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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Patrick Hannon
'Negative'

Fáinche Ryan
Covid, *Sensus Fidei* and
the Church

Michael A. Conway
The Place of Theology

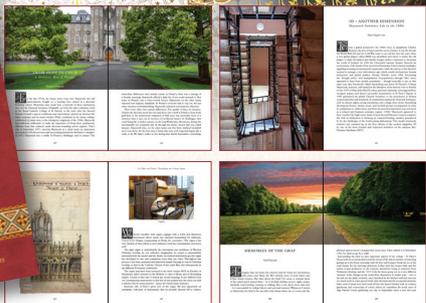
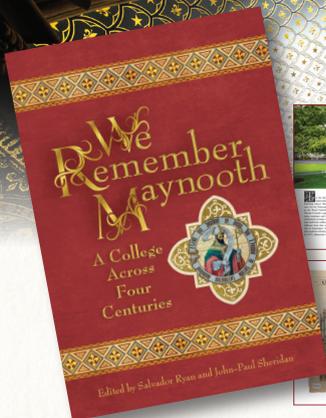
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The Furrow

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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.

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‘Negative’

Patrick Hannon

‘At best it is experienced as cold and distant, at worst hurtful and offensive’: words of Achonry Bishop Paul Dempsey, and an exact description of the impact on many people of the *Responsum* or reply by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) to the *dubium*, doubt or question, ‘Does the Church have the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex?’ As is the practice, the response is expressed in the Latin monosyllable ‘*Negative*’, and the reasons for this decision are set out in an attached Explanatory Note. The Note ends with the sentence: *The Sovereign Pontiff Francis, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Secretary of this Congregation, was informed and gave his assent to the publication of the above-mentioned Responsum ad dubium, with the annexed Explanatory Note.*¹ The hurt and offence have been obvious in the reaction, in mainstream and social media, of couples affected by the decision, and their families and friends; but also on the part of Catholics not personally affected by its content, including priests and others who accompany such couples pastorally; to which can be added bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, some of whom have expressed their disapproval in very strong terms. When Bishop Bonny of Antwerp said ‘I feel ashamed for my Church. I mainly feel intellectual and moral incomprehension’, he wasn’t what is nowadays called an outlier².

BUT ISN’T IT RIGHT?

The *Responsum* was also defended of course, including by two members of the Council of Cardinals appointed by Francis

- 1 Italics original. The Note can be accessed at both the Congregation’s website and that of the Vatican, together with an ‘Article of Commentary on the *Responsum ad dubium*’. All official church documents are accessible in English at the Vatican website, <http://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>, which also provides links to the websites of the offices of the Roman Curia, that of the CDF being <http://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/en/congregazioni/congregazione-per-la-dottrina-della-fede>.
- 2 <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2021/03/belgian-bishop-lashes-out-at-vatican-over-gay-unions-decree>

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to advise him in the government of the Church. In a webinar organized by Georgetown University which took place three days after the document's release on March 15, Cardinals O'Malley and Turkson both sounded a note which echoed what appears to be a concern of the Congregation: in O'Malley's words, 'the church has a very clear teaching about marriage that needs to be proclaimed'³, a sentiment reiterated by many who welcomed the decision. That this was a concern is suggested by what the Explanatory Note offers as one reason for the decision: 'since blessings on persons are in relationship with the sacraments, the blessing of homosexual unions cannot be considered licit. This is because they would constitute a certain imitation or analogue of the nuptial blessing invoked on the man and woman united in the sacrament of Matrimony'. A fear of misleading people about church teaching is a familiar explanation when emphasis is laid on certain norms, often in the area of sexual ethics, giving the impression that church leaders are obsessed with these. We'll return to this when we look at the Note more closely.

OR WHAT?

In fact confusion was probably the most common reaction upon the appearance of the *Responsum*: how was it to be reconciled with words and actions of Pope Francis, what he teaches in *Amoris laetitia* and models in his own life, his meetings with LGBT+ individuals and same-sex couples, his insistence on the primacy of God's mercy, his picture of the Church as a field hospital, when he says that Eucharist isn't a prize for the perfect, not to mention what he says about civil unions of same-sex persons in the documentary *Francesco*, currently streaming. One view was that Francis might be open to an accusation of hypocrisy and the suggestion that in these matters he speaks out of both sides of his mouth; a possibility which led others to wonder whether critics of the Pope hadn't staged the episode as a way of embarrassing him and undermining his authority. Some critics did seize on the confusion, adducing it as yet more evidence that Pope Francis is unfit to lead the Church. And that kind of critic wasn't mollified when within a week of the document's publication there was an Angelus address which included what reliable Vatican sources interpreted as signs that Francis might be distancing himself from the *Responsum*. All of which led the usually well-informed Gerard O'Connell to write 'Given the controversy that has followed the publication of the CDF statement, sources in Rome told *America* they would not be

3 <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/cardinals-omalley-turkson-defend-vatican-decree-against-gay-union-blessings>.

surprised if the pope were to return to the whole question more explicitly at some future date’.⁴

Another and perhaps more telling sign was the intervention of Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna, more telling because he is a member of both the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and the Council of Cardinals, a key influence in the drafting of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a distinguished theologian, and thought to be particularly close to the pope. In an interview for the Vienna edition of the Catholic weekly *Sonntag* he was put a question sent in by a father: ‘All people are equal before God. Jesus treated all people equally. My son is also homosexual and happily married, was an altar boy for years and a devout Christian. Once again, I am sorely disappointed in the Catholic Church. You can’t be surprised when many people say, “I have a good relationship with God, but I have big problems with the Church”’. The Cardinal replied that he was ‘not happy’ with the *Responsum* and Note. ‘The church, as is traditionally said, is mater et magistra, mother and teacher. She must teach, but she is first of all mother. And many people who have same-sex feelings and who are living same-sex lives are particularly sensitive to this very question: “Is the church a mother to us?” And they remain children of God. And they also want to see the church as a mother, and that is why this declaration has hit many so particularly painfully, because they have the feeling that they are being rejected by the church’. His own position: ‘if the request for the blessing is sincere, if it is truly a request for God’s blessing for a path in life that two people, in whatever situation, try to walk, then they will not be denied this blessing’⁵.

so?

Dismay, a welcome, confusion: the effect of the publication of the CDF’s *Responsum* about the blessing of same-sex unions. This article is the first of two which will examine the Congregation’s statement: the case it makes for the conclusion that the Church – meaning, presumably, the bearers of magisterium or official teaching role - does not have ‘the power to give the blessing to

4 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/03/21/pope-francis-same-sex-unions-statement>, which includes the text of the Angelus message. For another well-informed account of the *Responsum* and its reception see John Allen at <https://cruxnow.com/last-week-in-the-church/2021/03/gay-unions> and <https://cruxnow.com/last-week-in-the-church/2021/03/gay-unions-update>. Cf also Christina Pongratz-Lippitt at <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/cardinal-schborn-says-church-cannot-refuse-blessing-for-gay-couples>

5 A detailed report which includes key excerpts from the interview is found at <https://www.catholicnews.com/vienna-cardinal-not-happy-with-vatican-same-sex-statement/>

unions of persons of the same sex', and the significance the verdict has for church teaching and pastoral practice. To people affected by the decision of the CDF, what follows here may seem to be concerned with technicalities as cold and distant as Bishop Dempsey says of the *Responsum*. But the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is charged with oversight of Catholic thinking and teaching, and its utterances cannot be disregarded, and it's a particular responsibility of those professionally involved in the work of theology to reflect on and engage with what it says. Nor is such reflection of 'academic' interest only, rather is it in aid of pastoral practice, for pastoral practice is informed by the teaching of those who are bearers of the Church's official magisterium.

Confusion was probably the most common reaction to the *Responsum*, as already said, and I shall take it as our entry-point to what will follow here and in the second article. The confusion is part of a wider perception of a kind of incoherence in the teachings and actions of Pope Francis: on the one hand he constantly reiterates church teaching about, say, the indissolubility of marriage or homosexuality; on the other hand he speaks always of the priority of God's mercy and compassion, and he says that the Eucharist is not a reward for the perfect, and he speaks of the Church as a field hospital; and he calls for 'discernment' and 'accompaniment' as the appropriate attitudes in pastoral ministry to people who are in irregular situations from the standpoint of church law. As well as confusion, this gives rise to disappointment and even anger. One kind of critic says that he doesn't go far enough; in the case of church teaching on homosexuality, for example, they believe that what's needed is a radical revision of Catholic sexual ethics. But others accuse him of compromising Christian principle by blurring the claim of moral norms.⁶ You don't have to subscribe to this second view to recognise that there is room for confusion on the part of people unacquainted with everything the Catechism says about how we are to understand the Christian way of life. But one is baffled when the second view, even in less extreme forms, is expressed by prelates and others who may be supposed to have studied Catholic moral theology and the teaching of Jesus into which all of this must be fitted if we are to interpret it correctly. The crucial point is that, important as moral norms are, they do

6 'Norm' has several meanings, the chief of which according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary is 'an authoritative standard... a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behavior'. In that sense it carries the meaning of precept, commandment, or action-guide - what we might call 'do's and don'ts' - and for brevity's sake I use it here. But it's important to keep in mind that right action is rooted ultimately in 'the kind we are', expressed in terms of character and virtue. Its use here implies these aspects of right action too.

not constitute the whole of Catholic teaching about morality. To which one might add that, important as *that* teaching is, it will make complete Christian sense only if it is presented in terms of a response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

POPE FRANCIS AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

When Pope Francis said ‘Who am I to judge?’ one could think of him as only following the prescript of Jesus, ‘Judge not, that you may not be judged’. True, but he was speaking also from a place in Catholic teaching which makes a distinction between what it calls ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ morality. Objective morality is what a norm or principle or precept requires one to do, or to be, or to avoid; the Ten Commandments are familiar examples. Subjective morality refers to a person’s capacity to implement the norm, a capacity which is ours because we have minds and some power of choice. That is, reason lets us see the claim of a norm, and what we call will allows us to choose to implement it or not.

The distinction is made in the context of an account of moral responsibility, of when and to what extent we’re answerable for our choices, and so may be praised or blamed: what the textbooks call imputability or culpability. And since their appearance early in the seventeenth century the textbooks have recognised factors which affect responsibility because they affect our power of choice, including psychological conditions that make a grasp of a norm difficult or impossible, or otherwise limit or deprive one of the freedom to choose. Same-sex orientation is not a psychological disorder, it must immediately be stressed, though it took until the Seventies before psychiatric orthodoxy acknowledged this. But it is deeply seated in the personality of some men and women, making heterosexual relationship impossible for them. It’s inevitable that norms premised upon heterosexuality seem as it were beside the point for the constitutionally homosexual; and what this implies for the expression of their sexuality is what’s in debate when the moral status of same-sex unions is discussed.

This isn’t the place to consider the arguments made by theologians in favour of a revision of traditional norms; these are not to our purposes here. For now we need to notice only that, given its recognition of the difference between objective and subjective morality, it’s also an item of Catholic teaching that only God can judge the actual morality of persons in a homosexual relationship. So when Pope Francis said ‘Who am I to judge?’, he wasn’t saying something foreign to Catholic theology. The distinction between objective and subjective morality, and what it implies about moral responsibility, is as characteristic of Catholic teaching as are the

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norms the Catechism reproduces. We can verify this immediately from the Catechism itself: ‘Imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors’ (CCC 1735). And when Francis insists on the dignity of persons of whatever sexual orientation, he’s repeating an elementary Christian truth.⁷

PATRONISING AND A SLIPPERY SLOPE

Of course, to say that subjective factors affect the capacity of a person to implement a norm doesn’t mean that the norm is wrong, which is one reason why this way of talking provokes impatience and irritation and outright anger. For it seems to say, what you’re doing is wrong but you can’t help it, and this will come across at best as patronising; and it won’t satisfy people who believe that what’s needed above all is a revision of Catholic teaching about sexual ethics. And this way of talking is rejected by a different kind of critic for a different reason: that it weakens the force of a norm’s claim, is but a step upon a slippery slope toward excusing or even justifying wrong-doing. But the CDF will doubtless be familiar with an adage of the canonists and moralists of yore, *abusus non tollit usum*; roughly, the fact that something can be misused isn’t an argument against its use. It’s a common sense point really – would anyone say that the misuse of cars or phones shows that they shouldn’t have been invented?

What we are called to is one thing, what we are able for is another, even with the help of God, for God’s grace builds on nature as it is embodied in each of us uniquely and at any particular time - another point to be developed in the second article. A pastoral practice that’s meant to help people follow the way of the Lord Jesus must start from where each person is, and that’s why Pope Francis speaks of ‘discernment’ and ‘accompaniment’. The idea of discernment is associated especially with St Ignatius, whose spiritual exercises were formative for Francis’s own life-path, but it’s a mistake to think of them as belonging only to an Ignatian spirituality which one might or might not find congenial. A web search shows that there has been considerable interest in the idea in recent decades, not just among Jesuit scholars or others writing about spirituality but also by some resolutely secular thinkers. And as far as Pope Francis is concerned, his training will have included also an introduction to the concepts and distinctions that we’ve

7 The foregoing three paragraphs are a lightly edited adaptation of material from my ‘Transgender and Catholic: What Has the Church to Say?’, *Reality*, September 2019.

been looking at, standard in Catholic moral theology for centuries, even as fresh light on them is now available from the various human sciences. So he’s not introducing vague and dangerous ideas from a suspect source in Jesuitry, epithets to be found in more than a few characterisations of his style, and not just in social media but in the comment sections of some self-described Catholic organs.

What I’ve tried to do in this article, as a preliminary to further analysis, is to point to a way out of a confusion that has been reactivated by the publication of the CDF’s *Responsum* about the blessing of gay unions, a confusion that is owed in part to a failure to recognise that there is more to Catholic teaching about morality than the various do’s and don’ts of which we’re regularly reminded. There’s yet more to it indeed, as we’ll see when we look at the Explanatory Note itself, for there are aspects of the Note’s reasoning which are hard to understand in the light of the totality of the Catholic teaching that has a bearing upon the matters of the *Responsum*’s concern.

Death. Confronted with death, its anguish and loneliness – especially spiritual death, of which our biological end is merely a sign – people today are perhaps more defenceless than ever before. It seems that our civilization is the first in history to do all it can to brush death aside, and in so doing perhaps discloses its very essence. Funeral rites are expedited as quickly as possible, or else disappear altogether. People no longer know what to say, what to do.

- OLIVIER CLEMENT, *The Other Sun*. 2021. (Herefordshire: Gracewing Publishing) P. 69.

Covid, *Sensus Fidei* and the Church, a time of opportunity

Fáinche Ryan

17 February 2021, Ash Wednesday ... ‘there is a continuous stream of people going in and out of our church’, a priest friend rang to tell me. He was delighted. I went to my local church, and there was a scattering of people, lighting candles, praying and collecting a little sachet of ashes, to bless themselves with, to bring home. And not all were old. The building felt ‘alive’. It was an Ash Wednesday like no other, with no communal service. But people remembered, they felt the need to come to a sacred place.

Sacred space, sacred place – a place where you can light a candle, collect blessed Ashes, kneel and pray. A place that “feels” holy. It is remarkable that people continue to visit churches, to visit a building. For many it provides a great respite from the ascetic demands of Covid, for some a break from a loneliness that can accompany isolation.

The work that is done to ensure these places, our churches, are kept open, and are places of welcome, of beauty, and of quiet, is to be applauded. The Church is alive. Indeed, while the Covid pandemic is undeniably dreadful, a cause of loss of life and great suffering, of months of restrictions to our usual freedoms, the exercise of the *sensus fidei* is instructive. It is our Church. It is alive and we wish to keep it so.

Covid has taught us the importance of our local church, to some simply a building, but to many of us our local building is so much more.

We haven’t been able to gather as community for months; it is now a year since restrictions were first imposed ... and while our Archbishops have rightly asked that consideration might be given to some form of communal celebrations for Easter ceremonies (2021) we cannot be too hopeful.

And yet, many watch mass regularly on RTE, participating as

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best they can. Every weekday, since March last, RTE's News Now channel has broadcast mass at 10.30am from St Eunan's and St Columba's Cathedral, Letterkenny. This daily broadcast has an average audience of 34,600, according to figures released last April. RTE, and in particular their Head of Religious Content, Roger Childs are to be thanked for this initiative which unites so many people throughout the country, helping to nourish their faith at this difficult time. The Bishop of Raphoe, Alan McGuckian, has accurately noted that the broadcast is uniting many viewers in faith.

Many, very many others, more adept with Wifi, tune in online to their own local church, or 'travel' to mass somewhere else in the country, or indeed in the world.

The *sensus fidei* knows we need the prayer of the Eucharist. The Church makes the Eucharist, the Eucharist makes the Church.

Perhaps the most moving image for a Catholic during this COVID-19 pandemic, this time of 'virtual' liturgy, is that of Pope Francis, alone in Saint Peter's Square, on a wet, dark, miserable Good Friday 2020. The Pope's empathy was palpable: "Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by ... We find ourselves afraid and lost."

The "*Urbi et Orbi*" blessing was given from the steps of the basilica to an empty square, his words and actions reverberated throughout the world.

At this 'global' liturgy the Pope invited the world to see lockdown, pandemic, as a time for people to focus on the important, "a time", he said, "*to separate what is necessary from what is not.*"

These are good words to contemplate with seriousness as we think of our Church in Ireland. The lockdown has shown in many ways the strength of people's faith, the need for prayer, for our local church building, for candles, for online liturgies. A time *to separate what is necessary from what is not* – all these seem necessary.

EUCCHARIST

The 'pandemic' of online and televised masses also challenge us to think of what is necessary when it comes to the mass, to Eucharist. How does 'virtual' communion, what we are terming 'spiritual' communion, nourish us? I think of an old friend I know in a Nursing Home. They have all been vaccinated now and have daily mass. Fortunately, there are a number of retired priests in the Nursing Home. My friend chose not to go to mass recently. Why? 'It's not mass'. It took me a while to work out the problem:

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the presider receives communion, the other priests present receive also – but no one else. Who has made this decision is uncertain – it is unlikely to have been the elderly priests - and it is hard to see it as a medical decision, as a Covid safeguard. Some do receive, but not all. It seems rather to be a throwback to an old, one might say sterile form of Catholicism, a clericalism of some laity, whoever makes the decisions in the Home, who see the Church not as People of God, but more as a hierarchy of ‘priests and people’.

All this prompts us to ask what do we really understand by Eucharist, and indeed by the People of God? Why do some receive communion, and others not? Will this continue post-Covid? What is necessary, and what is not? And how well have we educated, formed the People of God?

Post-Covid it may be helpful to give deeper consideration to how our understanding of the sacraments ... and of how the Church and the *sensus fidei* are to be understood.

BAPTISMS AND FUNERALS

At least one Diocesan website currently states that baptisms ‘should only be celebrated where there is an urgent need such as danger of death’ during this time of Covid. Perhaps we might have thought differently and offered online webinar guidance as to how to celebrate a baptism in our family home, during this time of crisis, and so empower further the People of God.

Is not the Church the People of God, and among the People of God some are ordained? Are not all the baptized permitted to baptize in case of necessity ... is not Covid a time of crisis? And at once an opportunity to encourage people to own more strongly their baptismal gift of a share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ?

Another opportunity to consider *what is necessary* stems from the image of Church entering our homes this time of Pandemic. It has been striking, as many commented in the early days, how male our church seems when the only access to liturgical celebration is via the web, where day after day a man is seen leading us all in prayer, in the readings, in all that has to be done. This has changed somewhat now during our third lockdown. We have a variety of people reading or leading the singing, but we cannot often see the singer and so the stark image remains. Is this necessary? Some think it is, some wonder.

We have also seen the crisis of age, as so many of our priests are elderly, and during the very harsh cocooning instructions of the first lockdown in some cases the over 70s were severely restricted in their ability to minister by a strict reading of Government

guidelines. As well as noting that many of our priests are indeed over 70 this cocooning must ask us to consider the *ageism* in our society – racism is rightly condemned, perhaps it is time for an honest critique of ageism. Was this necessary? Could not over 70s be trusted to make wise intelligent decisions, once informed of the dangers of the virus?

It needs to be stated clearly, and proudly, that among those deemed ‘front line workers’ lie our priests, those both under 70 and over. Week after week, sometimes day after day, they preside over funerals in the most difficult of circumstances. They seek to comfort people without being able to touch them. They lead liturgies aware that family members, and friends, are oftentimes excluded from the liturgy, due to Covid number restrictions. These tasks are necessary, and very difficult, for priests and for those who mourn. It is heartening to read Dublin’s new Archbishop Dermot Farrell publicly challenging this very strict limitation on numbers at funerals. He caused me to ponder - more than 10 people can be in my local supermarket, but not in my much bigger local church. Is this just? And is it necessary?

Most of our priests live alone. They pray the mass into an empty church into a camera, or webcam. They only meet people for funerals. We must remember them, with pride and with prayer and with profound thankfulness.

And then we must also ask, is this necessary ... perhaps a married priesthood needs reconsideration not only for the Amazonian church.

OPPORTUNITY AND GIFT

This time of Pandemic is, perhaps, a gift for the Church, a time *to separate what is necessary from what is not*.

Much good has been visible. Many priests have commented on the ongoing generosity of people in their offerings to their local parishes. The Vincent de Paul collections at Christmas were in many places as good as ever; although many churches did not hold public Christmas ceremonies and those that did had restricted numbers. The *sensus fidei*, the sense of faith of the People of God, is alive and well. Common good, care for the less well off, care for those who serve us, these things have been remembered. People know this is necessary.

We have seen great creativity too. Dioceses have arranged webinars for adult faith formation, and now we are seeing them being prepared for sacramental formation. The variety of presenters in all cases has been impressive.

And as I finish my ‘parish parcel’ has just arrived through my

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email. It too is a sign of a parish alive and well, a parish committee that cares for its people.

The Church is still alive. Now is the time, we have now the opportunity to separate *what is necessary from what is not*, and to enable to flourish more visibly and strongly the *sensus fidei*, the People of God. Recently a general assembly of the Irish bishops' conference announced that the Church in Ireland is to hold a national synod within the next five years. The International Theological Commission (2018) speak of synodality as "the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God." In Ireland there will be five years of preparation as we journey together, as People of God, as we seek to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church in Ireland at this time. That we might embark on this journey courageously, intelligently, for this, let us pray.

Life Poured Out. The gospel account of the woman pouring out the alabaster jar of costly perfume on Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50) captures well Nano's life of self-donation to the poor. Instead of hoarding her gifts and sealing herself against the cry of God's poor, she shares with them her power, position, and prosperity. Aided by the light of a lantern flame and her walking stick, this frail woman walked Cork's grubby, muddied, smelly laneways in compassionate loving service daily. Fortified by her spiritual practices, she became love poured out for the world.

- ANNE LYONS, PBVM, *The Story of Nano Nagle, A Life Lived on the Razor's Edge*. 2021. (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p. 46.

The Place of Theology: From Sphere to Polyhedron

Michael A. Conway

INTRODUCTION

If one accepts that there is an emerging crisis in some institutions in terms of teaching theology, then it must be asked why this might be so, and how one might respond appropriately.¹ I have already outlined what I believe to be some premature, problematic responses that neither appreciate the precise locus of the problem, nor address the crisis in a wholesome, rectitudinous manner from the perspective of theology. How one answers these questions, to a significant degree, will determine how one responds, and, derivatively, have an impact on the destiny of theology as a discipline at third level in an Irish context. In this second paper I would like to explore further the crisis and, in that light, in a third paper, present a possible programme for theology that might respond adequately in our current cultural situation. Whereas I have some precise institutional situations in mind, my hope is that anyone involved with teaching theology will find in these reflections ideas that might be helpful and that might be tailored to correspond to different situations. This, I believe, honours best the complexity of the situation in which we find ourselves as a society, as a culture, and, more narrowly, as a church community.

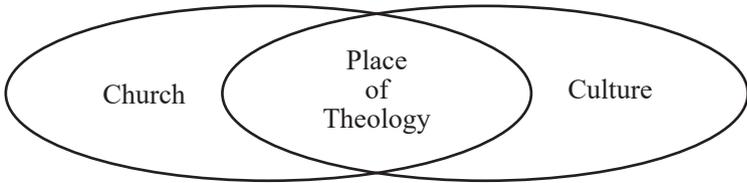
It is important to recognize clearly the distinct character of the place of theology (*le lieu de la théologie*) in any such discussion. On the one hand, it is an ecclesial activity that reflects on faith, and, on the other, it is positioned in the academy, which is itself a

1 This paper is a continuation of a reflection begun in an earlier paper on theology taken as part of a humanities degree. It is the second of three papers, the last of which will appear in the *Furrow* shortly. It should be noted that I am not dealing with the classical full degree in theology (e.g., the Bachelor of Divinity). See Michael A. Conway, "'Break Every mirror in the house": The Place of Theology,' *Furrow* 72 (2021): 195-204.

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locus within the culture, where it is answerable to the demands of critical reflection.²



Over the last thirty years or so religion, church, faith, community, and spirituality (factors that have a direct impact on theology) have all been radically transformed in wider society and culture.³ And this transformation, necessarily, impacts on the profile of student, who might choose to study theology. In fact, if it were otherwise, it would be very odd, indeed. This means that as the ambient culture is being transformed, so too, theology in the academy needs to change so as to accompany this living transformation. This in itself calls for a thoroughly renewed understanding of the academic needs of contemporary students (which is very different from even ten years ago). If they have changed, surely those of us who teach and research in theology ought to be changing what we do and how we do it to meet their changing needs. Pope Francis calls for the promotion of ‘a culture of encounter’ in open cooperation with all the positive forces that pervade human culture, and this, not least in the engagement with students who study theology.⁴

As regards the locus of the crisis, I would suggest that the most effective and empowering response is to be had, when one considers it directly and simply as being a crisis of the ‘place of theology’ itself.⁵ To put this in other terms, the problem (if I might

2 It is not possible to explore the complexity of this question of the position of theology in the academy. See Michael A. Conway, ‘Theology going Somewhere and Nowhere,’ *Furrow* 67 (2015): 375-386 and Michael A. Conway, ‘Intercommunion of One and All: Theology and its Future,’ *Furrow* 69 (2018): 460-73.

3 Derek Scally’s *The Best Catholics in the World* is a timely and insightful account of some of this recent change (see Derek Scally, *The Best Catholics in the World: The Irish, the Church and the End of a Special Relationship* [Dublin: Penguin Random House, 2021]).

4 See *Veritas gaudium*, No. 4.

5 Clearly, one could debate endlessly the causal structures of societal and cultural change (and, derivatively, the concomitant impact on theology); there is, however, only so much to be gained by indulging the dynamics of a ‘bad infinity (schlechte Unendlichkeit)’ (Hegel), when what is required is some kind of appropriate, reparative response in the present. Likewise, what emerges in the future cannot be determined precisely by any particular *modus operandi* in the present, which is not to deny the power of creative, reflected action in contributing substantially to a response that engenders life in the future. Perhaps, we have here the formal structures that ground and facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit.

call it that) is with the institutional self and not the cultural other; seeing it in this way not only is more likely to lead to an apposite and creative response (since it does not shirk the task of taking responsibility), but also resonates most powerfully with a central tenant of Christian faith as the place of theology being a place of service and mission.

BEYOND PRIESTLY FORMATION

Theology as a discipline in the university has its substantial origin in teaching with a view to priestly ministry. Furthermore, the place of theology was understood to be a place that was anchored within the boundaries of the institutional expression of church. This means that, for the most part, theology programmes in Ireland were developed as offshoots of programmes that were originally designed to prepare for priestly ministry; and this was understood to be an exclusively ecclesial activity. The basic structure, for example, in terms of the various disciplines within theology, was almost always maintained so that there were recognizable courses in the classical subject areas, such as moral theology, scripture, dogmatic theology, liturgy, etc. For as long as the *Weltanschauung* of students taking these programmes matched substantially that of seminarians, there was no real problem, and, in many ways, it was the obvious and wise path to have taken.

Now, however, given the growing diversity of students and the wide spectrum of motivation in terms of reasons for studying theology, programmes of theology need to be rethought.⁶ There is, further, the reality that the framework from within which theology is taught is increasingly much bigger than that of ecclesial belonging, so that any programme of theology in a contemporary setting needs to take this into account. The ecclesial framework is no longer the norm for more and more students, who, still, wish to take theology as part of a humanities degree. The homogeneity of the past is being replaced by the diversity in the present. This is only a problem if one is not attentive to this significant shift that has taken place. It has implications not only in terms of course content, but also in terms of how one introduces students to theology, which is less in view of ministry (although for some this is still important), and more in view of disparate motivating factors.

'OVERLAP' AND THE PLACE OF THEOLOGY

In terms of meeting the contemporary student, it is vital to pay attention to the locus of meeting. The world of the student needs to some degree to 'overlap' with the place of theology if there is

6 One obvious, significant change is the number of women who now study theology (outnumbering men).

to be an initial encounter. It is only in this way that the potential student will be able to recognize something of the possibilities that theology might open up. This requires careful consideration as it is the initial condition, so to speak, of any engagement whatsoever with theology. If what one offers is totally alien to the reality of potential students (from their perspective), then, there is little hope of connection and no reason to even consider taking up the discipline. Any viable programme in a contemporary context must begin in a locus of overlapping world views. The world of the student must clearly overlap with the place of connection to the theological tradition. If there is no 'overlap,' no commonality, then, there can be no communication. The overlap comes first, and the exploration follows. If the meeting point is not well gauged and established in each module (particularly in the first year, but not only), you are less likely to have students to begin with, and if the subsequent exploration is not connecting well with students, then, you have less of a chance of retaining them in any particular course or programme.⁷ Here you have, I would suggest, the essential issue when it comes to both recruitment and retention. If you have a decreasing number of students applying for a course, or if you have a remarkable number of students leaving a course (particularly early on in a programme), then, I suggest that a first consideration ought to be the preliminary issue of this 'overlap.' The concern is about theology per se (and how it is being taught) and not about the ancillary structures that support the work in the classroom. If there is a problem at this level, no number of cosmetic adjustments, ancillary structures, or promotional enterprise will resolve the issues that are hindering theology from advancing as a discipline in a contemporary context.

It is vital to promote a classroom experience that is rooted in real encounter, healthy dialogue, and respectful exchange with students. Pope Francis insists over and over again on the importance of such dialogue:

I dream of Theological Faculties where one lives differences in friendship, where one practices a theology of dialogue and welcoming; where one experiences the model of the polyhedron of theological knowledge instead of that of a static and disembodied sphere. Where theological research can promote a challenging but compelling process of inculturation.⁸

7 This is not a matter of 'dumbing down' theology to match a lowered threshold of expectation. The academic integrity is to be maintained fully. There is always a relativity at play in terms of the initial connection to any discipline, and it is this relativity that is in question.

8 See Pope Francis, 'Address of His Holiness Pope Francis,' Naples, Friday, 21 June 2019, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190621_teologia-napoli.html, accessed 7 April 2021.

It is, of course, clear that it is not possible to please all students all of the time, but good connection, real choice, respectful dialogue, and actionable feedback, when taken seriously, go a long way in mitigating the dynamics of alienation (from the students' perspective) in the classroom.⁹ The greatest danger for theology in a contemporary setting is working in the abstract, the general, and the ideological without meeting the real-life situation of learners. It is only then that one can show how precisely the thought structures and speculations of theology contribute to and nourish human life, social life, church life, and personal life. Otherwise, it can easily be taken to be a parallel world that can be dismissed as, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, sheer fantasy.

STUDENT CENTRED

The crucial feature when it comes to theology in the modern university is that the discipline must be, in every way, a student-centred endeavour. The content per se that is to be explored as part of any theology programme is secondary, so to speak, to the programme itself being student centred. The main reason for saying this depends on the necessity of valuing freedom as the foundation to any credible educational enterprise (something that has been neglected up to now), on the one hand, and, on the other, the necessity of ensuring that any programme per se meets the needs of students, whose profiles change at a disquieting rate.¹⁰ This, in itself, though, ensures a certain energy in the classroom experience and, to a fair degree, secures commitment from students, who are less and less able and willing to spend long periods in activities that do not engage their interests (this, thanks to the ever cascading stimulation of the internet, I suspect).

This feature of being student centred is a radically new consideration in terms of reflection on the discipline of theology. When Karl Rahner, for example, published his 'Sketch (Aufriss)' of a 'Dogmatic Theology' (understood as a comprehensive syllabus for systematic theology) in 1954, he did not allude even once to the students for whom this syllabus was being drawn up.¹¹

9 I hope that it is clear that this has nothing to do with reducing everything down to a lowest common denominator, and everything to do with pastoral sensitivity, academic integrity, and even intellectual rigour.

10 My general sense from several decades now teaching theology is that the general profile of students changes significantly about every five years; but this may accelerate in the years ahead. And I believe that one ought to take this into account in drawing up, monitoring, and modifying any programme.

11 Karl Rahner, 'Über den Versuch eines Aufrisses einer Dogmatik,' in Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 4, Hörer des Wortes; Schriften zu Religionsphilosophie und zur Grundlegung der Theologie, ed. Albert Raffelt (Freiburg in Br.: Herder, 1997), 404-48.

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Nothing of their background (religious, social, or cultural) was deemed necessary for comment, and there is no indication of any such consideration being important. This is extraordinary, when you think about it; particularly from someone as perceptive and insightful as Rahner. He, like everyone else, would appear to have assumed a 'model student' (probably a seminarian of a certain academic and religious calibre, with, to some degree, a particular socio-religio-cultural background).¹² As a teacher drafting a programme for theology, his only concern in terms of explicit reflection was on the discipline itself. This is an extremely common feature of the discussion of programmes in theology, even up to the present. The student is taken to be an anonymous, homogenous recipient, who is 'treated' as being completely passive vis-à-vis the programme in terms of content, in terms of execution, and in terms of modification and development.

It cannot be occulted that in the past students were expected to attend lecture courses that were at times of no interest to them whatsoever in order to achieve a qualification that would permit them to advance to ministry, or teaching, or whatever. There was little real choice and no build-in opportunity to express concrete dissatisfaction with the classroom experience. The only option available *in extremis* was student strikes, which did, indeed, pepper student life from the '60s onwards (something I 'enjoyed' on a few occasions!). The basic model, however, remained unchanged. This model will no longer work in our current situation, with greater respect for individual freedom, significant empowerment of the learner in the education system, and a far greater range of options in terms of choosing modules across a campus being available to students. The captive university student is less and less the norm in third level education.

THE LEARNER AND THE MYSTERY

Any programme in theology must be connected in a substantial way to the world of the student with whom it is concerned. This is not just as an offering to be appropriated by them but is a service to students in their respective intellectual journeys of exploration and discovery. It ought to assist and facilitate their intellectual growth and expansion. This means that students need to be in a real, concrete way co-creators of the classroom experience. In his address to the Theology Faculty at Naples, Pope Francis remarks:

¹² Neither did he deem it necessary to take student capability into consideration. Notoriously, he lectured at a demanding intellectual level that left many students in the dark as to what exactly he was presenting.

I am thinking of the students of our faculties of theology, of those from “secular” universities or from other religious inspirations. “When the Church – and, we can add, theology – abandons the rigid schemes and opens itself to an open and attentive listening of young people, this empathy enriches it, because it allows young people to make their own contribution to the community, helping it to appreciate new sensitivities and to consider new questions.” To appreciate new sensitivities: this is the challenge.¹³

What is explored in a programme cannot be merely handed out as a *fait accompli*, complete, definitive, and absolute as in a mathematical formula. To do that at third level is not to teach theology; it is to do some kind of religious instruction or training (dubious, at best), or, maybe, better, to teach superstition.¹⁴ More than any other discipline, theology is a ‘life-science’ in the richest expression of this term. As a discipline it requires a real exchange in the classroom that takes seriously the presence of the student in the absolute integrity of being other, not as a spectator, voyeur, receiver, or psittacist, but as a real participant in the endeavour itself that is theology. Any good teacher knows this, I would say, instinctively. Enabling students to mature in terms of their intellectual growth and in their engagement with, and understanding of, the Christian tradition requires an interaction and exploration that brings into wholesome conversation the world itself of young people and the horizon of Christian faith (whose expression is new in every generation).¹⁵ In a remarkable observation, Pope Francis speaks of the farsightedness required of those who work with young people, explaining that

It is the ability to discern pathways where others only see walls, to recognize potential where others see only peril. That is how God the Father sees things; he knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young. Each young person’s heart should thus be considered “holy ground”, a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must “take off our shoes” in order to draw near and enter more deeply into the Mystery.¹⁶

13 Pope Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis,’ Naples, 21 June 2019. The internal quotation is from *Christus vivit*, No. 65.

14 See, for example, Blondel’s discussion of superstition in *L’Action* (1893).

15 I am most concerned here with meeting young students as potential students of theology; although, what I am saying applies equally to any learner, of any age.

16 Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, No. 67, English translation corrected.

It is important, too, to recognize clearly that theology at the university (for all its intrinsic connection to the ecclesial community) is not a catechetical endeavour, and it does not presuppose a faith commitment per se. The impulse to study theology may stem from many motivations, and all of these are equally valid and welcome in terms of taking up the discipline. This should be made clear from the beginning of a programme so that all learners know that it is inappropriate to have expectations about others vis-à-vis any explicit faith commitment. It needs, further, to be acknowledged explicitly for the sake of learners so as to alleviate any fears or anxieties that they may have about hidden expectations at this level. This ensures that everyone is treated equitably whatever may be their personal commitments. There is here, too, the valuable lesson for students of learning to engage with persons of faith and none in an atmosphere that respects the other and values each person in contributing to the dialogue and exchange of the classroom space. A theology programme in the contemporary academy is in this way open to all: persons of faith, persons of no faith, those who are searching, those who are simply interested, and so on.¹⁷

It is, perhaps, worth remarking that the university task is properly an academic one and, therefore, ought to be attentive to, and respectful of, the boundary that marks off the interior forum. University theology belongs exclusively in the external forum and ought never transgress this boundary; students are not particularly aware of this, and so, it is vital that the teacher (or tutor or facilitator) take full responsibility for ensuring that this boundary is scrupulously respected by everyone.¹⁸ This is true in terms of the classroom space as a totality, in the case of each student in interaction with teachers or tutors, and in terms of individual students in their engagement with other students (in classroom discussions, tutorial exchanges, projects, etc.). A university theology classroom is not a space for proselytizing or faith development or even catechesis. One would, of course, hope that what happens in the classroom would have a real, existential impact on students (good teaching always does), but questions and material that belong in the internal forum are only ever indirectly ‘addressed’ in the theology classroom. This, too, is an important learning for students of theology.

17 There is a significant theological issue here (that I cannot explore) in the acknowledgement of the importance of the other for faith life itself (see, for example, Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire* [Paris: Du Seuil, 1987]).

18 For a discussion of the abuse of this boundary, see Dysmas de Lassus, *Risques et dérives de la vie religieuse*, Préface de Mgr José Rodriguez Carballo (Paris : Cerf, 2020).

A major recent critique of our Irish education system is that it is based on a twentieth century model of teaching and learning. Andreas Schleicher, head of education for the OECD, observes that it is ‘quite industrial in its outlook and its design,’ explaining: ‘Students get taught one curriculum, it’s quite heavily focused on the reproduction of subject matter content, and not that much focus on getting students to think out of the box (sic) and link across the boundaries of subject matter disciplines.’¹⁹ More than any other discipline in the academy, theology suffers, when it continues to operate in the mode of the student as passive recipient in such an ‘industrial’ system. The subject is in danger of being alienating right from the beginning, leaving little room for students to begin the complex process of appropriating the theological tradition for themselves on their own terms.

Some programmes of theology still oblige students to take particular modules (especially in professional degrees), but this may well do a disservice to theology per se, where tacit resentment can, ultimately, do more harm than good. It is imperative that we overcome the pathogenic classroom dynamics that perpetuate power over the learner and replace them with a healthy interaction and exchange so as to enable human growth and not just on the intellectual level. It is a matter of overcoming the monophorism of a dysfunctional hierarchical model of human interaction and of replacing it with the healthier mutuality of the learning environment. As a teacher you put your expertise at the service of students as opposed to using it as an instrument of power over them.

It calls, inevitably, for a classroom experience that encourages and promotes dialogue, exchange, and shared exploration, not as a pedagogical strategy to meet or fulfil the wishes and desires of the teacher, but as a conviction that the classroom itself is a real place of theology. In the end, this amounts to treating learners as co-equal adults, enabling them in terms of independent, critical thought and action, and avoiding the paternalistic dynamics of earlier models of third level education. In his discussion of reform of the French University system some ten years ago, now, Louis Vogel, who has extensive experience in terms of the contemporary university, points out that the ‘magisterial lecture’ can no longer remain the central axis of university teaching, and we need to restore a level of pleasure to the classroom. ‘We need to make

19 See Carl O’Brien, ‘Irish schools need to modernize “20th century” approach to learning, warns OECD,’ *Irish Times*, 22 March 2021. I take it that the referent here is to our secondary school system, although much of what he says applies *mutatis mutandis* to third level (theology, at least).

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studying more stimulating, to take the pressure off the student, to remove the vague feeling of imperfection in relation to the teacher, to prevent one from believing that everything one says is of no interest, in short, to restore the pleasure of studying.’²⁰ And writing *à propos* theology in 1964, Peter Fransen observed: ‘As soon as all that is expected of the students, and probably of the professors as well, is to repeat what is written in a classical handbook, then theology, as a living form of witness to faith, is dead!’²¹

20 Louis Vogel, *L’Université, une chance pour la France* (Paris : PUF, 2010), 74-75. He notes, interestingly, that the French philosopher Alain already critiqued this mode of teaching in 1932! ‘Remarquez que l’expérience a été faite. D’une leçon magistrale il ne reste presque rien après huit jours, et après quinze jours il ne reste rien du tout!’ (Alain [Émile Chartier], *Propos sur l’éducation* [Paris: PUF, 1967], 78).

21 Peter Fransen, ‘The Teaching of Theology on the Continent and its Implications,’ in *Theology and the University: an ecumenical investigation*, ed. John Coulson (London: DLT, 1964), 78-104, at 84.

Listening to the Word. According to the Global Scripture Access Report the Bible is available in 674 languages today. This implies that 81% of the population worldwide are able to read the Bible in their own language. When we consider Europe, however, we realise that people may own a Bible but no longer read it, and in fact may never have spend even an hour glancing through its pages. In many parish centres, rooms are booked for well-attended entertainment or social activities, but Bible study groups get less attention and only a small number of people attend. Social and political issues and human reason are more important than the Bible for many clergy as a strategy for the future of their church.

– GESA E. THIESSEN (ed), *Called to Freedom* (Dublin: Wordwell Ltd.) 2019, p. 176.

In Italiano: on the Italian translation of the Roman Missal

Liam Bergin

The new Italian translation of the Roman Missal has had a gradual rollout with the possibility of celebrating with the new texts from the First Sunday of Advent 2020 to their obligatory use from Easter Sunday 2021. The Missal represents a generous embrace and maturing reception of the reforms of Vatican II that have received renewed stimulus under the pontificate of Pope Francis.

THE JOURNEY

The helpful study guide produced by the Italian Bishops' Conference to accompany the translation notes that the publication of the new edition of the Roman Missal offers a propitious occasion to reflect on the “irreversible”¹ journey of liturgical reform which has been undertaken.² This is the third Italian translation of the Missal.³ The first, published in 1973, was an expedient rendering of the Latin text of the new rite of the Mass. The second, promulgated in 1983, represented a significant development of post-conciliar liturgical reform in Italy and offered not just a vernacular translation of the original but included many texts that were newly composed to facilitate a more contemporary expression of faith and worship. These included a number of alternative greetings and prayers that were not in the Latin text, including creative options for the introductory rites, the penitential act, the introductions to the “Our Father” and to the sign of peace, and the final dismissal. Unlike the

- 1 Pope Francis used the word “irreversible” in his 2017 address to participants in the 68th National Liturgy Week in Italy. See http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/august/documents/papa-francesco_20170824_settimana-liturgica-nazionale.html.
- 2 Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, “Un Messale per una Chiesa in Cammino” in *Un Messale per le nostre Assemblee. La terza edizione del Messale Romano: tra Liturgia e Catechesi* (Roma, 2020), 17.
- 3 This article is greatly indebted to Goffredo Boselli, *Le nozze dell’Agnello: Guida alla nuova traduzione del Messale* (Milano: Edizione San Paola, 2020).

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editio typica tertia of 2002, its amended *reimpressio emendata* of 2008, and its English translation of 2011 (hereafter, EM11) where the lack of alternatives is striking, the third Italian translation (hereafter, IM20) retains and expands these options.

The second translation also offered collect prayers for Sunday Masses based on the three-year lectionary cycle and corresponding communion antiphons inspired by the gospel text of the day. These are also retained in the new translation. The effect is to strengthen the relationship between Word and sacrament insisted upon by Vatican II as the faithful are nourished from the two tables that are now drawn closer together in this liturgical act.⁴ As Pope Benedict XVI noted, “Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist.”⁵ The Italian Bishops’ Conference had already approved a new translation of the Bible (CEI Bible) that was published in 2008. Some of the changes introduced in IM20 follow the revised scriptural text.

LITURGICAM AUTHENTICAM

The Italian translations have not encountered the same controversy as their English and other language counterparts. The so called “dynamic equivalence” inspired by *Comme Le Prévoit*, Paul VI’s 1969 guidelines for the translation into the vernacular, was easier from Latin to Italian where language and syntax have a closer correlation. For example, the first Italian translation already had “I believe...” in the Creed and the response “and with your spirit.” Nor is the Italian ecclesial landscape marred by the cultural wars that have beset the English-speaking church. Certainly, there were and there are theological, liturgical and pastoral differences of opinion among Italy’s bishops on the reception and application of the reforms of Vatican II (remember the impasse between Cardinal Siri of Genoa and Cardinal Benelli of Florence?). However, the Italian Catholic Church has not experienced the extremes that have beset the church in the United States and Australia in particular.

Vox Clara is a case in point. This group (ironically, perhaps tellingly, with a Latin name) was established by the Congregation for Divine Worship (CDW) in 2001 to advise on the translation of liturgical texts into the English language. The specific competences of the episcopal conferences, the CDW, the International Committee

4 A similar effort by ICEL in 1998 has never been approved for liturgical use by the Holy See. No new original texts were composed for EM11 except for three “dismissal” formulae at the end of Mass.

5 Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), 55.

on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)⁶ and *Vox Clara* were often obscure and contentious.⁷ Earlier that year the CDW had issued *Liturgicam authenticam*, a document “on the use of vernacular languages in the publication of the books of the Roman liturgy.”⁸ This document called for translations that were to reflect the Latin text “in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses.”⁹

In 2009, with the assistance of *Vox Clara*, the Congregation returned a translation approved by the 11 episcopal conferences who sponsor ICEL with some 10,000 changes from that submitted by the conferences.¹⁰ While the Italian bishops had exchanges and debates with the CDW, IM20 knew no such obstacles.

The Italian Episcopal Conference had previously approved a translation of the Missal in 2012 (by 189 votes to 4). However, this did not receive the recognition (*recognitio*) of the Congregation required by *Liturgicam authenticam*. In their presentation of IM20, the bishops agreed that the requirements of a literal translation, a plaster-cast of the Latin (“*un calco del latino*”), did produce a text that was more faithful to the original. However, they add, it also gave rise to considerable criticism of the literary quality of the texts, their comprehensibility and, above all, their suitability to be proclaimed or sung by those for whom they were destined. Indeed, the bishops noted, a trial period of “celebrative verification” confirmed the problems that had already emerged during the translation process.¹¹

MAGNUM PRINCIPIUM

The situation changed with the publication of Pope Francis’s *Magnum principium*¹² in 2017. In this *motu proprio* Francis restored the responsibility of preparing, translating and approving liturgical texts to each episcopal conference. The CDW was now to confirm (*confirmatio*) rather than to recognize the translations

6 According to its website, ICEL was established in 1963 by eleven episcopal conferences “to prepare English translations of each of the Latin liturgical books and any individual liturgical texts in accord with the directives of the Holy See.”

7 See Liam Bergin, “Translations Matter – on Pope Francis’s *Magnum principium*,” *The Furrow* 68 (2017), 603-610.

8 Find text at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html

9 LA 20. For a conservative critique of *Liturgicam authenticam* see Peter Jeffery, *Translating tradition: a chant historian reads Liturgicam authenticam* (Collegeville, MN., 2005).

10 See Gerald O Collins & John Wilkins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass* (Collegeville, MN., 2017), 32.

11 “Le novità nel Rito della Messa e nelle Preghiere Eucaristiche” in *Un Messale per le nostre Assemblee*, 107.

12 Find text at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/09/09/170909a.html>

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undertaken by the local bishops. The Italian bishops responded by revisiting the translation they had approved in 2012, comparing it with the second translation from 1983, and then approving the final text of IM20 almost unanimously (by 195 votes to 5) at an extraordinary assembly in 2018.

In presenting the more significant changes in IM20, the Italian bishops draw attention to a number of criteria that undergird the new translation. These include the decision not to change the responses of the faithful and the invitation to prayer made by the priest, the correction of some texts in line with their newly approved version of sacred scripture, greater fidelity to the original texts, retouches that improve the text that were drawn from the almost forty-year experience since the previous translation in 1983, and coherence with other liturgical books that had been translated in the intervening period.

PENITENTIAL ACT

While the *editio typica* and the EM11 have just one option as an invocation in the Penitential Act – “You were sent to heal the contrite of heart: Lord of mercy ...” - with 7 other options given (but difficult to find) in the appendix at the end of the missal, IM20 has a total of 17 invocations available directly in the text and arranged according to liturgical season. Interestingly, the post-conciliar Italian responses “*Signore, pietà; Cristo pietà; Signore pietà*/Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy” are replaced by the ancient Greek refrain “*Kyrie, eleison; Christe, eleison; Kyrie, eleison*” which had persisted in the text of the Mass when the first vernacular translation from Greek into Latin was made in the fourth century.

Inclusive “*fratelli e sorelle*/brothers and sisters” is introduced in the *Confiteor* as it is in other places where the Latin *fratres* appears. *Homo (homines)* continues to be translated as “*uomo (uomini)*/man (men)” as, for example, in the *Gloria*, the Creed and in Eucharistic Prayer IV. The Creed also holds “*della stessa sostanza del Padre*/of the same substance as the Father” avoiding the unfortunate “*consustanzial*” of EM11.

GLORIA

In the *Gloria*, the line “*in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*/on earth peace to people of good will” which was translated as “*pace in terra agli uomini di buona volontà*/peace on earth to men of good will”) is now rendered as “*pace in terra agli uomini, amati dal Signore*/peace on earth to men, loved by the Lord.” While this

iteration is inspired by the new CEI translation of Lk 2:14 “*che egli ama*/which he loves,” it does not correspond identically to the biblical text. This discrepancy, the bishops explain, is to maintain a similar syllable count in both translations to allow the new to be sung to existing melodies.¹³

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYERS

IM20 reflects an episcopate that is emboldened by Pope Francis and *Magnum principium*. The retention of “*per tutti*” (for all) in the words of consecration over the wine cup is a good example. While English, French and Spanish translations use the narrower “for many” championed by Pope Benedict¹⁴ and others as a more literal translation of the Latin “*pro multis*,” the Italian bishops, previously under pressure to change it and with “*pro molti*” already in the CEI bible, held firm to a translation that underlines God’s mercy as all-embracing, with a wording that is more in keeping with Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom and with the subsequent vision of Vatican II.¹⁵

LORD’S PRAYER

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of IM20 is the change to the Lord’s Prayer. The penultimate petition originally translated the Latin “*ne nos inducas in tentationem*” as “*non ci indurre in tentazione*/lead us not into temptation.” The new translation reads “*non abbandonarci alla tentazione*/do not abandon us to temptation.” While Pope Francis had spoken about the change in a television interview¹⁶ in 2017, this change is not to be attributed to him as some commentators have done. This wording is already found in the new translation of the CEI Bible. A similar change has been made by the French¹⁷ and Spanish¹⁸ bishops. The German bishops have decided not to change their translation for

13 “Le novità nel Rito della Messa e nelle Preghiere Eucaristiche” in *Un Messale per le nostre Assemblee*, 107.

14 See Pope Benedict’s 2012 Letter to the German bishops at http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20120414_zollitsch.html.

15 Yet, in 2017, Pope Francis notes that “The ‘many’ who will rise for eternal life are to be understood as the ‘many’, for whom the blood of Christ was shed.” See http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171103_omelia-suffragio-defunti.html.

16 The programme can be found at <https://www.tv2000.it/padrenostro/video/padrenostro-settima-puntata-non-ci-indurre-in-tentazione/>

17 The former “*ne nous soumetts pas à la tentation*/lead us not into temptation” now reads “*ne nous laisse pas entrer en tentation*/do not let us fall into temptation.”

18 The text reads “*no nos dejes caer en la tentacion*.”

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“philosophical, exegetical, liturgical and, not least, ecumenical” reasons. The translation has also remained unchanged in EM11. Before EM11, English-speaking Christians had common texts for the *Gloria*, the Creed and the *Sanctus*. This is no longer the case even as Saint Pope John Paul II’s *Ut unum sint* had encouraged Christian churches to compose agreed texts for the prayers they hold in common.¹⁹ While the ecumenical impact of this change in Italian is not insignificant, because of the greater numbers of non-Catholic Christians who pray in German and English, any unilateral attempt to alter the wording in these languages of a prayer we have in common should be avoided.

EXCHANGE OF PEACE

A significant change is introduced in the manner by which the congregation is invited to exchange peace. IM20 moves from “*scambiatevi un segno di pace*/offer each other a sign of peace” to “*scambiatevi il dono della pace*/offer each other the gift of peace.” This new translation seeks to be more faithful to the Latin “*offerte vobis pacem*” and to highlight the fact that it is not a sign of peace that is exchanged but the divine gift of peace itself. This peace is then exchanged through a gesture or sign that may take on cultural variations.

INVITATION TO HOLY COMMUNION

The invitation to communion is significantly reworked to follow the Latin text more faithfully. The first part, (“*Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi*/Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world”) is found on the lips of John the Baptist in the opening chapter of the Fourth Gospel (Jn 1:29) and was already in the Tridentine Missal of Pius V. The second part, (“*beati qui ad cenam Agni vocati sunt*/ blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb”) echoes the vision announced by the angel in the Book of Revelation (19:9) and was newly inserted into the invitation in the Missal of Paul VI. Both the new English and Italian translations explicitly mention “the supper of the Lamb/*cena dell’Agnello*.” Not only does this reflect a more exact rendering of the original Latin but it serves to accentuate two theological points.

First, the eucharist is a sacrificial meal. Catholic eucharistic theology since Trent had focused on the sacrificial character of the Mass that was called into question by the Reformers. This is readily witnessed in the language used such as altar, priest, offering

19 Gerald O Collins & John Wilkins, *Lost in Translation*, 14-15.

and victim. The biblical and liturgical *réssourcement* in the period prior to Vatican II retrieved some of the meal motifs that had been inadvertently eclipsed in the previous centuries such as community, table, celebration, host. The first vernacular translations in the immediate post-conciliar period emphasized the recently restored meal aspect of the eucharistic feast (“Lord’s Supper/*cena del Signore*”). But, the eucharist is both meal *and* sacrifice. The new translations acknowledge this with their explicit mentioning of the supper of the sacrificial Lamb as proposed by the Latin text.

Second, the new English and Italian translations serve to underline the eschatological dimension of the eucharistic banquet. Theological approaches to the Eucharist tend to focus on the past, on the supper in the Upper Room. Yet, recent theological reflection points as much to the *future* as to the past.²⁰ The Eucharist is not just a remembrance of things past but a foretaste and herald of what is to come. The catechetical imagination traditionally gathers people around the Last Supper table recalling the events of two thousand years ago. Reference to the “supper of the Lamb” anticipates the future and invites us to pull up our chairs to the eschatological feast!²¹ That is why the elements of the eucharistic celebration – language, music, architecture, vestments, decoration – should underline the fact that “the heavenly world penetrates our world and is present when the Eucharist is celebrated.”²² It is striking that the *editio typica* omits a phrase from Rev 19:9 which reads “blessed are those called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” Inclusion of the “wedding feast” in the liturgical invitation to holy communion would further highlight that our participation in the Eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. It is notable that the new French translation of the Missal does precisely that.²³

DISMISSAL

IM20 restores “*Ite, missa est*” as one of the nine dismissals at the concluding rite. It reminds the congregation of the origins of the

20 The work by Dermot A. Lane is significant. See his “Eucharist as Sacrament of the Eschaton: A failure of imagination?” in *50th International Eucharistic Congress: Proceedings of the International Symposium of Theology* (2013), 399-412, and *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue: the Wisdom of Laudato Si* (Dublin, 2020).

21 On the fortieth anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in 2003, Pope John Paul II wrote an apostolic letter with the title *Spiritus et Sponsa* taken from Rev 22: 17. He notes that the liturgy “opens a glimpse of Heaven on earth, and the perennial hymn of praise rises from the community of believers in unison with the hymn of heavenly Jerusalem” (16).

22 Walter Kasper, *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church* (New York, 2004), 126.

23 The text reads “*Heureux les invités au repas des noces de l’Agneau.*” See Boselli, 59-61.

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name “Mass” as an ancient sending forth of the assembly, the Body of Christ that is to proclaim the Lord from the rising of the sun to its setting.

JOURNEY ENDED; JOURNEY BEGUN

The publication of the IM20 represents a point of arrival and, necessarily, a point of departure. As a point of *arrival*, the text bears witness to the liturgical and pastoral journey that the Italian church has made in the post-conciliar period. It represents the best of a pilgrim people that has embraced ongoing liturgical and pastoral reform, initiated by Vatican II and reinvigorated by the magisterium of Pope Francis. Firmly rooted in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, this third translation grows organically from its two predecessors as it includes prayers that have emerged over the past fifty years. EM11, by comparison, shows itself to be much more hesitant in embracing legitimate developments that had taken place over the same period.

As already noted, the Italian bishops had a trial period of “celebrative verification” during the translation process. This served not only to identify problems with the emerging text but also to allow for consultation with and reaction from laity and clergy. When faced with the stringent requirements of *Liturgicam authenticam*, the Italian bishops took the long view and waited for the more favourable circumstances that *Magnum principium* would offer. This was not the case when EM11 was prepared and the fundamental role of episcopal conferences was diminished and, in some cases, ignored.

One of the more controversial aspects of IM20 concerns the 23 illustrations in the text.²⁴ Commissioned from the contemporary artist Mimmo Palladino, the plates (he prefers not to call them works of art) are striking in their simplicity. Palladino explains, “I think they are signs. Signs that intend to accompany the written words and that want to be intelligible on several levels. The Missal is a powerful tool, if we may say so. It contains words that lead us towards the absolute through the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord. So, it doesn’t need decorations but graphic signs that can visually translate what you read there.”²⁵ The bishops chose not to decorate IM20 with illustrations from the noble canon of Italian art but, in a move that is truly sacramental, to offer signs that draw the reader from the word to the Paschal

24 The illustrations can be found at https://it.aleteia.org/slideshow/illustrazioni-messale-cei-2020/?from_post=525831

25 From an interview in *Avvenire* (12 September, 2020). <https://www.avvenire.it/chiesa/pagine/palladino-i-miei-segni-darte-che-arricchiscono-il-messale>

Mystery and to the gift of salvation that the eucharistic liturgy represents.

By their very nature, vernacular translations must undergo revision as living languages change. A new translation, then, is also the point of *departure* for its own replacement. In the document issued following the fifth national gathering of the Italian Church at Florence in 2015, the bishops noted:

The task of liturgical reform is not behind us, because the Council is an event that continues even today to generate newness in the liturgy as in the whole life of the Church. To this end, we must continue to walk, without uncertainty or second thought of the liturgy comes the renewal of the Church.²⁶

IM20 is not perfect but it does represent a significant step forward on the ongoing journey to provide a translation that draws the best from the tradition while presenting prayers, old and new, that both reflect and invigorate the life of the church. If the vitality of the Italian church is to be assessed on the basis of this new translation there are indeed signs of hope that the communities that have already been transformed by celebrating these sacred mysteries will continue to walk together in faith, hope and love. It is a challenge that other national churches could well emulate.

26 Quoted in Boselli, 8-9.

Women and Ministry. I believe the heart of this question is so much more significant than simply giving women more power, or status as some might see it. I believe at the heart of this question is not just past history. Our reflection on this question needs to be grounded fundamentally in our responsibility, our call as church, to be faithful to Jesus' mission that he passed on to ALL of us, baptized in Christ-to live in his Spirit, to be bearers of his grace in our world today.

– D. MICHAEL JACKSON, ed., *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective* (Durham: Sacristy Press) p. 72.

Ministry Teams – What’s Happening!

Johanna Merry

In recent times the accelerated pace of diminishing clergy relative to ongoing pastoral demands has seen dioceses reconfigured into administrative areas or pastoral units. There is a consequent shift towards a number of priests from different parishes being jointly responsible for the whole unit, co-equal in power and accountability. The practice of committees attending to different aspects of Church life e.g. parish pastoral council, liturgy groups, finance committees etc. under the charge of the parish priest is not new to the Church. However, the lexicon and practices are changing here also, with the emphasis on ‘team spirit’ – working corporately and cooperatively (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12).

It might be said *the whole is greater for the sum of its parts*, reflecting the ethos to achieve optimum outcomes. The evolution of parish teams covers a wide range of dedicated services towards agreed goals: baptism, funerals, Eucharistic Ministers, Readers, assisting at liturgy etc. Similar patterns have emerged in religious orders with the move from leadership councils headed by a superior, to leadership teams characterised by more circular, less hierarchical models. Distinct province governance is giving way to join-up administrative areas and ‘community teams’, including a gradual move towards lay members in face of scarce religious personnel.

Such merging and cooperation in organisations are generally considered to enhance synergy, increasing efficiency towards desired outcomes. While the goals of secular organisations are often focused on market logic to maximise output and/or profit, Church bodies are centred more on the reign of God. For the Christian community, team work is not regarded as merely a neat ‘division of labour’, but something *more* – a participation in the mission of Jesus to make known the Father’s Love. Further, that something *more* may well include the hidden catalyst for personal growth and change (conversion). Team interaction offers direct/

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indirect opportunities to open ourselves to others, going ‘outside the self’ to discover self-insights. The routine practice of prayer at the start and close of meetings is a reminder that we are workers tending a vineyard, a vineyard that is not ours to possess.

Since the initial lockdown, I initiated a number of virtual conversations with some colleagues, ministry teams and pastoral units. The conversations centred on transition in these changing times, together with the impact cocooning has had on ministry teams – as one aspect of Church structure. Just as snowdrops, crocus, and daffodils emerge from slumber following the winter solstice intimating that hope is never dead, glimpses of hope were noticed embedded in the challenges of this time.

STRUCTURE

Dedicated ministry teams usually mark a beginning moment when they gather to reflect and agree a *mission statement*, an aspirational compass to guide the group in ways it hopes to function. Cooperative bonds are forged, as strategic goals and pathways are mapped. Individual and corporate tasks are identified and clarified. From the outset, working groups seek to establish a firm bedrock that will withstand turbulent times (Matthew 7:24- 27), sustained by its ethos or *esprit de corps*. Individual commitment is sought to own common group goals, while members are encouraged to stand alone when needs be, humble enough to submit to the corporate process as appropriate. A group will return time and again to review its ethos and revise its functioning. Many would agree that 2020 was a year like no other. Government restrictions unsettled the routine patterns of team building and team work, disrupting plans and closing work/service spaces. With changed work practices and focus somewhat scattered, many teams were in a frenzy trying to regroup and reset the compass. Many have done so, some ups and downs worth recording and commented upon.

Team Work: Learning new ways of being team proved to be a positive experience. Zoom meetings afforded sharper focus, reduced distractions, less emotional entanglement, more efficient use of time. The normal sequence of ‘form<> storm<> re-form’ of group process seemed more streamlined. Generosity, respect, patience, kindness, more evident - notwithstanding the challenges of submitting to corporate processes. That these positives might endure into the future was a hope expressed.

Our Common Home: The loss of casual ordinary encounters in the work place, possibly taken for granted before, was missed. A reminder that we are social beings, not robots! Confined as everyone is to their own work spaces, connecting to other people/

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team members via zoom or phone meant a full day could go by devoid of any real human contact. Many refreshed their interest in the tenets of *Laudato Si* (May 2015), awakening an attentiveness to the wider ‘community of life’ e.g plants, wild life, eco-friendly practices etc. Practices that expanded in the quest for connectivity – as an adjunct to virtual connections.

Archetypes: Most people thrive in the company of others. Some, less so. It was noted that a few individuals acted with greater confidence, autonomy, and improved efficiency from a remote working space. However, these individuals also gained the self-insight that reinforcing such habitual social patterns are not always for the better, either for themselves or the corporate synergy of team.

Creative opportunities: Many parish ministry teams ceased or reduced functioning, evoking a sense of ‘not needed/redundant’ in some instances, particularly so among team leaders. A few questioned their on-going commitment, while others embraced the natural challenge to diversify and create innovative outreach. For example, fostering pastoral support interaction by phone, offering presence and support through difficult times of loss such as illness and funerals; doing virtual preparation for First Communion and Confirmation; novenas on grief and loss; virtual prayer guidance, etc.

Universal fulfilment: For some, disconnection while cocooning heightened the sense of flux in global realities, evoking greater interest and solidarity with wider world events. This in turn tempered the growing sense of remoteness people have felt. An awareness and feel-good factor that however removed, I am also an ‘agent of life’ in caring for the universal good of others, beyond my immediate, singular concerns.

Personal Transformation: Being the sole agent of one’s personal time was in many instances attractive – at least initially. Inevitably, even for the best of introverts, company with oneself over prolonged periods can lead to ruminations around life losses. Regrets can surface, personal gremlins may play havoc with thoughts and feelings. Many embraced the moment in an attempt to resolve retrospective personal issues, deferred possibly due to prior, crowded work demands. In general, habitual practices for better/worse became exaggerated, heightening the need to re-vision boundaries – personal, lifestyle, diet, or other. Work practices are now viewed by some from an altered perspective. And, it might be added, healthy individuals make for a healthy team.

Health and Wellbeing: Even without zoom, working alone is stressful for some in the absence of camaraderie. Capacity for prolonged intense work understandably diminishes with age,

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a reality widely reported in my exchanges. Anxieties around unfamiliarity or awkwardness with technology was balanced by an excitement in learning something new, expanding horizons. However, ready access to files when needed, relying sometimes on memory, added stress to zoom gatherings; prolonged attention to a screen often energy draining. Many spoke of latent tiredness or exhaustion in the aftermath. A few spoke of altered moods and sleep patterns. Overall, presenting challenges were viewed as an opportunity to revise how they lived and worked.

Interiority: There was a growing realisation that what matters most in ministry is a dedicated unwavering ‘pastoral presence’, characterised by patient attentiveness to the outside world and needs of others, being a channel of security/love. Through a practice of deepening interiority, a measure of confidence/confirmation of *raison d’etre*, is bestowed, unfettering the frantic flurry of ‘doing’.

Conflict resolution: Virtual/electronic interactions can blur non-verbal cues; as a result, ascertaining mood and other bodily signals may be difficult. One can easily miscue, reading things into a more limited array of signals, such as voice tone. Communication can become uneasy, ambiguous, or conflictual. Argumentative or competitive dynamics may be subsumed or overlooked, opting to get the business done with the least strain. Minimising tension can prove counterproductive, should compliance to unhealthy group norms be the result. However, it was noted that the personal space/distance for reflection also enabled the palliation of charged thoughts or feelings, less defensiveness, more openness to learn something from others, to respect differing points of view and legitimate interests.

PRESCIENT SEEDS OF HOPE

The image of a nascent cocooned butterfly carries an expectation that wings will naturally expand and take flight in right time. Analogously, the immediate re-entry challenge for groups may be the balancing of recent lockdown learnings with what went before, adjusting some of the habituated personal and corporate practices for what is to come. A few prompts are offered to enhance *esprit de corps* and *synergy*.

Mentoring: Timely appraisal of the current state of team morale and synergy can help to reset the compass. The leader’s role may need rebalancing, alongside the need to gently subordinate individual members’ personal need for prominence relative to the corporate matrix - often a sensitive, emotionally charged dynamic in real-time meetings. Also, group dynamics tend to have an uncanny effect in unexpectedly returning us to roles and styles we

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adopted in our early family stories. For example, we may have been visible/invisible, forefront/background, silent/talkative, vulnerable/rescuer, etc. Mentoring may invite revision of these archetypes in the interest of personal change.

Best in us: Jesus and his disciples model aspects of team which reflect conflicting elements and foibles of the human condition. Teams are known for drawing out the *best* and *worst* in us. Dedicating time to identify and strengthen anchors, that help each individual part be their best selves, in the interest of the whole, makes for generous team encounters.

Faith: Strengthening the practice of seeing God, or God seeing us, in the midst of everyday bits and pieces, are graced opportunities to recognise and give glory and praise to God (cf. Ps 9:1; Ps 69:30; Ps 86:12). Or, fired by a sense there is a hidden treasure of meaning in this field of bewilderment (Matthew 13:44) that is ours to find, clutch and satisfy.

The Spirit of the Magnificat: Things hardly ever unfold quite in the way we expect, leaving us somewhat unsettled. There is need to remind ourselves we are limited, that we can only do our best. Forgiving our inadequacies allows us to rejoice with gratitude for being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). Such a turn of mind counters losing heart in face of missed opportunities or disappointments.

Bearing with: Many of us might identify with Luke's woman, bent over and weighed down (Luke 13:11) in overwhelming times. There is implied solace of not bearing such weight on our own in Deut. 33: 27: '*Underneath you are my everlasting arms*', but also the implied paradox of a spirit of detachment – a disposition of carrying, yet not carrying.

Webs of Humane Care: The heightened awareness of the fragility of life urges us to be alert to opportunities to express appreciation of fellow team members, their acts of kindness in thoughts or deed. Being present to their 'stories' opens up hospitable spaces to accommodate the joys and sorrows of the time, even if these may be different from ours. Such a disposition is not amiss in the stewardship of teams.

Communication: There can never be enough! Communication requires unceasing attentiveness to patterns and practices. There are always some among us who either may be, are, or feel excluded – real or imagined. Accidentally or not, a dreaded sense of being an appendage, that one is not important or inexpedable, can preoccupy a team member.

Laughter: An average adult laughs seventeen times a day, a child three hundred times! *A laugh a day keeps the doctor away.* Try to include light-heartedness, buoyancy.

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Imagination: Speculative imagination is brought alive with a burst of ‘*what if*’ questions. *What if* the ‘doing’ of ministry were to better attend to some of the observations regarding interiority (noted above)? *What if* single administrative areas, with their constituent parishes, might strive towards a more collaborative, cooperative and unified approach to Sunday liturgy and other significant Church celebrations. For example, a composite representative team might rotate responsibility to create a template for Sunday Liturgy, which would be applied across all parishes in the administrative area. *What if* such inclusive lay ministry teams were to be a norm into the future? *What if* the local administrative area, as part of a wider diocesan strategy, were to be responsible for dialogue with priests and laity (nothing about us, without us) to evolve desired changes?

CONCLUSION

There is an invitation in this time to re-think and revisit our way of being Church¹. The enduring inspiration of the cocooned butterfly is that hope is never extinguished. For the faith-filled, wings will unfurl and expand as dedicated groups of people arise in a spirit of fraternity and cooperation, blending their gifts to further the reign of God – the essence of ministry teams. Perhaps innovative pathways, cast in the mould of more open, participative structures, might better purpose-fit diverse, flexible practices in the spirit of St Paul, ‘*all things to all people....*’ (1 Corinthians 9: 19-23).

1 See, for example, Malphurs, Aubrey. *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry*. Ada, Michigan: Baker Books (3rd Edition), 2013 and Hartwig, T. Ryan and Warren Bird. *Teams that Thrive: Five Disciplines of Collaborative Church Leadership*. Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Is Assisted Suicide the Compassionate Response?

D. Vincent Twomey

A private member's Bill euphemistically entitled "Dying with Dignity" is being processed through the Oireachtas. Without mentioning assisted suicide or euthanasia, the aim of the Bill is to legislate in principle for them. Since the contemporary culture is steeped in what Alasdair MacIntyre called emotivism, where feelings replace reason as the motive in decision making, there is a real possibility that such a Bill could eventually be passed on compassionate grounds as a response to a person's terminal illness, especially one that is marked by intense pain and suffering. But what is meant by compassion?

Compassion is the essence of Christianity. It is symbolized above all in the figure of the Good Samaritan, who, moved to compassion for the man who had been attacked and left to die, bound up his wounds, and then brought him to a nearby inn to be looked after (cf. Lk 10:33f).¹ Down through the centuries, that same Christian faith moved men and women to devote their lives to healing the sick in mind and body, people like St Camillus de Lellis, St John of God, the Venerable Catherine McAuley and St Teresa of Calcutta, to mention but a few.

Moved by the same compassion, the Irish Sisters of Charity, inspired by their foundress, the Venerable Mary Aikenhead, in 1879 set up the first ever hospice for the dying in Harold's Cross, Dublin, thus pioneering the hospice movement that has since spread throughout the whole world. Two giants of palliative care, Cicely Saunders (Anglican) and Anne Merriman (Catholic), drew their inspiration from the same Christian impulse. The most modern means of managing pain enable the dying today to face the last hurdle in life surrounded with that love and care that alone respects their dignity. Behind that attitude is the recognition of the innate dignity of every human being, old or young, sick or healthy. A

1 See Pope Francis's extensive reflection on the Good Samaritan, *Fratelli tutti*, 62-86.

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German writer newly converted to the faith, who spent Christmas and New Year in St Joseph's Hospice in London, run by the same Sisters, was so moved by the atmosphere and loving attention paid to the patients of all religions and none – and their resultant peace and serenity – that she wrote a prize-winning book with the title: "Let me die in someone's hand."²

As Pope Francis pleads, "Everything [must] be done to protect the status and dignity of the human person."³ Our dignity is based on the fact that: "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."⁴ Further, to care for the sick, above all the terminally ill, is what most fully corresponds to our own dignity and purpose in life: "I was sick and you visited me ..." (Mt 25:36).

The earliest Christian theologians saw in the figure of the Good Samaritan not only an exemplar of Christian living but a symbol of God's love for humanity. Moved by compassion for fallen humanity, the Father sent his Son to heal our spiritual wounds, the source of human suffering, by pouring his Holy Spirit into our hearts. By his wounds we are healed (cf. Is 53:5). Christ Jesus did not remove suffering or death from our lives but by freely submitting to them he transformed them from within. He gives us the inner strength and peace to face our own suffering and death in such a way that our dignity is affirmed and our lives ennobled.

Flannery O'Connor, who herself suffered from lupus and died aged 39, warned against false compassion, what she termed "tenderness": "In the absence of [...] faith now, we govern by tenderness. It is tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced-labour camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber."⁵ This may sound exaggerated but, in fact, the first legal step that led to the Nazi gas chambers was the introduction of euthanasia for the disabled, who were reckoned to be "lives unworthy of living"⁶

2 Lore Bartholomäus, *Ich möchte an der Hand eines Menschen sterben* (Mainz: Matthäus-Grünerwald-Verlag, 1980).

3 Pope Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps in the Central African Republic*, Bangui (29 November 2015).

4 Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Inaugural Mass of his Pontificate*, April 24, 2005.

5 Flannery O'Connor in Introduction to "A Memoir of Mary Ann" (from the collection *Mystery and Manners*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970).

6 *Life unworthy of Life* is the title of an essay by the German lawyer, Karl Binding, and the psychiatrist, Alfred Hoche, that was published in 1920 and is generally considered as a stepping stone toward the Nazi genocide policies; see Binding and Hoche's "Life Unworthy of Life": A historical and ethical analysis — UTMB Health Research Expert Profiles

or thought to be a burden on society. Is the situation today any better? Pope Francis referred several times to our contemporary “throwaway culture”.⁷ Recently he stated that “the current socio-cultural context is gradually eroding the awareness of what makes human life precious. In fact, it is increasingly valued on the basis of its efficiency and utility, to the point of considering as ‘discarded lives’ or ‘unworthy lives’ those who do not meet this criterion. In this situation of the loss of authentic values, the mandatory obligations of solidarity and of human and Christian fraternity also fail.”⁸

Physical and psychological pain can be unbearable. Even more unbearable is the imagined fear of the sufferings that we may have to face in the future. If you feel that you cannot endure present suffering or face future suffering, then suicide is a real temptation. It is an escape. For society to approve of suicide is to send out the message that life is not worth living unless one is healthy and free of suffering. It implies that the dignity of a person is based on their subjective sense of well-being. It assumes that our innate dignity could be diminished by suffering, whereas in fact it can ennoble us. In an increasingly materialistic world that denies the existence of God or an immortal soul, that false compassion which undermines human dignity would treat the sick as we would animals and “put them down”.

Few people ever found themselves in the literarily dreadful situation of the great Russian-Jewish poet, Osip Mandelstam. He was relentlessly persecuted by Stalin after word reached his ears that Mandelstam had written a poem criticizing the Marxist tyrant. He and his wife were reduced to penury in 1934; they were hunted from one town to another as he was awaiting the inevitable day when he would disappear into the Gulag Archipelago, as he did during Stalin’s Great Purge, 1937-1938. His wife, Nadezhda, in her autobiography, *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir*,⁹ recalls how he always rejected suicide. “His argument was: ‘How do you know what will come after? Life is a gift nobody should renounce.’ And then there was the final and most telling argument: ‘Why do you think you ought to be happy?’ Nobody was so full of joy of life as M., but he never sought unhappiness, neither did he count on being

7 Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), 53; See also his *Address to a delegation from the Dignitatis Humanae Institute* (7 December 2013) and the *Meeting of the Pope with the Elderly* (28 September 2014).

8 Pope Francis, *Address to the Participants of the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (30 January 2020): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 31 January 2020, 7. (Eng. trans.)

9 Translated from the Russian by Max Hayward, with an Introduction by Clarence Brown (London, 1989), 5. Nadezhda Mandelstam refers to her husband throughout the book as simply “M”.

IS ASSISTED SUICIDE THE COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE?

what is called ‘happy’.” On happiness, she wrote: “Who knows what happiness is? Perhaps it’s better to talk in more concrete terms of the fullness or intensity of existence, and in this sense, there may have been something more deeply satisfying in our desperate clinging to life than what people generally strive for”. “Although M. did not seek happiness, he described everything he valued in terms of pleasure and play: ‘Thanks to the wonderful bounty of Christianity, the whole of our two-thousand-year-old culture is the setting the world free for play, of spiritual pleasure, for the free imitation of Christ’. And elsewhere: ‘Words are sheer pleasure, a cure for anguish’.”¹⁰

For some years, Ireland has had a frightening rate of suicide, despite many efforts made to try to stem it. To legalize assisted suicide would undermine such efforts. It would encourage more and more people of all ages to take their own lives. And it would lead an ever-widening application of assisted suicide, as is happening in other countries. In 2014, Belgium extended the range of assisted suicide to include children. All suffered from untreatable illnesses. Among those who had recourse to this law, one was a child of only 9 years old.

The right to choose is invoked to legalize assisted suicide. But how free to choose are such sick children? How free to make a considered decision are those in agonizing pain? How free are older people, who are made to feel that they are a burden on their relatives and on society as a whole? How can such deaths be described as dying with dignity? By way of contrast, we still remember the inspiration of the Kerry teenager, Donal Walsh, as he faced death with courage and a smile on his face.

For all these reasons, the Church teaches that “it is gravely unjust to enact laws that legalize euthanasia or justify and support suicide, invoking the false right to choose a death improperly characterized as respectable only because it is chosen. Such laws strike at the foundation of the legal order: the right to life sustains all other rights, including the exercise of freedom. The existence of such laws deeply wounds human relations and justice, and threatens the mutual trust among human beings. The legitimation of assisted suicide and euthanasia is a sign of the degradation of legal systems.”¹¹

We know from experience that people tempted to suicide don’t want so much to end their lives as to end their present condition that makes life so unbearable. Modern palliative care provides such

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹¹ Letter *Samaritanus bonus on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 14th July 2020, Feast of St Camillus de Lellis.

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means, and we have the dedicated staff to make life bearable. They affirm the dignity of sick and dying people, assure them that they are loved and wanted up to the end. The legalization of assisted suicide would in time undermine the selfless, indeed often heroic, dedication of palliative care staff and hospices, perhaps Ireland's greatest gifts to medicine.

God's Mercy. Amidst the debates around specific pastoral practices, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the free gift of God's mercy fundamentally involves a call to repentance. There are ways, as Pope Francis has warned us, that Christian communities can attempt to limit the extension of divine mercy by unjustly excluding certain persons or groups from fellowship. That being said, the opposite danger exists whereby mercy could be understood as excusing sin rather than as the invitation to amend one's life. It is unfortunate that this conversation has fixated on a few very specific moral cases (e.g., cohabitation, remarriage, and, to a lesser extent same-sex sexual relationships), when the call to turn away from sin in preparation for Holy Communion is a demand placed upon all of us. By focusing on the issue of Communion for remarried Catholics, we perhaps run the risk of failing to pay adequate attention to other serious sins – say defrauding workers of their wages – that are not frequently dealt with in homilies or spiritual direction

– KEVIN J. O'REILLY, ed. *Heart Speaks to Heart*. 2021 (Herefordshire: Gracewing Publishing) p.67.

In a time of pandemics let us dream

Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman

We live in a time of trial. The covid-19 pandemic is a major trial and we are wearing masks, keeping safe-distance, and getting vaccinated to protect ourselves and all those with whom we come in contact. These actions are our moral obligations in this pandemic, concrete ways to respond to Jesus' great commandment: "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). It is also our moral obligation to protect ourselves and others in two other major world pandemics that do not get as much publicity, the pandemics of poverty and violence.

A TIME TO SEE

We cannot do anything against these pandemics unless we first *see* the reality of the world we live in. Did you know, for instance, that 3.7 million people died of hunger across the world in the first half of 2020? Did you know that six separate glaciers in the Antarctic ice sheet are now in a state of unstoppable melting that will lead to a rise in sea levels of about four feet. That sea level will lead to floods that will inundate millions of acres of land, displace some 204 million people, and destroy much of the rice-growing regions of Asia. The tragic results of a potato famine are well known in sparsely populated Ireland but the potato famine will pale in comparison to the results of a coming rice famine in densely populated Asia. There will be an incalculable and devastating increase in world poverty and hunger due to climate change. A quick scan of your morning paper will alert you to the extent of the pandemic of violence throughout the world. We read of heightened physical and sexual violence against women and children, of violence against gays and lesbians, against people of colour, against the homeless, against the poor and vulnerable. We read of gang violence, drug violence, street violence, a veritable pandemic of violence. Our papers have recently been filled with the horrors of State- and Church-sponsored violence against unwed mothers

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and their babies, provoked by the Catholic Church's refusal to understand or address human sexuality in a healthy, holistic way. We read also of so many wars and rumors of wars that very few ever bother to report the number of maimed and dead they produce.

The pandemics of poverty and violence are unlike the covid-19 pandemic in that they are caused, not by some runaway virus but by evil human actions. Like covid-19, however, they can be vaccinated against, not by some expensively-produced vaccine that will place cure beyond the reach of the poorest countries and peoples who need it most but by the conversion of humans from morally evil to good actions. That, you say, is easier said than done, and you are right. That will take not a simple jab or two in the arm but a determined, concerted, and ongoing program. Good Jesuit that he is, Pope Francis offers such a program in his new book entitled *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*. His proposed program is the well-known Jesuit three-step program: see, judge, act.

We first need to see, we need to open our eyes and our hearts to see our world, not the big, wide world that we actually cannot really see but the small, narrow world in which we live and can see what is going on. Seeing the big, wide world can be like a flood that overwhelms and drowns us in depression and inaction, like the biblical flood against which Noah built his ark. Really seeing our small, narrow world can convince us that we already have in our hands the required vaccine against the pandemics of hunger and violence, namely, do something. If the coronavirus pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we are intelligent and dedicated enough to do something to combat it and its outcomes. We have all marveled at and admired the caretakers, the health care workers, the hospital staffs, nurses, and doctors, who have risked, and sometimes given, their own lives to save the lives of others. They are heroes we say. Many of them are more than heroes, they are Christians proclaiming with Christ "I came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45). They have not been reckless, they did not seek death and did their best to protect themselves against it, but they worked to save the lives of others at the risk of losing their own. They are outstanding exemplars and witnesses for us, teaching us that we can do something against pandemics, even when we think we are helpless.

The coronavirus pandemic has heightened and exposed both the pandemics of poverty and violence. It has provided a window to clearly see these other pandemics, which have existed in the larger world perspective but have not always been evident in our small world perspective. People have lost their jobs and incomes, and many are threatened with the loss of the homes they worked so hard to acquire. They are living under a stress that is a new

and seemingly incurable disease for them. Some, who have never before faced this situation, need food to feed their families; some need shelter from the winter cold and, in the global south, some need shelter from the relentless and desiccating sun. Some, who have faced this situation regularly in their lives, need support as never before. Some, overwhelmed by the anxiety and stress, have taken to violence against their families; others, in the search for the means to survive, are driven to aggravated assault against those who appear to possess those means. We live in a time of great trial, but again we have exemplars and witnesses, this time not only healthcare workers but also ordinary people like ourselves, our neighbors, who seeing the need and judging that they can do something about it are acting to help their neighbours. Some are providing the hungry with food, others are offering shelter and whatever financial support they can, and still others are providing neighborly support against the anxiety and the stress. If we can see some of our ordinary neighbours making a difference in the presently heightened pandemics, then surely we can see that we too can do something to make even a small difference.

Pope Francis lists three ways of escaping reality that prevent us from seeing, all of which set up roadblocks to any helpful action. The first is *narcissism*, excessive self-love or concern exclusively with one's own self. For the narcissist, an action is good only if it is good for her/him and bad if it is any way bad for her/him, irrespective of its effect for others. Narcissism can cast me as the principal victim in any pandemic, thereby blocking out concern for others. Narcissism is characteristic of the so-called "me generation" and ignores the reality of everyone and everything else around me. Narcissism, it is to be noted, is *extreme*, individualistic self-love not to be confused with the measured and altruistic self-love that is good and necessary for one's own and others' human flourishing. Jesus' commandment to love our neighbours as *ourselves* is a commandment first to love ourselves, but not in the narcissistic extreme that excludes our neighbors. The second roadblock is *discouragement* that robs people of the courage to undertake an action and deters them from helping others. Discouragement can so blind us to the possibilities of what we can do in a situation that we see only the impossibilities of what we cannot do and get completely cut off from the reality and people around us. It is probable that many of us have been tempted to discouragement in the face of the three pandemics under discussion and it is certain that many of those most directly affected by them have yielded to it, reducing their capacity to react against it. The third roadblock to positive action is *depression*, a psychological condition characterized by a sense of hopelessness in the face of challenging situations.

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Depression is often accompanied by discouragement and paralysis when action is called for. Again, many of us have probably been tempted to depression when faced with the enormity of the three pandemics, but we have also been encouraged to hopefulness and action by the example of the ordinary people we see doing what they can to overcome them.

A TIME TO JUDGE AND TO ACT

After seeing and discerning the actual reality in our world today, we then have to judge what action we can take. After centuries of reflection on how the followers of Christ are to live in the world, the Catholic Church's social teaching offers principles for reflection which, in turn, offer criteria for judgment and Christian action. We mention first the principle of the *common good*, the principle that demands that, when we act, we act for the good of people as a whole. The common good in the abstract is the good we all share in the world as fellow creatures of the one creator God; in the concrete, it is the goods we share in common and should, therefore, be used and protected for all. We think of our environment, the land, air, and water which God creates for the benefit of all and how it is now severely threatened by what is broadly called climate change. We think also of the human rights to food and shelter. Our lands are being poisoned by pesticides, our air is being poisoned by toxic gases, to a large extent gases from our cars, and water from melting ice masses is threatening to inundate large areas of the world's land and the people who live in it. The loss of the human rights to food and shelter accompanies the loss of land and, as always, those most threatened are the poor. Seeing this situation and judging the gravity of its threat to the common good and even to human existence itself, we cannot avoid the judgment that something must be done to protect our environment and the common good before it is too late. Fifty-five years ago, the head of the American Petroleum Institute spoke of the dangers of pollution to our environment and warned that time was running out to save the world's people from its catastrophic consequences. If he were to judge today, he would have to judge that in some parts of the world time has already run out. We must read the "signs of the times" and see the reality of our world now, judge what we can do in our small, narrow world to protect it, and act accordingly. That action is as much a moral obligation as getting vaccinated against covid-19 today. Tomorrow may be too late.

Closely allied to the principle of the common good is the principle of *solidarity*, which recognizes and demands the interrelationship and interdependence of all human beings. That interrelationship

has two profound roots: we are all, first, creatures of the same Creator-God and, therefore, sisters and brothers of one another and we are all, second, created equally human. We *are*, therefore, our brother's and sister's keepers. The responsibility for all our neighbors applies to both individuals and nations. Individually, we are to facilitate the common good by sharing our gifts, talents, and resources with the needy. Nationally, while poorer societies work toward development for the betterment of their citizens, wealthier nations are to help them in this endeavour by sharing equitably with them their greater resources. We could have learned this solidarity long ago from Jesus, the unique Son of God, who taught explicitly that "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister" (Matt 12:50; see Mark 3:35), but we ignored and ignore him. We could have learned it also from our indigenous sisters and brothers, but we sinfully judged them to be "savages" and ignored them too. Today, we could still learn solidarity from them and from all the Covid caretakers who daily manifest it in their actions. We could also learn from them that our interrelationship as humans and as believers in the one God means that we have obligations to one another, to "practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1 Peter 4:9), to provide care for one another, to raise one another out of poverty, to provide shelter for the homeless and all those who have been the victim of violence. Solidarity is a concept mysterious to anyone of the me-generation. It is well-known to and highly valued by Popes John Paul II and Francis who both teach that world peace is a work of solidarity.

Solidarity is balanced by another principle, the principle of *subsidiarity* or *participatory justice* that recognizes and respects the autonomy of others to work out their own destiny and steps in to help in that project *only* when it is necessary. We are to work not only for but also with the poor and vulnerable. In 1931, Pope Pius XI taught that "it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and a disturbance of right order to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies" (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 79). This teaching applies not only to collectivities or nations but also to individuals of whatever state in life and empowers them to contribute whatever help they can to their neighbors in need. It also confronts, challenges, and seeks to overcome social structures that limit or frustrate these efforts. The principle of subsidiarity excludes any attempt to turn aid into domination over other human beings, what Pope Francis calls "dead stones to be hurled at others" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 49).

This leads us to another Catholic social principle, the *preferential option for the poor*, which John Paul II describes as a "special form

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of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42). While all people must be treated with the dignity due to them as equal creatures of the same God, the poor and vulnerable, the economically and socially oppressed, the victims of social and physical violence have a unique and urgent claim to solidarity precisely because of their poverty and vulnerability. This means that we ought to have the poor and oppressed at the centre of our thinking and always have in mind how any of our actions will impact them. Pope Francis points out how easy it is in our modern, me-first world to “look at those who suffer without touching them” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 76). The preferential option for the poor excludes that approach. It offers a different and for many a new perspective, a new way of seeing, one in which we not only help the poor but also embrace them as sisters and brothers. That perspective is validated and strengthened by a final Catholic social principle, *the universal destination of goods*. When God created the earth and its goods, Christians believe, God intended them for the use of ‘adam, that is, all humanity. The Catholic Church consistently teaches that private property is a right, but it equally consistently teaches that the prime goods of life, land, air, water, food, shelter, labour, are created for the benefit of all. The scandalous economic fact that one percent of the world’s richest people owns fifty percent of the world’s financial wealth is a fact that cries out to the creator-God for justice, not for the transformation of the richest into the impoverished but of the impoverished into a more equitable share of the riches God intended for all.

CONCLUSION

We can see no more fitting conclusion to this *see-judge-act* essay than a retelling of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan that occupies a central place in Pope Francis’ recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. Jesus tells the parable in answer to the question “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by robbers who stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead at the side of the road. Along came a priest who saw the wounded man on the road, judged him to be someone beneath his dignity who would threaten his service in the temple and, therefore, not his neighbour. Ignoring the wounded man, he hurried on past and so too did a levite who came along later. Finally, along came a despised and hated Samaritan, who saw the man lying on the road, judged him to be a neighbour in need of help, and acted to bind up his wounds, to bring him to an inn, and to take care of him (v. 34). Having told the parable, Jesus asked “which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man

who fell among the robbers” and got the answer, “the one who showed mercy on him” (vv. 36-7). He then offered an instruction as reason for and conclusion to the parable: “*Go and do likewise*” (v.37). We borrow Jesus’ conclusion as conclusion to our dream of Christians in a time of pandemics: See, Judge, and Act as did the Samaritan.

Reading the Scriptures. Newman’s sermons are suffused with an ardent devotion to Jesus Christ. The most eminent student of his writings in our day – Father Ian Ker – explained using Newman’s own words that his aim had been “to present the person of Christ not in an ‘unreal way – as a mere idea or vision’, but as ‘Scripture has set Him before us in His actual sojourn on earth, in His gestures, words, and deeds’”. For us, perhaps the greatest lesson that we can take from Newman is the encouragement to stay close to Christ in the pages of the Gospels, which he called “the best book of meditations which can be, because it is divine”. By regularly reading the Gospels, we can build up in ourselves that “intimate, immediate dependence on Emmanuel, God with us”, that Newman called “almost the definition of a Christian”.

– KEVIN J. O’REILLY, ed. *Heart Speaks to Heart*. 2021 (Herefordshire: Gracewing Publishing) p.101.

Homilies for June (B)

Brenda Dolphin

Feast of Corpus Christi

June 6

Exodus 24: 3-8. Ps 115. Hebrews 9: 11-15. Mark 14: 12-16. 22-26

Today we celebrate the Body of Christ. When Jesus, on the night he was betrayed and before his passion and death, ate his last meal with his disciples, he instituted the Eucharist, “in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us”. He instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood, the memorial of his death and resurrection, a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of love, a Paschal banquet.

Jesus could leave us no greater gift of love than the gift of his own body and blood to nourish and strengthen us to live as Christians. This is a gift that goes far beyond anything we can comprehend.

As human beings we will always come up against the boundaries that will always separate us in the world: in spite of all the means of communication at our disposal each person remains “an island”. Each person has their own consciousness and cannot fuse with another. Human bodies can only touch externally. We are finite. Only God’s Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, only the Infinite Word can bring about the miracle of being in bodily form and yet transcending boundaries.

Jesus says Take, eat; this is my Body. Drink; this is my Blood

It is as if he continues: ‘take into yourselves what seems only to exist side by side with you; and just as I can transcend the boundaries, so let your boundaries disintegrate by taking me into yourselves. It is not that your self-awareness should dissolve into mine; you must not think you are to become I. But, in Me, God’s word made flesh you are destined to be freed from your narrow confines to lead a new life, together with others and share with them a life of *communio*, a life as befits members of my Body, nourished by the circulating blood of my all-embracing life’ [Von Balthasar].

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In asking his disciples to “do this in memory of me”, he was asking his disciples to be Eucharist for each other, for the world. An extraordinary gift to be lived out in the ordinary round of daily life. A transforming gift that enables us to be Christ bearers for the people that we meet in daily life. A breathtaking expression of love that calls for deeds of love in return.

The psalm that we heard provides us with an answer. ‘How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me? “A thanksgiving sacrifice I will make. I will call on the Lord’s name’.

When we remember in faith we are usually lead to a deep and heartfelt sense of gratitude. This remembering also consolidates our sense of identity which finds its deepest roots in Christ. He lived love to the point of sacrifice. We are at our best when our love initiates his Love, when we enter into the experience of dying that leads to new life. The Eucharist draws us inexorably into this pattern of death and resurrection.

The Blessed Sacrament allows us to express our *deepest gratitude* to God and confirms us in our identity as daughters and sons of God. In our Catholic tradition, hosts are kept in the tabernacle after Mass so that the Blessed Sacrament can be brought to the sick and dying outside of the Mass. The practice also makes possible Eucharistic Adoration. Because Christ himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, he is to be honoured with the worship of adoration. To visit the Blessed Sacrament is a proof of gratitude, an expression of love and a place where we can give expression to our desire to adore and thank Jesus our beloved Lord.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when the celebration of religious services was restricted, when the reception of Holy Communion was impossible and the nourishment derived from receiving Holy Communion reached starvation levels, how many people found peace, solace, joy and a renewal of resilience and hope through spending time in the restorative Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament?

During the Covid pandemic when people could not come into the physical presence of loved ones, when grandparents had to forego the hugs of grandchildren and children could not hug grandparents; when children could not see their friends or play with them for months on end; when zoom calls, helpful though they were, could not make up for the reality of physical presence, how much did our faith enable us to be grateful to Jesus for his continuous palpable Presence to us in the Blessed Sacrament?

This feast day reminds us once again of the extent and exquisite finesse of God’s untiring love for us in Christ Jesus. The celebration of Corpus Christi reminds us of the gift we have been given and we

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are challenged to look once again at the way in which we receive and cherish this gift which is beyond anything we could have imagined for ourselves.

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 13

Ezekiel 17:22 – 24. Ps. 91. 2 Cor. 5: 6-10. Mk 4: 26-34

Jesus had an extraordinary talent as a teacher. He was brilliant in his simplicity. He used examples from nature that surrounded him to teach truths that can affect us profoundly. Today, we have his example of the mustard seed. The point that Jesus wanted to make seems to be that from the tiniest beginning something great and strong can grow. The first reading from Ezekiel leads us along the same path. God took a shoot from the top of the tree and from this small beginning a noble cedar was born.

In both Jesus' parable and in Ezekiel not only did great oaks from little acorns grow (to use another metaphor) but these trees of humble beginnings offer shelter to birds and shade for human beings and animals. Something big and blessed came from very humble beginnings.

Jesus was using the parable to refer to the Kingdom of God to reveal why he came on earth. The Kingdom of God started with Jesus himself and then with the group of men and women whom he gathered around himself. A very humble motley group it would seem, in a very remote part of the world and yet the Church that Jesus founded has had explosive growth and development down through the ages. It has suffered many an effort to erase it from the face of the earth; it has disappeared from one part of the globe only to reappear ever more strongly somewhere else. Like the mustard seed or the majestic cedar, it has been a source of sustenance and shelter for those who have sought refuge within.

And why has this been so? Because it is God's work and God's Spirit has enabled it to form and reform as it navigates the ages.

What can we learn from Jesus teaching today?

1. Meister Eckhart a German mystic from the middle ages says: "The seed of God is in us. Given an intelligent and hardworking farmer it will thrive and grow up to God whose seed it is. Accordingly, its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, hazel seeds grow into hazel trees and the seed of God grows into God". The seed of God is planted in the heart of every human being. There is a movement in the heart of every human being that is something akin to the seed pushing its way up through the dark earth towards the light.
2. Do I recognize that the seed of God is in me? Do I try to respond

to that seed alive and working in me like the intelligent hard working farmer? Do I try each day to do what I see as God's will for me for this day? How do I nourish the seed? How do I tend and care for it?

3. Jesus said: "The kingdom of God is within you". As I tend and nourish the seed of God planted in my heart I contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God in the world, in the place I inhabit.

"Inch by inch and row by row I will make my garden grow"

One of the many good things that happened due to Covid 19 was the chance for us to get closer to nature. Many people took to tending gardens and window boxes and growing vegetables to put on the table. Some people were already experts at this but many more of us were just novices. We did learn what it takes to enable a seed to grow and we have enjoyed and had the pleasure of watching the fruits of our tending to them like the intelligent and hardworking farmer of M. Eckhart.

So the lesson we take from today as we realise that by surrendering to God at work in our lives we can, in the words of St Paul, be full of confidence because we know and are certain that God is in charge; we know that life not death will prevail and we know that our lives will have been worthwhile.

"To love and be loved is to feel the sun from both sides" (David Viscott)

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 20

Job 38:1.8-11. Ps 106. 2 Corinthians 5:14-17. Mark 4:35-41

The gospel today is one of the more gripping miracles that Jesus did in his lifetime. We could say that the scene of the calming of the storm by Jesus is a parable "in action" carrying with it a message that challenges all of us. When life's storms swirl around us, when we feel threatened and endangered, how do we handle and indeed overcome our fear and apprehension?

Why were you frightened? Do you have no faith?

In the situation presented, it would seem that the apostles had every right to be frightened. They were caught in one of those dreaded storms that suddenly erupt on the sea of Galilee. Theirs would seem a very normal reaction given their circumstances; finding themselves in a small boat, battered by a very treacherous sea, and a man asleep in the boat who could be helping them to keep afloat!

While his disciples are alarmed and desperate, Jesus is sleeping soundly, oblivious, serene and calm. It is the only time in the

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gospels that we see Jesus sleeping; obviously he was exhausted.

The storm, the stressful situation, rouses intense fear and terror in the disciples. At the same time however, the situation lays bare the lack of rootedness of their faith.

“Master do you not care? We are going down”. The disciples react by waking Jesus and having a “go” at him for not helping them in their obvious necessity.

When Jesus awakes, he turns firstly and calms the wind. The surging of the sea abates. In a sense he responds first to the more obvious source of their anxiety and discouragement. Then he turns to his disciples and asks a searching question: “why were you so terrified, why are you lacking in faith?”

At first reading this seems a strange question to ask but we know that everything Jesus says and does teaches.

Trusting in God is not for the faint-hearted

As in every parable the meaning of Jesus’ words and actions goes much deeper than meets the eye. The Greek translation for the word frightened used here is “why are you so timid”? The same word appears in the final passage of the Book of Revelation and is associated with cowardice. It is used to describe traitors to the faith, deceivers of every sort (Rev.21:8) who are also regarded as cowards. Lack of faith is associated with these people in Revelation and it appears in the words of Jesus to his disciples in this story;

“How is it that you have no faith”?

What we are led to understand in this situation is that the fear of the disciples is not only a physical fear in the face of a physical threat to their lives, but deeper still, it is also a deep seated fear of trusting themselves to Jesus. The disciples’ reaction to the storm reveals that they do not yet fully trust Jesus.

In this situation they assess their own resources, they realise they cannot manage and then fear envelops them. Up to this point their trust in Jesus was not put to the test. However, in this situation they are put to a very severe test, they were faced with the fact that the storm was beyond their control.

Unlike the mustard seed in the parable we read last Sunday, the disciples’ trust in Jesus was not deeply rooted and it needed this serious test to challenge them to look honestly at themselves. When we say yes to someone (Yes to Jesus, yes to a spouse, yes to a daunting task) we have to learn how to survive the test that will come from living out that “yes” whatever the cost.

Each one of us must learn to enter into the “storm” of fear. At some point in our lives we must learn to know the moment in which I take responsibility to look deeply into myself and realise that on my own I cannot cope.

If our recent collective experience of Covid 19 has not brought

home that message, then we haven't learnt anything worthwhile from the experience.

Coming to the point of recognizing that in a "storm" situation or indeed in any situation that I am not "going it alone" is a vital milestone in our lives. I believe Jesus is with me and I trust his power at work in me will see me through.

The Kingdom of God exists but it is not seen. Jesus sleeps in the boat but he is present and as a result there is no fear if we have truly entrusted ourselves to him. If we do not understand the hidden story of the Kingdom of God, we will never be able to understand that God in Jesus is present with us in all of our lives and especially in all the hidden and difficult moments of our living. God comes to us in the storm. He calls us to have faith in him but more than that to entrust ourselves completely to his gentle tender loving care.

So, a question for us arising from this story is; "how do we understand the manner of Jesus' presence in our lives?"

This brings us to the ending of the story of the calming of the sea. The disciples were "filled with awe" at what Jesus had just done in their presence. A sense of reverence and esteem crept into their hearts that displaced the earlier accusation of "not caring".

We know that the opposite of "Fear" in the gospel is not presumption or irresponsibility but a reverential respectfulness, a sense of awe for the great tenderness with which God is close to us. Once this is experienced, fear, understood as timidity disappears and a calm serenity, a deep seated joy takes its place. We have the sense that there is somebody greater than ourselves present; that the little things that we live through bring us to a reality greater than our experience, to the taste of a presence that is holy, tender, affectionate, capable of never leaving us. This is surely a no fail recipe for "calming the storm"!

There was a book in vogue many years ago by Fr Raymond O.C.S.O. entitled:

"Relax and Rejoice for the Hand at the Tiller is Firm" (1968). The title sums up neatly the message of this Gospel story.

"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails" (William Ward).

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 27

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2: 23-24. Ps 29. 2 Corinthians 8:7.9.13-15.

Mark 5:21-43

The readings today once again draw us into the world of faith in Jesus and how he enables us to understand a little more deeply that God is a God of life and not of death.

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The first reading from the Book of Wisdom is clear and explicit – death is not “God’s doing” in fact *being* is what is important – “to be – for this is what he created all”.

We are more than meets the eye

We all know that what we say and what we do tells a lot about us but we are also very aware that our words and actions do not constitute the whole of us. Who we are, who we are called to be are aspects of our lives that are even more important than our more visible words and actions.

These aspects draw us into the mystery of life, the mystery of God and the mystery of who we are ourselves. Thomas Merton in his book “Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander”, describes this mysterious element within each of us as “le point vierge”, the virginal point in all of us, untouchable by ourselves or by others and known only to God.

It follows that we cannot fully understand ourselves and certainly no other human being can fully understand us either. A practical consequence for us is that we can never judge another person. We cannot know the whole story!

The Gospel attests to Jesus’ power over death, to his constant desire to heal, to uplift and to strengthen, especially those who cannot support and help themselves.

Our *Gospel* reading today tells us of two healing miracles performed by Jesus for two women. Two women in very different circumstances.

Like so many other women who formed part of Jesus’ life these women are not given a name. Others include; the woman at the well, the woman taken in adultery, the Syrophenician woman, the woman in Simon’s house, the widow at Naim, the women on the road to Calvary and now we have the woman who suffered from blood hemorrhaging and the daughter of Jairus.

Yet, all these women, together with those who are named, show a strength and tenacity of faith and trust that takes one’s breath away.

The two stories - the healing of the woman who was hemorrhaging for twelve years and the twelve-year-old daughter of the leader of the synagogue, Jairus, are linked not only by the narrative but also by the number twelve which is a number of biblical significance.

The Gospel Narrative

Jesus is approached by Jairus who pleads with him to come and lay his hand on his daughter who is at death’s door. Obviously, all other means of restoring her to health had been exhausted. Jesus agrees and starts out in the company of Jairus to go to his house.

The power of touch in the healing process; “*Who touched my clothes*”? *Who touched me?*

Jesus and Jairus are surrounded by a jostling crowd. In the middle of the crowd is a woman who for twelve years had suffered from a blood hemorrhage. She had spent all her money on doctors and healers and none could really help her. Moreover, she had spent the last twelve years in social isolation because her illness was deemed unclean and everybody, women included, would have given her a wide berth as she passed by. In her innocence she thought that by simply touching the hem of Jesus' cloak she would be healed and that then she could slip away unnoticed, secretly healed.

Things didn't happen quite like that. Instead in an action that was unusual for him, Jesus challenged her to step out of the crowd and to confess what she had done. As the story unfolds we recognize what Jesus was doing; he was challenging her to step out of her comfort zone, her timidity of "hidden faith" and to publicly confess the power and mercy of God. Her faith was being tested (just as the disciples in the boat during the storm at sea were challenged) to truly believe in and trust God, to proclaim this openly and her reward went way beyond what she had hoped for or expected.

She, the isolated one, the unclean one, the disrespected one was now being addressed in the most respectful of terms, an address that Jesus offered to no-one else "My daughter, your faith has restored you to health".

Secondly her faith was confirmed in public and Jesus made it clear that it was *her faith* and not the 'magical' act of touching the hem of his cloak that called out his healing power.

Jesus meets all where they are at.

This miracle, happening as it did while Jesus was on the way to the scene of another serious illness (callout) did not deter him from taking the time to heal and restore the woman who suffered from the hemorrhage.

So we learn from this that Jesus meets each person where they are in the present moment, and has time for all, no matter how unimportant or important the person may consider herself to be or how great or insignificant the situation is deemed to be.

Jairus' faith is tested

Jairus, must have been fretting that precious time was passing and Jesus had not reached his house. In fact, when, while still on the way home, he got the news that the young girl had died he made an effort to release Jesus from the commitment he had made to come to his house. Jesus calmly told Jairus to have faith that "she was only asleep".

Once again, through the healing power of faith and the human power of touch, Jesus took the girl by the hand and told her to get up, which she did and resumed normal life just as if she had been asleep.

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Covid-19 has highlighted for us how important *touch* is for us as human beings, how important it is to feel close to others and not isolated. How important health is and, last but not least, how vitally important our *faith and trust* in God is for all of us to face the demands of life and to remain strong not simply physically but emotionally, mentally and spiritually as well.

“Even if you are dealt a bad hand in life, with courage and faith you can play it well! (Anon)

The gifts that last. When God asked Solomon *What would you like me to give you?* as he began to rule his people after his father David’s death, the young king answered, *give me a heart to understand.* And God we’re told, was pleased with his request and the fact that he hadn’t asked for wealth or power and promised him *a heart wise and shrewd as none before you have had and as none will have after you.* The wisdom given to Solomon then is the pearl of great price to be treasured above all others.

– PAUL CLAYTON-LEA and MARIA FLOOD, *Pass it on!, Ronan Drury 1924-2017 Selected Writings.* 2019. Naas Printing Ltd. p. 87.

New Books

Approaches to Theological Ethics: Sources, Traditions, Visions. Maureen Junker-Kenny. London: T&T Clark. 2019. ISBN: 978-0-5676-8296-3.

This is a sophisticated textbook which would enrich any syllabus in moral theology or Christian ethics. Informed by decades in the classroom, Junker-Kenny has managed to write with accessibility without sacrificing intellectual ambition. No reader will be left in doubt as to the complexity involved in any ethical reflection within the Christian tradition, but they will be further equipped for that task.

Across three sections, Junker-Kenny considers the foundational sources of Christian ethics, particular traditions of Christian ethics, and before a conclusion, some visions for the role of Christian ethics. The first section considers four sources – Scripture, tradition, anthropology, and engagement with other disciplines – and would justify the book’s existence on its own. Without wanting to cast shade on authors who have compiled similar texts for use in the classroom, they are often structured in a flat-footed fashion. This book can still be dipped into – and perhaps more importantly, segmented for class readings – but it has an elegant construction which communicates the layered task facing the Christian ethicist. In each of the foundational sources, conversations are established between the different positions intending to draw the student into dialogue. These discussions are simple without being simplistic. This is very hard to do and very useful to have.

The second section considers virtue ethics, the role of worship as the location for Christian ethics, natural law conversations, feminist ethics, and autonomous ethics. One of the features of this work is how the references extensively engage German-speaking sources. I suspect most theologians working in this area would include a discussion of liberalism, which is a topic around which sources proliferate. The chapter on “autonomous ethics within a Christian faith perspective” goes in a different direction, charting a different line from Kant and it would serve as an excellent introduction to that field.

One of the things I enjoyed about this work is how it never tempts the reader to imagine the solution to the complexity of the task of Christian ethics is to achieve some mythical view from nowhere. Indeed, the book concludes with a reflection on how Christian ethicists might speak to wider society considering how we are located in relation to Athens and to Jerusalem and in a secular age (pp. 226-232). Her proposal that our

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theologically-informed positions must be translated is depicted as a sign of the strength of our tradition, rather than a compromise that a marginal group is forced to undertake to get a hearing. Thought-provoking suggestions like that are found throughout the book, which makes it not just an educational experience, but an enjoyable one too.

Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, Dublin

KEVIN HARGADEN

Real Presence: What Does It Mean and Why Does It Matter? Timothy P. O'Malley and McGrath Institute for Church Life. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press. 2021. ISBN 9781646800551.

Ten Ways to Pray: A Catholic Guide for Drawing Closer to God. Carolyn Pirtle and McGrath Institute for Church Life. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press. 2021. ISBN 9781646800575.

These recently published books are the first two in a six-volume series entitled *Engaging Catholicism* published under the curatorship of the McGrath Institute for Church Life. The Institute's mission is to connect the intellectual life and resources of the university with the pastoral life of the Church in America and the spiritual needs of its members. Both books have an introductory preface from the director of the Institute, Dr. John C. Cavadini, a former member of the International Theological Commission. He expands the understanding of this mission in light of the two books, and indeed the series. The series seeks to explore doctrinal matters and to offer them in such a way as to be of value and practical use to Catholics, those who regularly populate the pews and those who might be either seekers or questioners, or both. Doctrines, Cavadini suggests, 'are the normative way of handing on the mysteries of our faith. Doctrines make us able to pick up a mystery, carry it around, and hand it to someone else. Doctrines, studied and understood, allow us to know we *are* handing on *this* mystery and not some substitute' (xii). If theology is, as Anselm says *fides quarens intellectum*, (faith seeking understanding) then these volumes are a very good place to begin. They will be of use to individuals, parish and pastoral groups, catechists and church leaders. Neither books are particularly long, ideal for an individual to read and reread. The brevity of their content does indicate the academic abilities of the authors to produce a wealth of thought and theory in a limited space. There is a great deal packed tightly into each volume. It might be suggested also that this series is very much in keeping with the Church's aspirations for New Evangelisation as found in various papal teachings, synodal documents and among the pages of the 2020 *Directory for Catechesis*, where the evangelising ministry of the Church, 'has made use of various *forms*, so that this ministry may be carried out in the different areas and expressions of life' (#37).

Timothy O'Malley is the Institute's Director of Education, Academic Director at the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy and editor of the *Church*

Life Journal and seems admirably placed to write the first in the series, *Real Presence: What Does It Mean and Why Does It Matter*. He sees the relationship between doctrine and practice as a 'form of life' (vx). The question 'What is the intelligible content of the claim that which appears to the senses to be bread and wine is, in fact, Christ's body and blood?' posed on page 63 is one that O'Malley aims to answer. The doctrine of real presence and transubstantiation is not merely something that Catholics must believe, but it also something that they must love. The absence of full knowledge of a mystery of our faith is not merely a void or an emptiness, but something that is filled with love of a God, who in the words of Betjeman, 'lives today in bread and wine.' In the words of Fr. Thomas Reese, quoted in the book, "I think we should humbly accept it as a mystery and not pretend we understand it' (2). The book is in five chapters, beginning with an exploration of the current decline in belief in the real presence in the United States, a fact that is probably similar in Europe. It is also written in a time of pandemic when even the most ardent believers have been unable to receive Holy Communion. This absence has brought home to many how much they both took their daily or weekly communion for granted, and how much they missed it now. The second chapter attends to the subject of real presence in the scriptures, beginning beautifully in the ancient city of York and the tradition of the medieval mystery plays for the Feast of Corpus Christi. In chapter three he introduces the often-neglected Fathers of the Church and explains their eucharistic theology. It is a rich seam and one that many will be unfamiliar with, but he writes in a manner than allows an easy access into the treasures of Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons, Cyril of Jerusalem and others. In chapter four he focuses on some of the doctrinal controversy around the Eucharist. Mention of Aquinas' great Eucharistic hymn *Lauda Sion* is a good reminder to the reader to search out this and similar hymns (*Pange Lingua* and *Adoro Te Devoto* both also penned by Aquinas) which would be an admirable accompaniment to this book. The final chapter brings the study up to date and offers some of the theology of three medieval female theologians and adorers, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Mechthild of Hackeborn and St. Gertrude of Helfta and then three women from the twentieth century, Flannery O'Connor, Simone Weil and Dorothy Day. There is more than adequate referencing at the end, which will introduce readers to works to continue their reading.

Carolyn Pirtle is Program Director at the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy and the author of *Ten Ways to Pray: A Catholic Guide for Drawing Closer to God*. This book offers what might be considered new and stimulating ways to pray but are in fact grounded in the history and tradition of the Church. The ability to weave the practice of prayer into the tradition of the Church is a great strength of the book and she quotes a great reservoir of Christian writers from Theresa of Avila to Caryll Houselander along with passages from scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It is perhaps in prayer that we tend to remove our theological hat and put on our devotional one. In the pages here it is very obvious that rather than

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it being a case of either theology or devotion, it can be both theology and devotion. The book opens with an essay, *Introduction to Christian Prayer* and describes how one prays and the purpose of prayer, which (categories aside) is ultimately bound up in the notion of relationship and response. Pirtle states, ‘the beauty of Christian prayer is its capaciousness: within the ten methods that will be discussed in this book, there are as many paths to prayer as there are people who pray, because God call each person individually to a relationship that is unrepeatable’ (14). Along with relationship and response are words such as *practice, perseverance, and communion*. This journey of prayer experienced by a pilgrim people does not end this side of the grave. These pages will not make us perfect in our prayer, but as she reminds us, ‘prepares us for the day when we will be with God forever in heaven’ (16). It is the striving towards perfection that our lives make and attain meaning, and our prayer-life become an enriching and life-giving practice. Each of the ten chapters explores a different form of prayer – praying with experience, beauty, silence, action, etc., as well as in the liturgy, with devotions, and with the scriptures. Each offers a brief explanation of the form of prayer, why someone might use that form, and where and how it can be used.

In conclusion, another writer mentioned by Pirtle is Romano Guardini, from whom she quotes the following which I thought particularly apposite, “faith is a prerequisite for prayer...Prayer can only spring from living faith. On the other hand – and this completes the circle – faith can remain alive only when nourished by prayer...Prayer is the most fundamental expression of faith” (17). This sums up the two volumes very well. Even if faith is hanging on by a thread, especially in the times we are living in, the ability of prayer to nurture that faith, that response to God’s searching out, finding and loving us can only but be bolstered by a deeper understanding of the truths of our faith and by those men and women of faith and prayer who have gone before us and left pebbles on the path in order that we might follow. Both books are an enormous credit to the work of the writers and the aspirations of the McGrath Institute and will be of benefit to individuals and groups, lay, religious and clerical who read them.

St Patrick’s College, Maynooth

JOHN-PAUL SHERIDAN

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AUSTEN IVEREIGH:

*Pope Francis' vision for the Church
in the post-Covid world*

GERRY O'HANLON, SJ:

*Mapping a Way Forward
for the Catholic Church in Ireland*

More details to follow

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