurturing ‘solidarity through spirituality’ links traditional practises of ‘prayer, fasting, self-denial and almsgiving’ with the real needs of people, especially those who suffer. The broadening of formation across the board is recommended as a means to both fostering empathy and furnishing the knowledge and skills necessary ‘to work for a wounded humanity in cooperation with others’. Engaging and enhancing the idealistic energy of young people is advocated as ‘an antidote to the temptation of cynicism’. The creation of ‘space for dialogues’ at all levels and forums is commended alongside the restructuring of ‘projects and processes for interreligious solidarity’. The final sentence of the *Conclusion* articulates the aspiration and agenda which this document seeks to both motivate and model: ‘May we, by opening our hearts in dialogue and by opening our hands in

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solidarity, build together a world marked by healing and hope'. This is a fitting formulation for the symbol that stands at the head of the document.

COVID-19 fatigue is a real danger, both literally and metaphorically. How to avoid complacency in both consciousness and conduct in the course of a continuing pandemic constitutes a difficulty that cannot be dismissed or diluted. This document is more than valuable, it is *vital*, showing a vision of Christian concern for the suffering of the world both now and into the future, another reminder of what Saint John Paul II said so wisely and warmly on the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio/On the Progress of Peoples*: 'When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a "virtue," is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.' (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis/On Social Concern*, 1987, par. 38).

The Importance of Priorities. Returning to Ignatius's 'Principle and Foundation', it can be helpful to ask ourselves what exactly it looks like in our own particular lives. Within my unique context, what are my priorities? What means am I using? Ignatius's wisdom is quite simple. If we don't know what our priorities are, our energies will be unfocused and we'll become tired. We'll be working out of a vague plan where we are not realising what we really hope for and using up precious psychic energy in the process. This in turn will generate anxiety which will further drain our energies. This is one of the areas where Ignatius guidelines can really come into their own.

– Jim Maher, SJ, *Pathways to a Decision*, (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p. 90.

New Books

You Have the Words of Eternal Life. Martin Hogan. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2020. ISBN 978 1 78812 280 1.

This book contains ‘reflections on the weekday readings for the liturgical year 2020-2021’, beginning with the Feast of Saint Andrew on 30th November and ending on the 27th November next year. In the *Introduction* the author states that he hopes ‘these reflections will be of help to priests who like to share a short reflection on the weekday readings at Mass and that they will also be a resource to parishioners who like to base their daily prayer on the weekday readings of the liturgy’, noting that he has ‘been told that in parishes where a Liturgy of the Word occasionally replaces the daily celebration of the Eucharist, the Minister of the Word reads aloud the corresponding reflection after the readings’. Taking its title from the Gospel of John, the *Introduction* invites readers to see Jesus as ‘the Wisdom or Word of God’ whose words are ‘truly life-giving, satisfying the deepest hunger and thirst of the human heart’.

The reflection for Saint Patrick’s Day makes for interesting reading at the present time: ‘This was a time of great loss in Patrick’s life, but also a time of deep spiritual and personal growth. It is often the way in our own lives that the most painful experiences can also be the most life-giving, for ourselves and for others. Patrick discovered that when so much was taken from him, the Lord worked powerfully in his life. The Lord is always at work in a life-giving way in all our struggles and losses. At any stage of our lives, we can find ourselves in a kind of exile experience. Our personal landscape changes and we feel estranged, lonely, frightened. We are not alone at such times. The Lord is at our side’. This extract resonates with much of our experience, both personal and public with the changed landscape of life in society and church. The example and encouragement of the saints is echoed on the Feast of All the Saints of Ireland (6th November) where we are reminded of those ‘whose lives of sanctity and goodness were known only to their family, friends and parish community’. In the reflection for the Feast of Saint Thomas (3rd July), the author advises that ‘serious doubt and great faith can reside in one and the same person’ while on the following day we are alerted to the need to ‘approach the Lord differently because we are all different and the circumstances of our lives are different’ as attested to the contrast in the way both the leader of the synagogue and the woman who suffered from long-term haemorrhages approached Jesus.

The wisdom and warmth of such reflections are welcome at any time

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but especially facing the coming liturgical year with the exigency of healing and hope more emphatic than ever before. May many readers, both in church and at home, find spiritual courage and consolation in this very well produced series of scriptural reflections.

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

Kevin O'Gorman, SMA

Advent and Christmas 2020-2021. The Irish Jesuits. Sacred Space. Dublin: Messenger Publications. 2020. ISBN 9781788122511.

Alert, Aware, Attentive: Advent Reflections. John Cullen. Dublin: Messenger Publications. 2020. ISBN 9781788122887.

Messenger Publications in recent years have published a wide range of high quality and affordable books for the discerning reader. These latest publications continue this welcome development by providing two very compact and richly resourced books on the season of Advent and Christmas. The Irish Jesuit's publication is a printed version of their internationally known and acclaimed online prayer guide *Sacred Space*. It provides a reflection on the Gospel for every day of Advent, Christmas Day and the first two weeks of the Christmas season. It also contains an Advent Retreat that should be of benefit to individuals and indeed parish-based groups in their preparation for the joyous feast of Christmas.

The second publication, by John Cullen, has an eye-catching title *Alert, Aware, Attentive* and brings the reader through the four weeks of Advent with a reflection for each day. In his introduction he identifies Advent as 'an awareness time to help us *not* to miss the signs of God's presence.' His reflections will be of great help to readers in their efforts to engage fruitfully with this awareness time. Both publications are pocket size and portable with beautiful coloured scenes depicted on their covers. These are timely publications that will provide much nourishment to individuals and to faith groups.

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