

NOVATE
VOBIS
NOVALE

FURROW

The

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

+ *Brendan Leahy*
Making the Risen Jesus
Visible

Andrew McMahon
The Mother and Baby
Homes' Report

Tyrone Grima
The Love that Dares not
Bless its Rings

Johanna Merry
Forgiveness and The
Legacy of Abuse

Seán O'Sullivan
The Syrophoenician
Woman (II)

July/August 2021
€4.50 (inc. VAT)

The Furrow

Help secure a bright future for

The Furrow

by remembering the journal in your will,

or

by making a donation.

The entire journal is available online.

	Articles	
+ Brendan Leahy	Making the Risen Jesus Visible: The Church of Kenosis	391
Andrew McMahon	The Mother and Baby Homes' Report	399
Tyrone Grima	The Love that Dares not Bless its Rings	408
Johanna Merry	Forgiveness and the Legacy of Abuse	413
Seán O'Sullivan	Restoring her Voice [II]: <i>The Syrophoenician Woman as an icon for enlarged thinking</i>	419
John-Paul Sheridan	Homilies for August (B)	429
Tomás Surlis	Homilies for September (B)	434
	News and Views	
Michael C. McGuckian, SJ	The Marriage Conundrum	443
	Featured Review	
Noel O'Sullivan	Like a Tree Cut Back	445
	New Books	
Ronan M. Sheehan	My Story by Jesus of Nazareth	449
Neil Xavier O'Donoghue	Fifty Catholic Churches to See Before You Die and Many More Worth a Detour	450
P.J. McAuliffe	Saint Ignatius of Loyola	450
Tomás Surlis	Walking with Ignatius	451

The Furrow

A pastoral monthly founded 1950.

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

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

Editor: Pádraig Corkery, St Patrick's College, Maynooth. E-mail: editor.furrow@spcm.ie (for editorial enquiries, typescripts etc).

Rates: Single copy €4.50 (including VAT) and postage: Rep. of Ireland €2/Elsewhere €2.90). Annual Subscription: Republic of Ireland €75.00. Northern Ireland and Great Britain Stg£70.00/€75.00. Foreign: €90.00/\$106/Stg£84.00. Student rate €50.00/\$56.00/Stg£46.00. If you wish to avail of our *online* subscription please follow this link: <https://thefurrow.ie/register/> Subscriptions are payable in advance to the Secretary, The Furrow, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Telephone (01) 7083741; Fax (01) 7083908 (Codes: National 01; International +353-1). E-mail: furrow.office@spcm.ie Website: www.thefurrow.ie. Subscriptions can be paid by cheque or online through The Furrow website.

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

Back numbers and advertising rates available from the Secretary.

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

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

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

Making the Risen Jesus Visible: The Church of Kenosis

+ Brendan Leahy

When we are facing difficulties in life, be they financial, health, or relationship- related, it is a wise counsel to try and name the issues. Diagnosis, prognosis and treatment go together. Pope Francis often helps us name what the Church is living through at this time. For instance, speaking to the Roman Curia in December 2019, his straight talking certainly hit home: “Brothers and sisters, *Christendom no longer exists!* Today we are no longer the only ones who create culture, nor are we in the forefront or those most listened to. We need a change in our pastoral mindset ...”.

The Pope’s point was clear: Christian faith is no longer the presupposition of social life. We can no longer claim, as we might once have done, that Christian practices and norms are the way things are done around here. Today faith is often rejected, derided and marginalized.

So what are we, the Church-People of God in Ireland, to do? I’m not going to claim there are easy answers to that question. Nevertheless, in a talk to Bishops during the 2019 World Youth Meeting in Panama, Pope Francis spoke of the need for the Church to be a “Church of Kenosis”. Perhaps we can find here a direction of travel.

The word “kenosis” is the Greek word for “emptying” and we read of it in St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians in reference to Jesus Christ “emptying himself”, taking the form of a servant, humbling himself and becoming obedient, even unto death” (Phil 2:7). Quoting a homily given by Oscar Romero, Pope Francis reminded his listeners in Panama that Christ’s kenosis is not a thing of the past. God in Christ is still at work in the Church in his self-emptying compassionate outreach. It is important to recall this theme of Christ’s kenosis precisely when circumstances speak of darkness and woundedness, impoverishment and restrictions.

As the Catholic Church in Ireland sets out on Synodal pathway,

+ Brendan Leahy is Bishop of Limerick. He can be contacted at reception@limerickdiocese.org

THE FURROW

the theme of “kenosis” provides us with our GPS. We will, of course, need to marshal actively all our own personal experiences, intellectual reflection and resourceful ideas, but it will be salutary to realise that it is not by being “full of ourselves” that we hear God’s call, but rather by entering into this dynamic of Christ-like “emptying ourselves” that we find ourselves. Let’s explore this a little more.

JESUS’ KENOSIS

We know that the proclamation of the Kingdom was central in Jesus’ public life and ministry. He actively promoted and progressed it as intimately linked with himself. With his strong sense of self-identity, Jesus gave his all, heart, mind and strength, to proclaiming his missionary programme (cf Lk 4:16-20). But we also know that throughout his ministry Jesus lived “kenotically”. He knew, in other words, how to put himself “off-centre” in relating to the One he called “Abbà”, in listening to the Spirit guiding him, and in drawing close to others. In Heb 10: 5-7 we read: ‘when Christ came into the world, he said ... “I have come to do your will, O God”.’ Throughout his life he lived this self-emptying as the base note of his existence in love of God and neighbour: “no one has a greater love that to lay down one’s life ...”, “not my will but yours be done ...”, “those who lose life find it ...”.

Jesus’ kenotic lifestyle culminates in Calvary with its cry of abandonment: “why have you abandoned me?”. The devotional listing of that cry as one of the “seven last words” of the Crucified Christ can risk sheltering us from the shocking fact that the words of this question “why” are the only words of Jesus’ dying hour that both Mark and Matthew’s Gospels present us.¹

Let’s notice *two* dynamics at play in this culminating moment of apparent darkness and failure. On the one hand, the way of the Cross, which in reality had started well before Passover week, is a crescendo-ing procession of external circumstances emptying Jesus of so much that had been significant for him – the vast numbers of contacts he had made, his reputation as a wonder worker, the disciples he had called one by one, the community he had formed day by day, the simple structures he had established (a fund held in common by “The Twelve”, patterns of prayer and rest, missionary initiatives), his mother and those few supporters left. The Temple guards came and took him, Pilate condemned him, soldiers mocked him, ultimately, even the God with whom he had a unique relationship seemed gone.

1 See Gerard Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross: A Biblical and Theological Study* (New York: Paulist, 1987).

MAKING THE RISEN JESUS VISIBLE

Faced with these adversities, Jesus remained true to the mission and the message he was sent to communicate. He stands before Pilate as Truth incarnate. And yet he expressed this in a disposition of humble self-giving, the expression of his self-emptying. He didn't cling desperately to possess what he was being dispossessed of. He didn't engage in an aggressive defence by attacking (Luke's Gospel takes this up in another way by depicting Jesus saying "Father, forgive them ..."). Faithful "to the end", Jesus made of the external circumstances that were "emptying" him of so much the culminating moment of his internal faithfulness to his mission. In freedom and love he "empties himself" in service of God and humanity.

Others may have seen themselves as taking his life, but he had already clarified, that "I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn 10:18). He had been sent by the Father to identify with the human condition and now is drinking the cup of our human condition to the dregs; by the power of the Spirit (Heb 9:14) he still goes forth in love for the Father and for us.

And that is where the Church really began as Jesus Christ then rises as community in the power of the Spirit.²

STARTING AFRESH FROM THE BEGINNING

Returning to our situation of the Church in Ireland, it is obvious we are in a moment of massive transformation. Words written shortly after the Second Vatican Council by the future Pope, then theologian, Joseph Ratzinger are relevant to us today. Mindful of the need to be cautious in our prognostications, he wrote that the Church of the future won't be born of slogans of the day or howls of criticism. Something deeper is needed. We'll need to start afresh:

From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge – a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so it will lose many of her social privileges. In contrast to an earlier age, it will be seen much more as a voluntary society, entered only by free decision ... The Church will be a more spiritual Church, not presuming upon a political mandate, flirting as little with the Left as with the Right.

2 See Sandra Schneider, *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013).

THE FURROW

This process won't be straightforward or easy. The Church, however, is a long-haul process and new moments will open up for her. Ratzinger contended that in a context of future loneliness that will arise like a pandemic in the Western world (we think of the UK's appointment of a minister for loneliness), the Church's true nature as a community of mutual being-for-one-another will be recognised as a beacon of hope:

It will be hard going for the Church ... It will make her poor and cause her to become the Church of the meek ... But when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church. Men in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely. If they have completely lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty. Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.³

CHURCH KENOSIS IN IRELAND

That the Church finds itself starting afresh from the beginning is not something new in Ireland. The island has a long history with deep roots in Christianity and wide extension in mission. The ruins scattered across our landscape recall for us previous moments when the Church went through experiences of "emptying", "kenosis": the collapse of the monastic system, the bewilderment of Reformation, the devastation of famine. Different eras have witnessed different configurations of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

One small example. Ardpatrik in south Limerick is a tiny parish in beautiful surroundings. It's hard to believe today that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries an impressive monastery with fine buildings and a round Tower stood there as second in importance only to Armagh. Armagh had founded a league of ecclesiastical centres associated with St. Patrick and Ardpatrik became the chief centre in Munster. Archbishops of Armagh visited it and some Armagh Coarbs are buried there. *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*, Times change and we are changed with them.

We have mentioned above how in the case of Jesus we can speak of his "emptying" happening at two levels: external circumstances and his voluntary laying down of his life. While the comparison, of course, is not precise,⁴ nevertheless it is possible for us to affirm

3 *Faith and the Future* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), p. 117.

4 See further on this theme, Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Kenosis of the Church?" in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), pp. 125-138.

that in the case of the Church, Christ's Spouse, there are also two inter-connected levels of "kenosis" going on. The first consists in those circumstances and events that "empty" us of the ballast that is not for our time. The second is our own missionary desire to "empty" ourselves in service. Recognising these two dynamics can provide us with a navigation map for today.

BEING EMPTIED

The external circumstances of how the Church is being made "empty" are easily named. Suffice to mention *three* headings.

The tragedy of abuse and inappropriate behaviour at various levels has scandalised many, knocking church leaders and personnel off pedestals and indeed collapsing the very pedestal of faith in many. Government reports, daily news coverage and repeated reference to a very dark chapter of our story has certainly disabused the Church in Ireland of any self-glorifying self-image. Derek Scally describes the road ahead as "clearing the car crash in our collective minds, a pile-up of pride and shame that has left many of us silent, struggling to deal with a conflicting narrative we simply cannot process".⁵

A second feature of a kenosis dynamic in the Church today is an increasing institutional poverty. One of the great desires of Pope John XXIII was of "a Church of the poor". Poverty we know can take many forms. The Church in Ireland is experiencing an institutional poverty. We lack institutional personnel, financial resources are decreasing, the volunteer network – as in all levels of society – is weakening. Once we relied on the strengths of numbers, institutions, and structures. Today, what's being asked of us is authentic relationships, a pastoral ministry that "generates" life, and the building up of communities of belonging.

Secularisation is another obvious way the Church in Ireland is experiencing a "kenosis". Already in 1974 in an article in the *Furrow*, Michael Paul Gallagher pointed to a growing atheism 'Irish-style' expressed in feelings of withdrawal and alienation from the Church by then increasingly inhabited only externally. In the years that followed Michael Paul Gallagher would note how in the wider Western world, a secular marginalisation of faith has developed with religion subtly ignored as unimportant. Ireland is certainly not immune from that. We are being asked not so much to teach who God is but to show "where" God is to be found.

5 Derek Scally, *The Best Catholics in the World: The Irish, the Church and the End of a Special Relationship* (London: Penguin, 2021), p. 300.

THE FURROW

SELF-EMPTYING

While circumstances have “emptied” the Church, we also recognise that, in imitation of Jesus, we are also being called to choose to “empty” ourselves. Christ in the Church wants us to continue his kenosis of compassion. The temptation as we face adversity is to withdraw into ourselves and become self-referential, looking into the mirror and worrying. Instead, this is the time, as Pope Francis shows us so clearly, to “go out”, avoiding self-absorption and being a Church of kenosis in love of God and in service of others.

The Gospel with its missionary mandate presents us with an art of loving service that pushes us outwards not in proselytising zeal but in evangelising deed and word. The Son of God didn’t wait for problems to be resolved on earth before coming among us. He cured the sick and brought compassion to the suffering. Even in the face of adversity he continued to speak words of life and offer horizon and vision to the blind. His love was universal. As he put it, God “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45). He made himself a neighbour to all. Right to his last breath. Luke’s Gospel presents us with an active Jesus on the Cross forgiving, and offering hope. The Fourth Gospel presents the dying Jesus still working to establish the first cell of the Church: Mary and John (cf. Jn 19: 26-27), an image suggested in iconic form to the Irish Church in the Marian apparition at Knock.

LIVING THREE COMMUNIONS

In a Vatican document published last year on the topic of parish and pastoral conversion, we read how the parish is called to be “a sign of the permanent presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his People”.⁶ Not just the parish, of course. The whole Church is. Local faith communities – be they parish, diocese or smaller faith communities – aren’t just worshipping congregations. Rather, as members of the Church we find ourselves at all levels in “emptying” ourselves in outreach towards one another and towards others. It is the Church of kenosis lived out day by day as we journey to a new reality that lets the Risen Jesus be visible and act among and through us.

Of course, all of this is no simple task. The unique contours of our recent experience remain a challenge. To make our own St. Paul’s words “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20), we need to let *three* communions shape us.

6 Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church”, (20 August, 2020), n. 7.

a) *Communion with the Word of God.*

We put on the mind of the self-emptying Christ through living the Word. The Word has the ability to “prune” the old self and let the “new self” emerge. The Word as our daily viaticum has been a great focus put before us by the Spirit in recent decades but yet to be fully taken on board. Faith communities come to life through the Word of God not just prayerfully meditated or studied privately but when there’s a synthesis of Word and life with experiences and fruits shared communally. This communitarian encounter with the Word is a feature of new groups such as lectio divina prayer groups, Alpha as well as small Christian communities and ecclesial movements.

b) *Communion with our neighbour.*

Focus on the neighbour is always a way to avoid self-absorption. Pope Francis speaks of the mysticism of encounter and he underlines dialogue, fraternity and social friendship as keys for today’s mission. As he puts it in *Fratelli Tutti*, “By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there” (n.8).

This is why synodality as a theme is so important. Sr. Nathalie Becquart, the new under-secretary to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in Rome, speaks of the need of what John Henry Newman described as “con-spiratio”, that is, together, “breathing” the life of faith. In synodality all vocations become reconfigured in their relating to one another. We exercise together a communitarian discernment. We encourage one another to go out in missionary discipleship. The Acts of the Apostles teaches us so much about this.⁷

The communion with our neighbour can never be limited to just those immediately in our bubble. In church terms, communion is about living and feeling with the Church and in the Church in its universal dimension. It involves building communion with Christians of other churches, fostering dialogue with faithful of other religions, and reaching out to all people of good will. It can all be messy but, as Pope Francis repeats often, the Spirit works in this messiness.

c) *Communion with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.*

The Eucharist transforms us and makes us “other Christs”. In an era that is sick, we certainly need to “adore” as Peter Julian Eymard reminded us, but we need also to recognise how the

⁷ See Tom O’Reilly, *Acts of the Apostles: A Reading for Mission Today* (Dublin: Veritas, 2021).

THE FURROW

Eucharist propels us to continue Jesus' self-emptying by living eucharistically, that is, in a love that finds its measure in the Eucharist: 'love one another "as" I have loved you'.

We know that the Crucified-Risen Christ, encountered at Mass is the One who "emptied himself" by taking up residence in all places of vulnerability and exclusion, poverty and victimisation. With his self-giving, reconciling love, he has entered the cracks of differences, divisions and contradictions. In the Eucharist the very heart-beat of a world that increasingly realises that everything is connected with everything and everyone is connected with everyone. We also find the core of integral ecology, a theme young people are particularly sensitive to.

CONCLUSION

I was struck recently by a comment made to me: the Church starts when someone comes alongside you and, in imitation of Jesus says, "I am ready to give my life for you". The Church isn't lifeless structures, organisations or buildings. Of course, we need institutional elements to communicate, house and build Church but, ultimately, it is being together, united in love of one another, mindful particularly of those excluded, that we begin to be living cells of Christ's mystical body, journeying as communion in history.

Structures alone won't save the Church. Our trust is in the Lord who journeys with us: "they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them" (Mk 16:19). The dynamic of "kenosis", the "self-emptying" love, even in the midst of adversities, facilitates the visibility of the Lord's presence and action among us and through us.

One thing is clear. The Church of the future will have a considerably higher lay profile. That's not to say ordained ministry will disappear. Of course not. It will be there and essential. But the Spirit is blowing in the direction of an emergent profile of Church identity more in terms of laity, women and a new engagement of believers in the world. Here we think of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. In Ireland we have such a great devotional regard for Mary. But she is also the woman of justice, social engagement, problem solving as un-tier of knots, and community-generation. Ultimately, our Church-kenosis is about letting this Marian profile emerge more clearly.

The Mother and Baby Homes’ Report

Andrew McMahon

Mid-April brought news that the high-profile Philomena Lee had begun legal proceedings aimed at ‘quashing parts of the final report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes’. Four other persons were granted leave to bring challenges ‘over not having the opportunity to make submissions on sections of the draft report concerning them before the report was finalised.’¹ The cases were adjourned until May and - at the time of writing - their outcome is awaited. Such legal challenges appeared increasingly likely in the weeks following the publication of the Commission’s final report in January.² Some months on, they may well be viewed as the inevitable outcome of what appeared a campaign - supported by key figures within the Irish political and media establishments - to undermine the work of the Commission and discredit its findings.

RUBBISHING THE REPORT

Two days after the release of the Commission’s final report, for instance, the *Irish Times* gave over its front-page lead to parliamentary sketch-writer Miriam Lord. Lord used this platform principally to highlight the contribution of Leas Cheann Comhairle and Galway West TD, Catherine Connolly, in Dail Eireann the previous day.³ Connolly had set out to effectively rubbish the report, describing it as ‘inconsistent, shocking, poorly written, disturbing’ and ‘absolutely repulsive’. A *Sunday Times* editorial, in late February, would express concern about Catherine Connolly’s contribution, noting how it had ‘set the tone’ for much of what followed, ‘with other TDs enthusiastically trashing the comprehensive research by a judge, an international adoption

1 ‘Lee to challenge mother and baby homes report’ *Irish Times*, 13th April 2021, p.1

2 *Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes*, published 12th January 2021

3 M. Lord ‘State’s record on lost voices and broken promises shredded in Dail’, *Irish Times*, 14th January, 2021, p.1

Andrew McMahon is Parish Priest of Banbridge, Co. Down. BT32 3AR.

THE FURROW

expert and a historian'.⁴ Miriam Lord's concern - in contrast - was to extoll Connolly's performance, declaring it 'the most honest and powerful contribution of the day.' Such front-page feting of Connolly by the *Irish Times* had predictable enough consequences, amounting to little short of a rallying cry to an array of willing detractors.

'The real issue', that *Sunday Times* editorial proposed, 'was that the Commission's findings - including that Irish society was as much to blame for mother and baby homes as church or state - were not to everyone's liking.' The 'relentlessness and bitterness of the criticism' it argued 'has exceeded an acceptable threshold'. Identifying the role played by 'lobby groups' in intensifying criticism, the *Sunday Times* cited an accusation from the Coalition of Mother and Baby Home Survivors that the Commission had 'become part of a cover-up' - something it dismissed as a 'ludicrous claim'. The editorial continued 'Clearly, some people wanted the commission to adopt, unquestioningly, the testimony of survivors. They wanted the report to endorse the modern narrative about the church and state being entirely to blame for the existence of these homes. Anything else was unacceptable.' But what was the point, the *Sunday Times* wondered, 'in appointing three experts to be mere stenographers of witness statements and to deny them the use of their critical faculties, or tell them not to sift or analyse, not to be objective or critical?' This very fundamental question seems especially pertinent in the light of Philomena Lee's recent challenge. Among its objectives, according to the *Irish Times*, is the 'quashing' those parts of the report which 'do not accurately reflect her evidence to the commission'.⁵

'POLITICAL GRANDSTANDING'

The *Sunday Times* editorial also highlighted the behaviour of Sinn Fein's Kathleen Funchion, who chairs the Oireachtas Children's Committee. Funchion (praised, too, by Miriam Lord) accused the Commission of having 'repeatedly added to survivors' distress' and proposed that Judge Yvonne Murphy appear before the Children's Committee. 'To no great surprise' the editorial remarked 'Judge Murphy declined the invitation', adding that these kinds of 'Oireachtas hearings' are widely viewed as 'platforms for political grandstanding, rather than for elucidating and examining.' The *Sunday Times* noted, with concern, those calls made for a change in law, to compel investigators to present themselves before such

4 'Who would want to sit on a commission of inquiry now? *Sunday Times* (Irish ed.) 28th February 2021, p.16

5 *Irish Times*, 13th April, 2021, p.1

THE MOTHER AND BABY HOMES' REPORT

committees. All of which led the newspaper to pose the basic question: 'After the way members of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission have been treated since publication of their report', it asked 'who would ever want to lead such an inquiry again?'

Even this brief critique of reaction to the Commission's final report points up a range of questions which Irish society might usefully consider: What kind of assumptions, for example, are encouraged around investigations of this kind? Are those termed 'victims' and 'survivors' effectively set up for further trauma, through the nurturing of unrealistic expectations? Are various advocacy groups, purporting to represent their interests, genuinely helping their healing and well-being? How can a comprehensive report of this scale - inevitably contextualizing the narratives it receives - avoid seeming to relativize personal testimonies? How can a wider society begin to grasp complex historical realities when leading parliamentarians prioritize 'grandstanding' over informed analysis? ⁶ What might induce a more mature and insightful political response in a culture where prominent media outlets act as cheerleaders for the most derogatory of reactions? And - perhaps most fundamentally - where, from within this same culture, could the stimulus possibly come for these kinds of questions to be countenanced and considered?

APPORTIONING BLAME

Its attributing of 'blame' to a variety of elements within Irish society and refusal to isolate church or state was - as the *Sunday Times* suggested - the rock on which the Commission's work appeared to perish. What, we might ask, is really going on here? Reflecting on the fall-out from the Ryan Report, in 2009, communications specialist Terry Prone - experienced in working with Catholic religious - probed the demonizing of congregations and orders in the wake of that report. Regarding the issue of blame, Prone wrote, 'Humanity always seeks to site evil within a discrete group which is visibly different to the majority.'⁷ She went on to reference Solzhenitsyn's conviction that 'the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart - and through all human hearts.' The 'complex implication' of this insight, Prone believed, had 'gone unaddressed' in the aftermath of Ryan. A decade on, it appears to remain unaddressed and Irish society seems neither willing nor able to face such uncomfortable

6 e.g. The week following her shredding of the report, Catherine Connolly acknowledged to the Dail (20th January 2021) that she had still only read parts of it.

7 Terry Prone, 'Bricks on the Road to Hell' pp. 84-94 in Tony Flannery (ed.) *Responding to the Ryan Report*, Columba Press (2009)

THE FURROW

truths. Reluctant to accept any personal responsibility for what may be ailing in society, we find it more comfortable to scapegoat and attach blame to those entities we conceptualize as ‘other’. It was telling to note how so many Catherine Connolly enthusiasts were drawn to that part of her speech where she declared ‘I am not responsible. My family is not responsible. The people I know are not responsible.’⁸ These lines, at least, were regularly cited by her admirers. Given that the report had covered a 76-year period, the notion that one could simply declare various generations of one’s family exempt from anything contributing to the Mother and Baby Homes’ phenomenon suggested a naivety about the complexity of the past on Connolly’s part.

Writing in the same volume as Terry Prone - back in 2009 - retired social worker and former Mercy Sister, Margaret Lee, highlighted the work of post-war psychoanalyst Eric Erickson. Lee explained how, for Erickson, ‘The final task of human development’, is the ability ‘to negotiate integration versus despair. By this he meant that towards the culmination of our lives we must be able to consider all the things that have happened to us and integrate them, accepting them as part of the whole.’⁹ Margaret Lee went on to offer the following striking analysis in respect of contemporary Ireland: ‘When I apply this to Irish society, I think that we are still very young and immature. We are not able to look at life in the round and we are not able to hold good things and bad things in our consciousness at the same time. We want to simplify people, life, and its myriad events into dichotomies - good/bad, success/failure, brave/cowardly.’ The Commission’s final report could be viewed as attempting - in certain respects - to coax today’s Ireland beyond such simplification and instinctive recourse to dichotomies.

‘THAT AWFUL ERA’

Public awareness and perceptions, however, remain heavily dependent upon national media and how they choose to pitch and present a story. Given the length of the Commission’s final report and the likelihood that few would even read its executive summary, a special responsibility rested with the Irish media to accurately convey its core themes. It is far from clear, though, that this happened in practice. The *Irish Times* began its coverage - the day following the report’s release - with the statement that ‘Ireland has again been brought face-to-face with its cold and callous past’.¹⁰

8 Leaders’ Statements on the *Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes*, Dail Eireann, 13th January 2021

9 Margaret Lee, ‘Searching for Reasons: A former Sister of Mercy looks back’, pp. 44-55, Flannery (2009)

10 ‘From the graves of innocents’, *Irish Times*, 13th January 2021, p.1

THE MOTHER AND BABY HOMES' REPORT

The statement is nowhere to be found in the actual document and appeared to reflect, on the part of that newspaper, as much a concern to editorialize as to report. One of the piece's authors, Patsy McGarry, followed up with an 'Opinion' column inside the same edition. McGarry spoke of 'the Ireland of 50 years and more ago', describing it as 'that awful era'.¹¹ The painful testimonies included in the report and often brutal treatment of those pregnant outside marriage clearly offer grounds for soul-searching and a thorough interrogation of aspects of our country's past. The reduction of our forebears and their world to crude characterizations, on the other hand, is hardly just or accurate and suggests more of an ideological crusade than a genuine desire to inform.

Moreover, even in today's changing media environment, the lingering influence of the *Irish Times* on the country's journalism should not be underestimated. A columnist in the Belfast daily, the *Irish News*, addressed the Commission's report the weekend after its publication. Mary Kelly wrote of 'the damning indictment of a 'cold and callous' Ireland (Kelly's quote marks) revealed in the Mother and Baby Homes report published earlier this week.'¹² Kelly and her editors appeared oblivious to the fact that she was referencing the *Irish Times*, with this quote, and not the report itself. The day following the report's release, meanwhile, the *Irish News* gave pride of place - and the largest headline amidst its coverage - to an item entitled 'Shame lies with Catholic Church.'¹³ Journalist Allison Morris began this comment piece as follows: 'The shame and neglect of women and children in Ireland's mother and baby homes lies fairly and squarely with the Catholic Church, who not only owned the homes but created a society where single mothers were deemed sinners to be locked away.' Within this opening sentence, alone, Morris had misrepresented the report on at least two counts. It came nowhere close to leaving the blame 'fairly and squarely with the Catholic Church', while even a basic engagement with the document would have revealed that, of those institutions investigated, the majority were not owned by the Catholic Church.¹⁴

11 Patsy McGarry, 'We must now pay a price for our past wilful silence', *Irish Times*, 13th January 2021, p.12

12 Mary Kelly, 'Churches must have skipped that bit in the gospels about not casting the first stone', *Irish News*, 16th January 2021, p.28

13 Allison Morris, 'Shame lies with Catholic Church', *Irish News*, 13th January 2021, p.3

14 Of the 17 institutions investigated, 7 were owned by local authorities, 6 were Catholic-owned, 3 Protestant-owned, while one other - 'The Castle' in Co. Donegal - is described as having been 'established, funded and governed' by a combination of the North-Western Health Board and the Catholic dioceses of Raphoe and Derry.

THE FURROW

‘THE PREVAILING NARRATIVE’

Comment pieces of this kind appear all too regularly in Irish newspapers, offering correspondents - under the veil of ‘Opinion’ or ‘Analysis’ - a licence to ignore unwelcome facts and present developments in ways which cohere with their own prejudices. In the context of covering the Mother and Baby Homes’ story, they were important in blunting the impact of the report’s conclusions and - in enabling existing stereotypes to retain dominance - served to undermine the work of the Commission. In its own way, the Commission may well have foreseen this reluctance to engage with the perspectives it offered. In the introduction to the final report, it states - in bold print - that any commission of investigation ‘must look at all the available evidence and reach conclusions based on that evidence.’ Very significantly, it adds ‘The conclusions it reaches may not always accord with the prevailing narrative’.¹⁵

A good example of a newspaper’s outright refusal to revise its narrative, in light of the report’s findings, came the day after its release in the *Irish Daily Mail*. The paper ran a remarkable item, headed ‘How the *Mail* helped expose story that left nation shocked’. It boasted of how ‘On May 31, 2014, the *Irish Daily Mail* revealed that babies had starved to death while in the care of nuns’ and reproduced, for illustrative purposes, previous *Mail* headlines - one of which declared, ‘Babies who starved to death in Nuns’ care’.¹⁶ On reading the report, however, it becomes obvious that claims of children having ‘starved to death’ must be treated with considerable scepticism and probably arise from a misunderstanding of the term ‘marasmus’ as used in relation to childhood deaths. It seems worthwhile - in this instance - to allow the report, itself, to speak. Chapter 33 explains: ‘The term marasmus as a cause of death was common until the 1940s and was used in instances where a child could not absorb enough nutrients from food to thrive. Marasmus was always associated with an underlying health condition or disease which resulted in a failure to thrive.’ It goes on, then, to specifically caution against misinterpretation, saying, ‘Some commentators have concluded that infant deaths which occurred in mother and baby homes due to marasmus indicates that infants were neglected, not appropriately cared for, and/or willfully starved to death in these institutions. However, marasmus was a frequently cited cause of infant deaths in institutional, hospital and community settings in early twentieth century Ireland. The Commission considers it unlikely that deaths

¹⁵ *Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes*, Introduction, p.2

¹⁶ ‘How the *Mail* helped expose story that left nation shocked’, *Irish Daily Mail*, 13th January 2021, p.9

THE MOTHER AND BABY HOMES' REPORT

in hospitals and family homes were due to willful neglect and so cannot conclude that the term marasmus denotes willful neglect in mother and baby homes.¹⁷

In its Fifth Interim Report, the Commission had similarly advised caution regarding infant remains in the grounds of the former Tuam Home. The 2019 report had stated: 'In the light of a great deal of inaccurate commentary about the Tuam site, the Commission considers it important to emphasise what it has established and what it has not established.' It then explained: 'The human remains found by the Commission are not in a sewage tank but in a second structure with 20 chambers which was built within the decommissioned large sewage tank'.¹⁸ The 2019 report was equally emphatic that the bodies had been "buried" in 'an inappropriate manner' and the distinction it sought to make between actual facts and public perceptions may have been of little comfort to those related to deceased residents of the home or deeply affected by the find. It seemed to recognise, nonetheless, the power of certain versions of the story to distort and inflame the situation and, for these reasons, seemed a point worth making. The distinction was effectively ignored, however, in much of the coverage of Tuam in January past. The *Irish Daily Mail*, for example, persisted in speaking of 'the site containing 796 babies in a sewage tank'.¹⁹ Anxious, meanwhile, to keep the focus on the 'nuns', media outlets appeared to overlook a further significant observation of that interim report: 'All the residents of the Tuam Home were the responsibility of the Galway and Mayo County Councils. It seems to the Commission that responsibility for the burials of deceased children rested with the local authorities and Galway County Council had a particular responsibility as the owner of the institution.'²⁰

ISOLATING 'THE CHURCH'

Their downplaying of local authority responsibilities towards many of the institutions - and of the Commission's criticism of failures to meet these responsibilities - has enabled certain sections of the media to continue to portray 'the Church' as the villain of the piece. The *Irish Daily Mail's* coverage of the release of the

17 The report adds: 'The more likely explanation is that marasmus as a cause of death was cited when an infant failed to thrive due to malabsorption of essential nutrients due to an underlying, undiagnosed medical condition'. See *Final Report*, Chapter 33: Deaths, pp.2-3

18 *Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters*, Fifth Interim Report, published 15th March 2019, pp.9-10

19 'I'm amazed, says historian, as the Sisters say they will pay redress', *Irish Daily Mail*, 14th January 2021, p.7

20 *Fifth Interim Report* (2019), p.10

final report began, tellingly, with the sentence ‘The Taoiseach has launched an unflinching criticism of homes run by the Church in the past.’²¹ The front-page of the *Irish Daily Star*, that same day, informed readers that ‘The long-awaited report found that 9,000 children died in the institutions and women endured abuse and neglect in the homes run by religious orders.’²² As always, smaller print - on inside pages - afforded some qualification of these generalizations, but only after initial, misleading impressions had been created. Catholic iconography, meanwhile, dominated the visuals - and not just in tabloid accounts. The *Irish Times* headed its initial coverage with a photo of the Madonna and Child from the grounds of the Dublin Regina Coeli Hostel. It carried inside a further Marian statue, located at the Sean Ross Abbey, in Roscrea, and adorned with the words ‘I am the Immaculate Conception’.²³ One sensed an inference, through these particular choices of imagery, of the Mother and Baby institutions as an inherently Catholic phenomenon - despite the report’s emphasis that this was not historically the case.²⁴

Margaret Lee had witnessed not dissimilar attempts, over a decade ago, to isolate Catholic religious - making them the focus for public ire, where the reality was more complex. One politician, for example, had labelled them ‘monsters’ in reaction to the Ryan Report. ‘No interviewer in our Irish media challenged this language’, Lee recalled. ‘Indeed, if anything’, she continued, ‘the interviewers seemed to encourage more hyperbole. No one referred to what these religious had contributed to Irish society despite all the flaws, the petty snobbery, all the failure to live by Christ’s law of love.’ Lee proposed that ‘because we cannot integrate two sides of a situation, our current view of religious is unable to see the good that they have done.’ ‘As time passes’, she concluded, ‘this may change.’²⁵

Irish religious have - on the contrary - continued to be denigrated throughout the years since Margaret Lee wrote these words. This merely intensified in the wake of January’s report. The image of a nun sweeping a skeleton under a mat was projected onto the exterior of the former Sean Ross Abbey building for St Brigid’s Day this year. It was part of a taxpayer-funded initiative

21 ‘Our Homes of Shame’, *Irish Daily Mail*, 13th January 2021, p.1

22 ‘Gates of Hell’, *Irish Daily Star*, 13th January 2021, p.1

23 *Irish Times*, 13th January 2021, p.1 & p.4

24 Academic and media analyst, Dr Niall Meehan, has argued that the *Irish Times* appears to down-play both child abuse and institutional abuse when uncovered within Protestant settings in Ireland. See Niall Meehan, ‘Irish Times struggles with non-Catholic abuse’ in the *Village* magazine (Issue 52) February 2017. www.villagemagazine.ie

25 Margaret Lee, p. 52, Flannery (2009)

THE MOTHER AND BABY HOMES' REPORT

known as the *Herstory* Light Show. The show aimed - according to *Herstory* founder Melanie Lynch - 'to awaken the healing powers of Brigid and the compassion to process the wound of the mother and baby home scandal.'²⁶ Whatever the likely efficacy of the project, the image seemed wholly pernicious - conveying an impression dangerously at odds with the truth and far removed from the findings of the Commission.²⁷ The notion, moreover, that the misrepresentation and stigmatization of one group of marginal women could, somehow, contribute to the 'healing' or upbuilding of another shows how seriously unintegrated and imbalanced much of Irish discourse has become. The final report on the Mother and Baby Homes may have been far from perfect. It had the potential, nonetheless, to help redress that imbalance and encourage Irish society, in at least one painful area, to grow towards a more integrated understanding of its past. This makes its repudiation - if not that surprising - seem all the sadder.

26 'Buildings across Ireland lit up in honour of mother and baby home survivors', *Irish Examiner*, 1st February 2021

27 The *Irish Times* used the same image to accompany an article penned by former Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, on Friday 5th February 2021. Given the illustration chosen, it seemed especially ironic that the article was entitled 'Only truth telling will close the sad chapter of Mother and Baby Homes'.

The Centrality of Christ. Christianity was, for Dietrich Bonhoeffer, not so much a religion, but a person – Christ – who made difficult demands on those who followed him. He worried that Christ had become a church matter, not a matter of life, and he saw that the church and real life seemed to be splitting from each other, a division that has almost reached completion in our own time. He would hope that the churches would bring, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, back to form a force in the context of human social existence.

– JOHN F. DEANE, *The Outlaw Christ*, 2020, (Dublin: Columba Books) p. 195.

The Love that Dares not Bless its Rings: *A Theological Reflection on Sacramentality in Catholicism*

Tyrone Grima

Interpersonal dynamics are a salient feature of human anthropology and inform our actions, thoughts and desires. The relational aspect has been the core of religious faith systems that have strived to understand these dynamics in the context of their theological belief. This article will explore relationality in the Catholic tradition, underlining the sacramentality that constitutes the nature of relationships, and the importance of comprehending this concept within a wider, universal and holistic manner that does justice, albeit partially, to the beauty of the depth of such a mystery.

OTHERNESS IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Relationality is a fundamental aspect in the spiritual journey of the Christian towards perfection. All Christians are called to grow in love with others, particularly the significant others in their lives. This is because the person can only discover the authenticity of the self, and, as a consequence, mature, through the interaction with the others. In the words of Josef Ratzinger, ‘man is the more himself the more he is with ‘the other’Only through ‘the other’ and through ‘being’ with ‘the other’ does he come to himself.’¹ Ratzinger’s anthropology, reflecting the Christian heritage over the centuries, denotes that humanity can only find meaning and fulfilment in life through relationships since all ‘human beings are relational, and they possess their lives – themselves – only by way of relationship. I alone am not myself, but only in and with you am I myself. To be truly a human being means to be related in love, to be of and for.’² In the study of Christian spirituality, however, otherness is not only limited to the human realities

1 Ratzinger, J., *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004) p.234.

2 Ratzinger, J., *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the fall* (New York: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995) p.72

Tyrone Grima is an academic at the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). His interests are the interface between the theatre and spirituality; feminine mysticism and queer theory.

THE LOVE THAT DARES NOT BLESS ITS RINGS

but extends to the supernatural as well. There is an intimate link between the love for human beings and the love for God, and these two relationships cannot be separated. In *The New Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, the term ‘spirituality’ is defined as an expression of the relationship between God, neighbour and self.³ In fact, ‘whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen’ (1 Jn 4: 20). This is due to the fact that the human being has been created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1: 27). Each significant other becomes a tangible mirror of the intangible God, and by loving the other, the individual also loves God.

The importance that Christian spirituality gives to the relational originates from the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father through the Son. This mutual indwelling makes the Christian God the only God whose ontology is rooted in relationality. The Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are in a continuous and eternal relationship with each other, and their being is a relational ontology of love. Relationality is not only holy, but it is also eternal.⁴ Since human beings were created in the image of God, they cannot but need to follow the Trinitarian approach and grow spiritually by relating.

THE SACRAMENTALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Within the Catholic framework, the relational is elevated even further since it is an integral aspect of sacramental theology. The seven sacraments are relational since they are a manifestation of the relationship between the person and God, witnessed by the community and within the parameters of the community. A sacrament is never a private enterprise either in its execution (the community is always present either physically or symbolically) or in its fruits (the benefits received by the person receiving the Sacrament enrich the community). The basis of the communal engagement in the Sacraments is a two-tiered reality. Primarily, Sacramental life is relational, and secondly, by investing in this reality, the relationships between community members are strengthened because of the spiritual nourishment that the Sacraments provide.

Furthermore, the Catholic framework emphasises the notion of relationality in realities that fall outside the parameters of the seven sacraments, but which are nonetheless sacramental. Post-conciliar theology accentuates that:

3 Pryce, M., “Relationships,” in *The New SCM Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Sheldrake, P. (London: SCM, 2005) p.536.

4 Cusano, N., *La Dotta Ignoranza* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1991) p.70-1.

THE FURROW

... the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite, the spiritual in the material, the transcendent in the immanent, the eternal in the historical. For Catholicism, therefore, all reality is sacred... human existence is already graced existence.⁵

This is reiterated by the Catechism of the Catholic Church that explains that sacramentals ‘prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it’ and ‘that there is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of men’. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1670). The Catechism also explains that ‘among sacramentals *blessings* (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first. Every blessing praises God and prays for his gifts.’ (CCC, §1671).

These two references clearly indicate that the human is ‘capax Dei’. Since the relational elevates the human being to his or her highest form of maturity and development, it consequently follows that relationality is potentially the highest form of sacramentality that the Divine has gifted humanity with.

The French mystic Simone Weil develops the sacramentality of relationality by juxtaposing it with the notion of *metaxu*. This is the space in-between the reality of the Divine and the reality of humankind. *Metaxu* is the middle ground, bridging these two polarities.⁶ Weil compares this Platonic concept to the stick that the blind person uses to touch eternity⁷ emphasising that in the limitations of the human condition, *metaxu* can offer humanity the possibility of attaining wholeness. It is a bridging space between the reality of the Transcendent and the reality of humanity. In this framework, relationships are a form of *metaxu*, allowing the person to grapple with the *mysterium fascinans* through the intricacies and profundity of the human mystery of the other. Relationships are not only signs, but vehicles that lead the human being to the Divine. They become *opportunities* whereby in his/her woundedness the human being can respond to the intimacy that God creates us to partake in. Hence, a relationship cannot be intrinsically evil and always have the potential for spiritual growth.

ARE ALL RELATIONSHIPS SACRAMENTAL?

The concept of *metaxu*, however, should not lead to the fallacious conclusion that all relationships are sacramental. *Discernment* is key towards understanding whether a relationship is conducive

5 McBrien, R.P, *Catholicism* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994) p.9-10.

6 Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans., Griffith, T. (London: Everyman Publishers, 1986), 203b-c, p.54-5.

7 Weil, S., “Cahier VI,” in *Œuvres Complètes : Cahiers (septembre 1941 – février 1942) : La Science et l’Impensable* (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) p.357.

to spiritual and psychological growth. A person enduring an abusive 'relationship' where violence and sexual exploitation are regular occurrences may probably be a case of a relationship that does not deepen the relationship with the Transcendent because of the psychological damage inherent in it. Other relational scenarios might be less clear-cut, and more challenging to discern, emphasising even further the importance of such a process in the spiritual life. Without a deep process of discernment, this approach could lead to misinterpretation and to the promotion of a culture of relativism. *Metaxu* is not an excuse to justify convenience in life. In Weilian spirituality, the starting point is neither the welfare nor the convenience of the individual. The well-being of the individual is the result of *metaxu*, and not its cause. The *point de départ* is the desire of the person to connect with God, without using this bridge as a form of consolation or compensation.⁸

Pauline theology offers guidance that can be used in the process of discernment to understand whether a relationship is a means for spiritual growth. In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle shows that any action or activity in which the fruits of the Spirit are manifested is by default coming from the Divine. This offers the individual a paradigm to be able to recognise the will of God in his or her engagement with the material world and with others for 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control; against such there is no law.' (Gal. 5: 22). These are the indicators of a person who is engaged wholeheartedly in the journey towards authenticity as s/he learns how to direct attention from the self to God, through the dynamics of the relationship.⁹

It is in this theological light that the responsum issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning blessings of the unions of the same sex also needs to be challenged. The starting point of the argument presented is flawed, reflected in the semantic expression which stalls any form of dialogue or critical analysis. The persistent direct use of 'homosexual inclinations', as well as the indirect reference to a 'disordered reality' prevents the possibility of delving deeper in the reality of the loving relationships shared and experienced by people in the LGBTI community. Communication and meaningful reflection require an encounter whereby stories can be shared. The narratives of various LGBTI couples across time and cultures reveal inspiring and heart-warming experiences, and of course, struggles, of persons whose

8 Ibid., p.320.

9 Diogenes, P.A and Springsted, E.O., "Winch on Weil's Supernaturalism," in *Spirit, Nature, and Community: issues in the Thought of Simone Weil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) p.81.

THE FURROW

rapport with the Divine has deepened through (and not in spite of) their intimate one-to-one relationships. These are the accounts that can truly help us understand how our mysterious God operates in a most beautiful way in our lives for as Aquinas states ‘ Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.’¹⁰

Hence, the distinction of whether a relationship is sacramental, or not, does not lie in the ontological nature of the relationship. Any relationship requires the couple, as well as each individual, to enter into the process of discernment to reflect on whether that particular relationship, within that particular context, can serve as a vehicle for spiritual growth and therefore, be sacramental. Unfortunately, a narrow understanding of the theology of sacramentality in relationships has been the cause of much undue pain, and as a consequence, underdevelopment in the spiritual life of the individual. This theological perspective has justified the persistence of women or men in heterosexual relationships in remaining oppressed in the damage that their marriage is inflicting on them on the basis of sacramentality. The same theological perspective, which denies potential fruitful relationality to LGBTI people, has also resulted in several episodes of psychological breakdown and of countless suicides committed by young, and less young, individuals who not realising the sacramentality of their relationships, believed it to be a curse to be rid of.

CONCLUSION

This way of understanding the sacramentality of relationships is *inclusive* and *liberating*. Without underestimating the complexities of relationships, which no psychological, anthropological or theological framework can capture in its totality, it offers a perspective that permits us to ponder on the nature of relationships in a healthy and creative manner. It does not straitjacket the relational within closed, and often times, reductionistic boundaries. The Divine does not limit himself to these humanly created confines. The spiritual experience frees us by allowing us to peek into the immensity of the love of God. It allows humanity the possibility to enter the depth of the joyful mystery of otherness that makes us so human, and yet so akin to the Divine. It is, indeed, this mystery that spurs each one of us forward in our journey towards authenticity.

10 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Volume I, Q.1, A.8 (New York: Christian Classics, 1948) p. 6.

Forgiveness and the Legacy of Abuse

Johanna Merry

INTRODUCTION

There is no let-up in reports of the historical abuse of children linked to Church bodies and wider entities, this despite Church and State efforts to establish remedial and preventative structures to address wrongs. The recurrent surge of wrongdoing in Ireland reminds us/society much work remains to be done in dealing with this legacy of trauma. Wrongdoing always finds expression, one way or another, and efforts to respond are always fraught with difficulty - stretched between *limitation* and *possibility* of the human condition.

Survivors of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, etc.) are shifting from a position of mute helplessness to voice acts of protest, anger, or even despair. Persons feeling robbed of their potential keep returning to remind society of a *debt*. Liaising with other survivors has had a cathartic effect, releasing a collective urgency for restitution. In this respect, moves to establish formal remembrance memorials in Ireland are understandable.

Despite on-going incremental actions in response, such as vigilant safeguarding programmes, new statutory legislation, redress schemes etc. embedded discontent persists. Action responses go some way to reconcile past wrongs but are rarely sufficient in themselves; all wrongs cannot be put right, yet forgiveness, reconciliation, and possible closure play an important role were society to move beyond *limitation*. The poignant Eastertide metaphor of unbinding, the tombstone removed, new life erupting from that which is dead, embodies a sense of hope. (cf. John 20:1).

Johanna Merry is a Human Resource Consultant who works with religious congregations and dioceses. She has an interest in Pastoral Mediation and Lives in Dublin. E-mail: johannamerry@gmail.com

THE FURROW

IDENTITY

Survivors often speak of a haunting shadow cast over their adult lives that lingers, with no end point. Some survivors go on to describe the act of abuse as *pure evil, shrouded in darkness*, the offender an *evil person*. Personal identity is affected all through life; the continuity and flow of life compromised, whether they be patterns of industry, trust, loving, or belief/faith.

Over time, a very long time for some, psychic capacity strengthens enough to force action. Being proactive is neither easy nor straightforward, tends to be gradual, varying from one person to another. Years of suffering in silence leave its mark, speaking out a major step in (re)claiming personal dignity. There are also contradictions to be wrestled with: *the offender was my teacher, did these gross acts, then gave me money ... but kind to my family*. The intensity of pain of self-blame can silence survivors, but sometimes also they are silenced by cultural mores, be that institutional or family, etc. Many questions previously muffled now surface: *Am I the only one? Why me? Did anyone know?* The complex emotional trauma- bond between survivor and offender can be difficult to unfetter, hard to betray. A prolonged tug-of-war between rational and emotional intelligence, inevitably unlocks. Thereafter, the survivor moves on to name the experienced wrong and voice the tragic sequelae.

MEMORY

Remembered past events recorded in the present do not necessarily represent how things happened. Memories can be selective and reconstruction of past events can, on occasion, be false. Like an oil painting, memory is something that is constructed layer by layer. In the process, images are drawn which can be overlain with others, driven by emotion and by subjective perspective. The final product, in some instances, may not resemble the original sketches. The natural process of forgetting may take its toll, memories can fade or become distorted. Although people may not knowingly be lying – this can happen also. An added factor is that sustaining a traumatic matter can become emotionally intolerable urging premature ‘settlement’ to bring necessary relief.

Jean Piaget¹ provides a provocative example of memory. He sets out a graphic vignette of a recollection of his attempted kidnapping incident when he was two years old. He recalled sitting in a pram with his nurse in a park when a man tried to kidnap him. His nurse

1 Piaget, Jean. *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 1952. p. 188.

FORGIVENESS AND THE LEGACY OF ABUSE

bravely tried to fight off assailants His parents often spoke to him of this event. Ten years later the nurse wrote to Piaget's parents saying she had fabricated the story! Even after this disclosure – he found it difficult to discount that the event had not happened. Somehow the story with its vivid imagery had become etched into his episodic memory.

Nonetheless, all things considered, survivors come forward to tell their stories, striving to recall in a way that is true to their memory, with a sense of expectancy that they would be believed.

RESPONSE

Because recollections are known to vary, questions around proof of evidence can arise. Legal justice seeks to apply the 'Statute of Limitations' to safeguard against contestable evidence that may have deteriorated over time. However, in some instances, when survivors do eventually come forward, often after protracted and agonising processes, the statute barred provision can dishearten. This set back to a survivor's search for justice may act as a catalyst for more extreme actions to resolve the perceived debt owed to them. On balance, it is requisite that dedicated Church authorities toil with the dilemma of moral justice, in remaining open to engage with survivors, in the hope of finding fair and equitable resolution for all involved.

The human mind can barely grasp the power of evil actions. But we instinctively know that such wrongdoing must be confronted. The testimonies of survivors remind society of the need to hold those deemed responsible accountable. Such calls are interlaced with a need for apology and restitution, often financial, compensation for a debt impossible to quantify, or even insolvent in cases. Demands for patent measures to prevent the same crime from reoccurring usually run in tandem. With these measures reasonably in place, a foundation may be laid to begin to forge a tentative track towards forgiveness.

What follows is an attempt to explore the foregoing process. Unique and universal patterns of survivors' experiences are appraised, gleaned from real-time professional encounters. It is hoped to amplify a creative space whereby *forgiveness* may enter the *real* conversations among those in relevant ministries with survivors, offenders, and the on-going work of reconciliation.

COMPREHENDING NARRATIVES

Narratives are central to enabling both survivor and offender/representative to understand and acknowledge each other's experience. The act of storytelling helps survivors to re-connect to

THE FURROW

parts of self previously alienated. Without the human (and humane) encounter, there is a risk of the reported experience becoming an abstract spectacle or a repository of dead facts. To this end, survivors often share a victim impact statement, a testimony in the form of a figurative presence that makes immediate the reality of the trauma suffered, and cumulative loss incurred.

Being wronged is just not something we act against but is also something experienced as an intrinsic blighting of one's essential nature, an aspect often overlooked. Evil tends to be associated with darkness/dark acts, a preference for darkness to light (cf. John 3:19). An element of self-estrangement almost always attaches to the absence of light in the form of a blind spot or denial or disassociation; a mental shutdown of sorts. This buffer can provide a measure of psychic protection, particularly with severe trauma as in illness, catastrophe, or intolerable guilt and horror. To overlook this 'shutdown', is to ignore how shockingly strange the experience impacts on a person, and its power to render them blank. Any form of abuse of a child is a horror we can never sufficiently comprehend, the nature of which is both illusive and elusive.

Practical understanding begs the question *how* one is to act against evil, if one cannot recognise it? – may well warrant the need to pray for an understanding mind to discern between good and evil. Such understanding may effect a change of heart and compel one to assess the ethical aspects of their behaviour and align such to the happiness or misfortune of others. In doing so, the call to act with integrity and justice may arise. Survivors that come forward are a reminder to society of this moral duty.

CATHARSIS OF MOURNING

Integral to the ongoing narrative of a survivor is the working through of grief. Not unlike the loss of a loved one, the pattern of grief is *not* linear, but sways back and forth between phases, gradually dissipating. However, in the case of survivors, anger towards oneself and others may be heightened and accompanied by an internalised sense of it being one's fault. Resolve to speak out tends to be delayed. In some cases, mood slides; laments of blaming others, the system etc. enter to intercept loss of self, meaning or absolute despair in this low time. For some, where jeremiads allow expression of in-most thoughts without limits, existential meaning and purpose may come within reach as experienced by Job. (cf. Job 3). Survivors do move onwards, but ruminations of loss return from time to time through life.

In the case of survivors, mourning may be characterised by patterns of obsessional repetitions of laments or disabling repression

FORGIVENESS AND THE LEGACY OF ABUSE

of events. The reality of the pain of loss suffered may not emerge until long after the abuse experience. Uprooting from the quagmire of grief with resolution to take action, can run through different spin cycles. For example, a survivor may take on the persona of an expiatory victim ‘offering’ their suffering as a sacrifice or atonement for the collective suffering of fellow victims. Likewise, where process of resolution is truncated prematurely, a false sense of empowerment may impel survivors towards vicarious advocacy interests. Those seeking help may be overwhelmed by the emotive impact of otherwise well-meaning third-party advocates.

FORGIVENESS

There are more questions than answers to the enigmatic nature of forgiveness. Has the offender to ask for forgiveness? Should the offender be forgiven? Is there such a thing as forgiving oneself? What part does the sorrow, remediation, and reparation of the offender play? How can we forgive if we cannot identify what we are forgiving? Survivors say that their decision to forgive mirrors a determination to put revenge and bitterness behind, an important step in reclaiming their life. Undoubtedly, the power to forgive seems more often in the hands of the one-wronged. Where there is synchronicity between the longing of the one-wronged to bestow forgiveness, and the offender’s desire to seek such, the process can be less awkward, as in the story of the Prodigal Son. (cf. Luke 15: 11-32).

Forgiveness is the threadbare bridge between the survivor and the offender/representative. There are necessary pre-conditions to crossing that bridge. Ideally, the offender first recognises and acknowledges the wrongdoing, taking responsibility for their actions, matched with corresponding sorrow. Survivors can be locked into a need for retribution, but a time may also come about where there is a felt need to let go. The genuine efforts of offender to reform plays an important part in the ongoing process. Therein lies the possibility to identify - albeit in a tentative way – what to forgive, or what is asked to be forgiven.

There is no science of forgiveness, neither is it accomplished in one magical moment, but tends to start with a shallow initiative and consolidates over time. By means of patient listening and working through of the narrative, minds may open to a deeper understanding. Wisdom bestowed, and forgiveness *possible*. Such forgiveness surpasses the limits of rational calculation and explanation, eliciting the *marvel of once again!*² In Pascal’s terms,

2 Kearney, Richard. “On the hermeneutics of Evil.” *Reading Ricoeur*. Edited by David M Kaplan. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2008. p. 85.

THE FURROW

the heart has its reasons, which reason knows nothing of³
Then again, there is a limit to forgiveness. There are evil crimes that are insurmountably inexcusable at a human level. If pardon is beyond reason, it is never completely blind, and if it is stirred by the gratuitousness of love, it presupposes a disposition of surplus or excess. This is not to deny the injury, the wrong or pretend nothing happened, but in a lavish moment, to sidestep one's personal harm to love the offender - in spite of the appalling act. That there is more to the offender than the act. ... it is that *more* that summons the *marvel of the once again*, marking a second chance for both survivor and offender to *begin again*.

Perhaps only a divinity could forgive indiscriminately, as exemplified by Christ, as man, asking his Father to forgive his crucifiers. (cf. Mark 10:27). One can argue that in the Christian tradition, humans are scarred by original sinfulness, prone to fault or compromised by evil. As such, forgiveness directed to the unforgiveable, when given freely, subverts our reason in a way that we hardly comprehend.

In the marvel of the moment, perception shifts, unsurmountables to forgiveness are sufficiently sidestepped making possible tentative steps towards reconciliation. Reconciliation attempts to leave behind the traumatic legacy of the past - to make possible a new and different future. Forgiveness is a sort of healing of memory, once described by Dag Hammarskjöld as *the answer to a child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again...⁴*

CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is a precursor to reconciliation. Forgiveness is never amnesia, but also about anamnesis - remembering the legacy of victims in order to *signify* the debt owed to them, in the hope that what happened yesterday can never repeat tomorrow. That through the prism of remorseful contemplation of the past a hopeful anticipation of a different future is *possible*.

3 *Pensées* (1670, ed. L. Brunschvicg, 1909) sect. 4, no. 277.

4 Hammarskjöld, Dag. *Markings*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1964. p.110

Restoring her Voice [II]: *The Syrophoenician Woman as an icon for enlarged thinking**

Seán O’Sullivan

THE ENDURING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

When we are afforded time to hear and reflect on this unique and powerful gospel narrative, it highlights just how much we are missing out on when it is excluded from the Sunday Lectionary. Many of us, even those privileged to preach, simply never have to grapple with its unique testimony. I would dare to suggest that the majority of our communities have never heard this gospel proclaimed and that, even for priests and ministers, it constitutes little more than a vague memory from a scripture class many years ago. However, if we allow this text to speak its unique saving word to us it can I believe open us up to radically new insights in respect of our vision of Church and ministry. If we are willing to grapple with the text rather than ignoring it, if we are willing to listen to rather than to silence its message, it opens up the possibility of a new understanding and a new praxis.

BECOMING AWARE OF OUR OWN UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Modern psychology has helped us to understand the reality and the prevalence of unconscious bias. Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that we carry outside of our own conscious awareness. Modern research demonstrate that unconscious biases affect not just some people but all people. They are part of the human condition and are shaped and influenced by our upbringing and formative experiences including but not limited to familial, cultural, societal, religious and ideological influences. Research has further demonstrated that unconscious bias is more prevalent than conscious prejudice and is very often incompatible

* Part 1 of this article appeared in the June issue of *The Furrow*.

Seán O’Sullivan is a priest of the diocese of Cork and Ross.
Address: New Parochial House, Monkstown, Co. Cork.

THE FURROW

with one's conscious values. It is automatic, unintended and so deeply ingrained that it manifests itself almost as a reflexive response.

The historical, economic, cultural and religious tensions that existed between Jewish communities and Hellenistic communities in first century Palestine would have made for a potent mix in which unconscious biases between both communities would have thrived and flourished. Within such an understanding, Jesus' response to the woman's plea, incomprehensible though it may seem to traditional Christology and piety, is simply the natural manifestation of such an unconscious bias. Such an understanding by no means exonerates Jesus of the charges of discrimination and prejudice. Our unconscious biases do not comprise the totality of who we are nor do they absolve us of responsibility for the choices we make. But they are part of our human experience and a holistic doctrine of the incarnation must take account of the contemporary insights of psychology and the social sciences and recognise that being fully human involves constantly bringing our unconscious biases to consciousness as we seek to negotiate our sense of self-identity and establish our personal values. Indeed, one could argue that such a process is part of the human process of "growing in wisdom, stature, and in divine and human favour" acknowledged in Luke 2:52.

The encounter of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman and, in particular, Jesus' curt and offensive dismissal of the woman's plea for her sick daughter, confront us with the unsettling reality of unconscious bias. If the historical Jesus was not immune to such unconscious bias then, surely, we cannot expect to be. Therefore, the *first* challenge that Mark 7:24-31 sets before us is to recognise and critically examine our own unconscious biases, both individually as believers and collectively as a church, and to seek to overcome such bias in order to become authentic witnesses to the values we profess.

AN AWARENESS OF THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

The encounter also alerts us to the way language and metaphor function as potent symbols of identity and differentiation and play a critical role in the articulation and perpetuation of bias and prejudice. Throughout history exclusionary practices have been underpinned by exclusionary language. We dehumanize the "other" in order to discriminate against them. The practice of exclusion and the language of exclusion go hand in hand. By differentiating Jew and Gentile as 'children' and 'little dogs' respectively, Jesus' response is in many senses already predetermined. Language is

not simply expressive of the act of exclusion but serves a strategic function in the propagation, justification, and perpetuation of attitudes of exclusion. The language we use continues to underwrite the practice of exclusion and so this passage warns us of the need to be constantly vigilant in the language and the imagery we use. It is surely legitimate, for example, to question how the Church's use of terms like 'disordered' in respect of homosexual acts and 'irregular unions' in respect of relationships outside of marriage are experienced by people within the gay and lesbian community and unmarried couples. What must it feel like to hear terms like 'disordered' or 'irregular' used in respect of the most significant and loving relationships in your life?

AN OPENNESS TO ENCOUNTER

T.S. Eliot famously wrote '*We had the experience but missed the meaning.*'¹ In many ways Mark 7:24-31 proclaims that without experience there can be no meaning; without encounter with the one who is different from ourselves there can be no transformation. It is in and through his encounter with the Syrophenician woman that Jesus discovers or, perhaps more truthfully, is forced to acknowledge, a new way of seeing himself, his ministry and the world. His encounter with the woman, being exposed to her perspective, her way of seeing things, leads him to new insights. These new insights, as we have seen, find expression in new inclusive practices in subsequent episodes. The historical encounter, fraught with the tensions and difficulties that typically characterize the meeting of those who differ from each other, births a new understanding which expresses itself in a renewed personal practice that later becomes normative for his disciples and the Christian community when he commands them in Mark 13:10 to proclaim the good news to all nations. Encounter leads to a reinterpreted self-understanding which in turn leads to a new praxis. Experience and perception shape and ultimately transform each other.

This passage proclaims that personal encounter with those who think differently from us, including those who oppose our vision and criticize our understanding, is essential if we are to grow in understanding and refine our own vision of faith and ministry. If we content ourselves, as we often do, to discuss matters with like-minded groups and individuals, we condemn ourselves to what John O'Donohue has poetically called '*the blindness of one-sided certainty*'. Unless we are willing to engage with the perspective of the 'other', unless we are willing to try to see things from their

1 T. S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages* (no. 3 of Four Quartets, Stanza I).

THE FURROW

perspective, we will have our truth, our way of seeing and they will have theirs but there will be and can be no shared truth among us and so we deny ourselves the possibility of mutual transformation and enlarged thinking revealed in Jesus' encounter with the Syrophoenician woman.

Any such option for encounter rather than isolation will only be fruitful however if it is marked by a deep and sincere humility that recognizes that God, the world and life itself are infinitely larger than we can ever know or imagine. The scriptures themselves recognize not only the partiality of our knowledge and understanding, but the partiality of even the possibilities of knowledge and understanding. Second Isaiah [Isaiah 45:8-9] declares that 'my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' Romans 11:34 asks what is surely intended as a rhetorical question: 'Who has known the mind of the LORD?' The humble recognition that new worlds of meaning and understanding exist beyond the limits of our experience and knowledge is a necessary precondition for any fruitful encounter. When Jesus is confronted with the contrasting perspective and distinctive cultural lens of the Syrophoenician woman, he is challenged to acknowledge the *partiality* of his own response. This passage challenges us not only to accept that there are other lenses through which to see the world, but also and perhaps more importantly, to accept that these contrasting lenses are as equally valid as ours and, in many instances, are in fact the only ones through which a different contextual reality can be seen or understood. By being open to the perspective of the other we take a giant step towards enlarged thinking and thereby towards transformative encounter.

Drawing on perspectives from Hannah Arendt, Miroslav Volf urges that even when we are convinced our programme is correct we must do so with the realization that our perspective is partial and limited, that there is always more than we can see. We must be always ready to expand our thinking and even our moral convictions. We enlarge our thinking by:

... letting the voices and perspectives of others, especially those with whom we may be in conflict, resonate within ourselves, by allowing them to help us see them, as well as ourselves, from their perspective, and if needed, readjust our perspectives as we take into account their perspectives. ... Reversing perspectives may lead us not only to learn something from the other, but also to look afresh at our own traditions and rediscover their neglected or even forgotten resources. ... We see what we have

not seen before because, in the encounter with the other, we have made space within ourselves not only for the perspective of the other but with the help of the other also for silenced voices within our own tradition.²

Our praxis of encounter must involve therefore a willingness to re-examine our own views and convictions in much the same way as Jesus was forced to reassess his own position by the Syrophenician woman's response. The experience of the 'other' and their 'contrasting truth' can often become a mirror that serves to expose anti-gospel values and attitudes in our understanding that we are simply unaware of.

A SAVING WORD FROM THE OUTSIDE

This unique passage also challenges us to be open to the fact that the 'messianic' or 'saving' word can be, and often is, spoken by the very people we as Church seek to oppose or exclude. The evidence of the scriptural text is clear. Jesus explicitly acknowledges the woman's word or 'logos' as the saving word of the encounter. It is the Syrophenician woman, the very one whom Jesus has sought to exclude, who speaks the messianic word within the pericope: Jesus merely announces the miracle but significantly he attributes it explicitly to her 'logos,' her word. The woman's response, her insistence on the legitimacy of her plea, her refusal to be excluded: these constitute the defining wisdom of the story. It is she who is the catalyst for the move from exclusion to embrace. Through a dialogue that dared to reach across the divide of 'difference,' the situation of both sides is transformed and enriched: her daughter is healed of the unclean spirit and Jesus is cleansed of the equally unclean spirit of prejudice and exclusion. In a telling comment on this passage Perkinson insists that, viewed in such a light, the pericope "can be read as a moment, when in its very genesis, christology offers us a detail that questions its own powers of normativity as discourse. ... It constitutes a site where the canonical source of christology can be read against itself as a totalizing authority."³

Mark 7:24-31 therefore calls us then to be less arrogant about our own understanding, our own theology, our own tradition and to be *open* to what God may be revealing in and through those who we all too often regard as opponents, critics and outsiders. The text clearly records Jesus changing his mind. He is willing to admit

2 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 213.

3 Jim Perkinson, "A Canaanite Word in the Logos of Christ or the difference the Syrophenician Woman makes to Jesus," *Semeia 75* (1996) 69.

THE FURROW

the inadequacy of his initial position and to enlarge his thinking by making room within himself for the perspective of the woman. He is open to recognizing the contradictions between his initial refusal to answer the woman's plea and his own sense of himself as an instrument of God's mercy. In so doing he recognizes that he himself needs to change if he is to become the authentic witness to God's mercy that he believes himself to be. That example should challenge us as a *Church* to be constantly open to critically examining the adequacy and the coherence of our theology, our teaching and our pastoral praxis when confronted with new insights and perspectives. All too often Church tradition and Church teaching are conferred with, or indeed claim for themselves, what Perkinson terms a 'totalizing authority.' The scriptural witness of Mark 7:24-31 challenges any such claim to 'a totalizing authority.' If Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, the fulness of God's revelation, needed to enlarge his thinking then, surely, we as a Church must be willing to do likewise. Therefore, in seeking to speak to our world we must demonstrate both *modesty* and *courage*. If we lack modesty, we are likely to repeat the mistake of Job's friends who preferred their own comfortable understanding of God more than the God who said that only Job had spoken correctly about him (Job 42:7). If we lack courage, we will have nothing to say to our world, nothing to offer it. In seeking to speak to our world we must respect both the freedom and the mystery of God attested to within the scriptures, as in Isaiah 48:6-7: 'From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known. They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, so that you could not say, "I already knew them."' If we fail to respect this radical and intrinsic freedom of God, we make God small, and God is never small! We need to be ever mindful of the call to modesty for all theological discourse laid down by the Cuban philosopher Raúl Fornet Betancourt when he reminds us that '*No one can speak absolutely of the Absolute!*'

A CHURCH DE-CENTERED BY MERCY

In the gospel encounter we have seen that the woman's faith in the unbiased and unconditional nature of *mercy* stands as the inspiration of her response and is the "contrasting truth" with which she confronts Jesus, inspiring him to refine his understanding of himself and his mission. Mercy has been described by Pope Francis in recent years as 'God's most powerful word' and, as such, should be understood as the fundamental principle of the activity of God and ought to stand at the heart of our vision of faith and Church.

It must transcend our different theologies and pastoral approaches and stand at the very heart of our self-understanding.

Sadly, for many people, this is *not* their experience of Church. Like the Syrophoenician woman, many people experience rejection rather than welcome; exclusion rather than embrace; judgment rather than acceptance; and condemnation in place of the compassion for which they so desperately yearn. All too often we allow our theologies, our tradition and our teaching to take precedence and we push mercy to the margins, satisfying ourselves with mere acts of mercy rather than making mercy itself the fundamental and guiding principle of the Church's life. The Syrophoenician woman dramatically reminds us that the core value of mercy must stand at the very heart and center of our Christian vision. We must be willing, where necessary, to be 'de-centered' by mercy by placing the demands of mercy above and beyond all other considerations, even the wellbeing of the Church itself. If we truly believe that mercy is God's most powerful word, then it must also become our *defining* wisdom by which all other aspects of our belief and praxis are evaluated and critiqued.

Like the Syrophoenician woman, many people continue to be drawn to Jesus and the grace he promises, only to be rebuffed because of their gender, their sexuality, their politics, their theology, their lifestyle or their life circumstances. These include but are not limited to women of faith who seek a path to ordained ministry and/or an authentic and real leadership role in the Church; people of deep faith and devotion who find themselves excluded from full Eucharistic Communion because they have dared to seek happiness and security in new relationships; members of the LGBT community who ardently desire to be part of the grace that Christ has promised and emerging theological voices who seek to articulate new understandings of faith by giving voice to communities who traditionally been not been part of our theology. Yet, like the Syrophoenician woman before them, many people who reach out to the church in hope and expectation experience instead rejection and exclusion. Thankfully, like the Syrophoenician woman, many of these voices refuse to be silenced and refuse to accept that no more can be said on the matter. Following the example of the Syrophoenician woman they courageously *challenge* the legitimacy of their exclusion by appealing to the fundamental principle of God's mercy and God's unconditional love. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we, as a Church, are capable of hearing their 'contrasting truth' and are willing to follow the example of Jesus in allowing their perspective, their way of seeing the same reality, to enlarge our thinking and, if necessary, to reshape our understanding and our pastoral practice.

THE FURROW

AN ICON FOR ENLARGED THINKING

Change is never easy, even at a personal level. Accepting that our point of view or understanding is inadequate to the reality and circumstances we now face is deeply challenging, even at a personal level. That challenge is magnified when it comes to an institution as large and as diverse as the Church, particularly one with such a long history and such an extensive tradition. But tradition need not weigh us down.

*Tradition doesn't have to weigh us down.
We weigh ourselves down with tradition,
with the past, with past failures, past forms, past perceptions.
We have made these things. We can unmake them ...
New worlds wait to be created
by free minds that can dream unfettered,
without fear, turning obstacles
into milestones towards luminous glories.⁴*

In seeking to address the reality of difference within our Church and amongst those who seek a place within our Church, we must account for the biblical witness of the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-31. The undeniable fact is that the earliest of the four canonical gospels deliberately includes a controversial and polemical passage that unambiguously shows Jesus changing his mind and enlarging his thinking when confronted with the contrasting perspective of a Syrophenician woman. Her perspective forces him to critically re-examine his own tradition and self-understanding and to ask himself whether his rejection of her plea for her sick daughter can be reconciled with his own understanding of himself as the instrument of God's mercy. As a Church we cannot shirk the challenge of this polemical passage. We cannot turn a blind eye to the testimony of scripture *just because* it is unsettling and challenges our traditional way of thinking. Neither can we turn a deaf ear to the 'Syrophenicians' of our own time.

And yet it seems to me that within the Church there remains a strong and steadfast *resistance* to enlarging our thinking. Often the Church's preferred way of dealing with difference seems to consist in simply denying the legitimacy of any view that is not in accordance with tradition and official Church teaching. The Summary of the Findings of the Apostolic Visitation in Ireland, published on the 20th March 2012, for example appear to reflect such a mindset. It stated that '... Since the Visitators also encountered a certain tendency, not dominant but nevertheless fairly widespread

4 Ben Okri, *Mental Fight* (London: Phoenix House, 1999), 13.

among priests, religious and laity, to hold theological opinions at variance with the teachings of the Magisterium, this serious situation requires particular attention, directed principally towards improved theological formation. It must be stressed that dissent from the fundamental teachings of the Church is not the authentic path towards renewal.’ Two weeks after this particular statement, during his homily in Saint Peter’s Basilica on Holy Thursday, Pope Benedict criticised Austrian priests who had publicly supported the ordination of women and the abolition of priestly celibacy, describing such ‘disobedience’ as a ‘disregarding of the definitive decisions of the Church’s Magisterium, such as the question of women’s ordination, for which Blessed Pope John Paul II stated irrevocably that the Church has received no authority from the Lord.’ Whilst acknowledging that such calls for reform might be well-intentioned and motivated by concern for the Church, Pope Benedict insisted that true renewal was to be found in a “radicalism of obedience.” The choice of *language* is significant and revealing. Terms such as ‘definitive decisions,’ ‘irrevocably stated’ and ‘obedience’ seem to reject *a priori* the legitimacy or merit or any viewpoint that differs from or diverges from the ‘official position’ and therefore shuts down debate and any possibility of enlarged thinking. Vatican II however insisted that the sacred scriptures are the soul of sacred theology and the scriptural witness of Mark 7:24-31 clearly shows Jesus changing his mind, enlarging his thinking, refining his vision of himself and his ministry, even though this meant rejecting a position he had previously held as being no longer adequate.

The voice of the Syrophenician woman refuses to be silenced today just as she refused to be silenced in her encounter with Christ. She stands as an enduring icon for *enlarged thinking*, calling us to a radical openness to new perspectives, a willingness to critically re-examine our understanding in light of these new and emerging perspectives and a readiness to enlarge our thinking if and when these new perspectives expose inadequacies or contradictions within our way of understanding God, faith and the world. She challenges us to multiply our perspectives in order to broaden our vision. She invites us to remove the ‘blinkers’ that limit our vision and understanding and to be willing to see familiar realities from new perspectives by opening ourselves up to the experiences and perspective of those who differ from us. She teaches us not to be threatened by difference but rather to seek unity in diversity, building on the firm foundation of the mercy of God which overcomes all boundaries. She warns us that, in seeking to silence what we regard as dissenting voices, we may in fact be silencing God’s ‘saving word’ and denying ourselves the opportunity to

THE FURROW

grow in our understanding of the mystery of God. She calls on us to be less arrogant, less certain, and less dogmatic in our teachings and in our understanding.

God remains free to act and to speak in and through whom God chooses and we must learn to respect that freedom. In Mark 7:24-31 the saving word is clearly spoken by the Syrophoenician woman and is acknowledged as such by Jesus. Hers is the transforming power of the story. And yet that saving and transforming word is effectively silenced by the Church by its deliberate omission from Sunday worship. This passage is one of the few passages in Mark's Gospel not included in the Sunday Lectionary. Is that because the Church does not want to be disturbed by its radical revelation just as Jesus did not want to be disturbed at the beginning of the passage? Yet it is precisely by being disturbed that Jesus grows in his understanding of his own self and his mission. The Syrophoenician woman refuses to be silenced now just as once she refused to be silenced in the region of Tyre. Her insistence on the primacy of mercy continues to challenge the illusion of legitimacy of every form of exclusion and to champion the dignity of difference. She remains an inspiring icon for enlarged thinking and continues to speak her saving word. The question is: Will the Church afford us the opportunity to hear that saving word? If not, why not?

A universal event. The Church embraces all of humanity for the simple reason that the founder of the Church, Jesus Christ, died for all. In recent times, the Church has understood more clearly its call to be an instrument of unity in the world – contributing to bringing about unity with God and the unity of the human race.

- BISHOP BRENDAN LEAHY, Catholic Perspectives on Inter-religious Dialogue in *Connecting Lives*, ed. Patricia Kieran (Dublin: Veritas) p. 121.

Homilies for August (B)

John-Paul Sheridan

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 1

Ex 16:2-4, 12-15. Ps 77:3-4, 23-25, 54. Eph 4:17, 20-24.

Jn 6:24-35

Tradition has it that alongside the Tablets of the Commandments in the Ark of the Covenant was a jar of Manna. For if the Ark was the symbol of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, then it would contain two things that bound the people in that relationship. The Tablets as the means to live in a community and in right relationship with Yahweh and the Manna as the means to sustain the community.

The first reading gives an insight into the doubt that begins to creep into the people in the desert. Instead of looking forward, they begin to look back rather than looking to the future – even slavery and the worship of Golden Calves seems palatable to the alternative. So, God sent Manna and satisfied the hunger, and the people gathered the Manna and would do so until the time of Exodus was over.

The Ark of the Covenant contained all the Israel needed for the journey. The Eucharist points to all that we need on our Christian journey, and to the command of Jesus to work for food that lasts. In the course of life, there are many things for which people work – to pay their bills, to feed their families, to have some money to spend for enjoyment and recreation. It is easy for those necessary things to become obsessions when we take our eye off the reason for our work. Wealth, ambition, power can all be forms of nourishments, they can all be pathways in life, all might have a certain merit and validity, but when we fail to understand them in the context of the bigger picture of the Christian life, they become the whole purpose and obsession of life. Henry David Thoreau suggests, “a person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imagination and our thoughts will determine out lives and our character.

John-Paul Sheridan is a member of the Faculty of Theology at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

THE FURROW

Therefore, it behoves us to be careful what we worship. For what we worship, we are becoming.”

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 8

1 Kgs 19:4-8. Ps 33:2-9. Eph 4:30-5:2. Jn 6:41-51

In the story of Elijah from the Book of Kings, the key words are, “get up and eat, or the journey will be too long for you.” Just as we saw the journey of Israel in the desert and the need for sustenance, we see Elijah and his need for the sustenance required for his journey. There is only one source of food that sustains the Christian life: Eucharist. The parallels with the first reading are obvious – the gift again comes from God, it will sustain the community and feed a pilgrim people.

In the gospel we have the people complaining about Jesus, bringing to reality the old adage, “eaten bread is soon forgotten.” What they did not realise is that Jesus could have provided for twice or ten times the number that was there. They “had the experience; but missed the meaning,” as TS Eliot would put it. The feeding of the five thousand was to help them understand that Jesus’ gift to them was not loaves and fish, but himself. They could only see as far as a carpenter whose family they knew; the demand to look deeper into the miracle escaped them, as it probably would have escaped each of us if we had been there.

Faith makes demands on us, and rightly so it should. The demand here was to see beyond the moment of miracle to the deeper reality of the story. What are the consequences of the miracle here – or for any of us? If we understand the miracle just as a convenient source of sustenance, then perhaps we would follow Jesus till the next time he produced from five loaves and two fish, or maybe head off in another direction when something different and novel attracts our attention. If we truly understand that it is his body and blood that is offered to us, and if we can understand what a gift that is, then the only recourse is to follow – yearning for a food that will sustain us on the longer journey, which supersedes all other forms of nourishment. Waiting for the command, “get up and eat.”

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

August 15

Apoc 11:19, 12:1-6, 10. Ps 44:10-12, 16. 1 Cor 15:20-26.

Lk 1:39-56

The solemnity interrupts the liturgical year’s foray into the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the teaching about Jesus, the Bread of

Life. However, when the teaching on Jesus, the Bread of Life makes demands of our faith, it is good for us to reflect on one for whom the demands of faith were so evident in her life, and the reward for that faith is at the heart of today's solemnity. This is summarized in the words of Elizabeth from the gospel today, "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Among the many things that can be said on this feast, it might be apposite to focus on *two* ways in which we learn from the mother assumed into heaven – Mary as apostle and as disciple.

Mary is *apostle*; in that she is the messenger or envoy of good news, coming from the Greek origin of the word. The Magnificat is the proclamation of the kingdom in words as powerful and transforming as those of the Beatitudes. I would direct readers to Kathleen Coyle's article on the Magnificat in the June issues of *The Furrow*.

Discipleship is bound up with both learning and obedience. The three-year long formation of Jesus' disciples was their apprenticeship into how to best bring Christ into the world, how to best make Christ a reality to all they would encounter. For Mary, we have the one who would physically bring Christ into the world, but she would also, as we see in the miracle at Cana, make the power of Christ a reality, so long as those who listen would, "do as he tells you". That listening is also one of the characteristics of Mary which we celebrate today. Obedience, from the Latin *obedire*, means to listen. Obedience is not subservience, but the freedom to listen like a faithful disciple. It is in truly listening to the voice of God, which brought Mary to places where perhaps she would really not go. It would also bring Jesus' disciples to places where they would not have thought of going, but it would bring them a true understanding of the message of Christ in all its richness.

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 22

Jos 24:1-2, 15-18. Ps 33:2-3, 16-23. Eph 5:21-32. Jn 6:60-69

At the beginning of August, we had the beginning of the Exodus and the gift of Manna and all that that symbolised for the people of Israel. Now we turn to the end of the Exodus and the gathering of the tribes at Shechem by Joshua. There is the story from the book of Numbers that some chose not to enter into the land. They rejected the reports of the advance party and were unwilling to brave God's promise. They ended up wandering in the desert until they died, except this was a real wandering: they no longer had

THE FURROW

pillars of fire or cloud; no longer had the Manna; no longer had the direction of Moses or Aaron or Joshua to keep them close to the will and covenant of Yahweh.

Here at the beginning of this last part of the teaching on the Eucharist, we see some who decide that this teaching is no longer for them. It is a good meditation on vocation to the priesthood and the religious life and equally a good meditation on the vocation of every believing Christian. *Christifideles Laici* describes 'vocation' as the universal call to holiness. This call may begin with an introduction to the person of Jesus Christ; it may continue with becoming acquainted with the words and deeds of Jesus, but ultimately it must be sustained by the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

It is a strange and curious incident for John to recount. Why would he speak of those who left, rather than those who stayed? However, it is a valuable letter for any follower of Jesus, then or now. Moreover, it does give one of the instances in the gospels where Simon Peter shines. He speaks for those who stayed, who could see deep into the heart of all that Jesus was saying and doing and find in it something worth following. His words resonate down the ages to us today. For many today, the words of Jesus are 'intolerable language,' and for the many who remain (although sometimes it seems like just a few) Peter's words echo in our hearts. It is only in Eucharist that we find strength for the challenges of faith today, sustenance for the journey in life and the means by which we are united in love, to the one who loved us first.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 29

Deut 4:1-2, 6-8. Ps 14:2-5. Jas 1:17-18, 21-22, 27.

Mt 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

This gospel instantly evokes a memory of my mother telling us to wash our hands before sitting down to dinner. It is one of those initial learning moments for children – both to have it done for them and then to learn how to do it themselves. So, in we would trundle to the bathroom and take turns at the sink. The notion of 'clean' and 'unclean' seems alien to us as Christian, because we do not have dietary laws in the same way as our Muslim or Jewish brothers and sisters. However, much like the recent gospels of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, there is a deeper meaning to the story here today. The Pharisees and scribes were looking to score points off the incident and Jesus was quick to put them in their place. The scribes spent their lives upholding the rules and

regulations which encompassed the principles of Mosaic law. It meant that the minutiae of life at the time of Jesus were regulated for. I suppose Jesus had no problem with that – he had said that he had not come to change the law. His problem was using the law as a stick to beat people or a rod to oppress them.

The etymology of the word ‘hypocrisy’ might be traced to acting; not necessarily the great actors of this or any generation who can inhabit the character in a play, but it means one for whom life is merely *an act*, without any sincerity behind it. If the practise of religion is only about the externals without any attention to the internal then it ceases to be anything of consequence, anything that lasts, anything on which a life can be modelled.

It’s very easy for us to think that we would never ‘act’ in such a manner, but we judge the actions and sincerity of others all the time. Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes, Orphanages and Industrial Schools were the way we as a society and a Church judged in the past.

The gospel is a reminder to us of what we are capable of; the response of Jesus to this type of judgement; and a way for us to look into the heart of any and all who come under our misguided and poorly orientated scrutiny, and find the person of Jesus Christ, the one who never judges us.

The Mind of Newman. One of the distinguishing characteristics of John Henry Newman, making him a particularly apt intellectual and spiritual teacher for our time, is the capaciously Catholic breadth of his intellect. He embodies in his person a comprehensiveness of outlook that resists partial views of reality. His is the quintessentially Catholic affirmation of “both/and.” Unlike the narrow rationalists of his own day and ours, Newman’s is not a constricted view of reason, but one that recognizes legitimate cognitive insights in non-scientific domains, like music and poetry. Indeed, he himself was accomplished in both areas.

– KEVIN J. O’REILLY, ed. *Heart Speaks to Heart*. 2021 (Herefordshire: Gracewing Publishing) p.104.

Homilies for September (B)

Tomás Surlis

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time *September 5*
Is 35:4-7. Ps 145. 1 Jas 2:1-5. Mk 7:31-37

Saint Mark recounts for us one of the many journeys undertaken by Jesus into pagan territory – into a territory that respectable Jews of the time would have avoided unless absolutely necessary. If a journey had to be undertaken into pagan territory, a respectable Jew who was looking out for his reputation would have avoided unnecessary contact – and at all costs physical contact – with people who did not share his faith, his culture, his understanding of God and the world. The question we, as followers of Jesus, have to ask ourselves is: Why? Why did Jesus not only enter into pagan territory but, at great risk to his reputation, enter into physical contact with a person who would have been viewed by the cultural mores of the time as doubly-cursed: both as a pagan and as someone afflicted by illness?

Part of the answer to the question comes from the fact that Jesus was brought up in Galilee – pagan territory – where Jews and pagans lived side by side. He was accustomed to interacting with people who held different beliefs and attitudes to his own and he did not fear them. It is obvious from this encounter with the man who was both deaf and had some sort of speech impediment that Jesus' concern was first and foremost with the person and not with the layers of cultural prejudice which were so current at the time. Jesus' encounter with this man is incredibly intimate. Usually, Jesus heals the sick by uttering a word of command and often this is done at a distance. But, on this occasion, Mark tells us that Jesus took the man "aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle." In a very physical and intimate manner, Jesus meets the deaf and mute man where he is at. He does not make a spectacle of him so that he can show himself to be a wonder worker. Rather, he takes

Tomás Surlis is a priest of the Diocese of Achonry. He is Rector of the National Seminary, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

him aside away from prying eyes and touching the sources of the man's affliction, he heals him immediately.

Mark tells us that, having touch the man's ears and tongue, Jesus raises his eyes to heaven and sighs before speaking the command "Ephphatha!" "Be opened!" The English word "sigh" hardly captures the intensity of Jesus' emotion which would have been communicated in the original Greek. A conversation with a deaf-mute at the time was impossible so Jesus' communicates through actions and through a groan that comes from the depths of his being and which shows that not only does he pity the man's predicament but he shares his pain. This encounter is a prelude to the Cross upon which Jesus bears the pain and longing of the entire human race and transforms our condition from pain-filled sinfulness into hope-filled healing, grace and mercy. What Jesus does for the man who is deaf and mute in today's Gospel story is what he offers to all of us who come to him in our pain and our need. In Jesus, God became a human being so that he could share in our longing and touch us in our need. He offers us a new way of being by opening our ears to hear the Good News which the Father sent him to bring to the world and by loosening our tongues to bring that Good News to others through the way we interact in our daily lives.

He reveals to us that he shares our longing for healing and hope and he shows us that the way to achieve healing and live hope is to allow ourselves to be touched by God in the intimate encounters he offers through the Sacraments and especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. These sacraments empower us to recognise our own brokenness and need for healing and enable us to reach out to others by being open: open to speaking for the voiceless, hearing the cry of the poor and reaching out to embrace those who need to know that they, like us, are beloved children of God. To you and me this day Jesus says "Ephphatha! Be opened!" This is the constant challenge that our faith places before us: to remember that we encounter Jesus each and every day in the most unexpected places and persons.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time *September 12*

Is 50:5-9. Ps 114. Jas 2:14-18. Mk 8:27-35

I am blessed to have a group of men and women in my life with whom I have been friends since primary school. When we get together – these days via *Zoom* – the conversation often turns to questions about God, faith, religion, etc. One or two of these dear friends wouldn't exactly be what one might call "Gospel greedy!" In fact, they seem to have given up on faith and Church. They protest that they don't need an institution to tell them how to live

THE FURROW

their lives, thank you very much. The usual reasons for not attending Mass or the other sacraments are given. "I get nothing out of it." "It's boring." "When the Church gets its own act together then it can tell me how to deal with mine!" And the list goes on! This has been going on for years. In the last few years, however, particularly during the pandemic, I have noticed that some of those who had been indifferent to the faith of their childhood for quite some time have begun to take another look. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that as they have gotten a little older, gotten married, had children, etc. the fundamental questions of life have become more immediate for them.

Who am I? Why am I here? What's the purpose of it all? Where am I going? Why believe in God? Why be a Catholic? Why not be a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim? Why be anything at all? Why indeed?! How do you deal with such questions when they do arise? Like my childhood friends, you may have avoided them for years. Or, maybe you consider yourself too young to bother with such issues. Or, maybe you have faced these questions and have found the answers you were looking for in the Church. Whatever our situation in life, these fundamental questions of identity and purpose are inescapable and, if we are ever to mature and grow in the faith and in our relationship with God, we must seek the answers to these questions and build our lives based on those answers.

Christians believe that the Scripture is the living word of God and that when we gather to celebrate the Mass, Jesus speaks directly to us in and through the word which is proclaimed in the first half of the Mass. Well then, what is Jesus saying to you and to me today? He is asking us a question that we cannot fail to answer if we are serious about our relationship with Him: Who do you say that I am?

It is important to notice the context in which this question arises in the Gospel story as recorded for us by St Matthew. Jesus and his disciples are gathered in Caesarea Philippi which is located on the south-western slope of Mount Hermon in the north of Galilee. This is pagan territory. In the city there is a temple built by Herod the Great in honour of the divinity of Caesar. Jesus and the Twelve are standing before a cave near the mountain on which the city is built and all around the mouth of the cave itself there are various niches in which are statues to the various gods and goddesses of the Graeco-Roman pantheon. This sanctuary is a symbol of the confusion of answers offered by the pre-Christian Greeks and Romans to the basic questions about life which we are considering today.

Jesus stands with his back to this bewildering variety of gods

and asks his disciples: Who do you say that I am? They are looking at what the pagan world has to offer behind Jesus and they all fall silent in the face of this fundamental question. All, that is, save one: Peter. Impulsive, emotional, rash Peter emerges as the leader, the one chosen by God to confirm the faith of the others and to exercise the office of overseer in the Church established by Christ on the rock of Peter's faith. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus' reaction to this declaration is to give to Peter, and through him to all the Apostles and their successors, the awesome power of the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, the power to forgive sins and the power to open or close the gates to salvation.

What Jesus does here is in keeping with the tradition begun by King David who had a council of twelve ministers to assist him in governing the kingdom of Israel. One of these ministers was the Master of the Palace, the equivalent to a modern Taoiseach or Prime Minister, who was invested with the king's own authority. The symbol of his authority was the key given him by the king which controlled access to the palace and thus to the person of the king himself. In today's Gospel, Jesus is giving just such authority to Peter and as such this event provides the basis for all papal authority as we know it today. Thus, the Pope's coat of arms bears the symbol of the keys. His role is to guide us on our way as we seek to follow Christ and to imitate Him in word and deed. The Pope is gifted with the special charism to discern the will of God for the Church and therefore, we are called to listen carefully to what the Pope has to say when he speaks to us about the faith and about moral living. When he meets with groups or offers his Wednesday catechesis and Sunday Angelus message, the Pope always finishes with the words "Pray for me!" To pray for the Pope and those who work with him in service of the mission of the Church to bring people into relationship with Jesus who is the answer to the deepest questions is a very good thing to do. All too often, it is easy to criticise, convenient to complain and popular to pillory. While it is good to question and sometimes necessary to critically evaluate, it is always good to gather and pray for the Church and her leaders as they strive to walk together with us along the path that leads us to the ultimate answer to the question posed by Jesus to each one of us today: Who do you say I am? You are the Christ. I believe in you and I trust in you. Therefore, I will follow you.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 19

Wis 2:12, 17-20. Ps 53. Jas 3:16-4:3. Mk 9:30-37

The United Nations tells us that at any one time there are 36 major wars and 42 minor wars taking place in our world. A major war

THE FURROW

can include civil conflicts, wars between neighbouring nations, tribal conflicts that bring about massive movements of peoples, refugees, etc. These major and minor wars are not always spoken about and only those that are of political and economic importance to the major world powers ever reach our TV screens or social media accounts or the pages of our newspapers. We live in a fiercely divided world without a doubt. The major divide is, of course, between the developed nations of the western world and the developing countries of Global South. Injustice is rife. Poor people suffer terrible hardships daily, even in our own little corner of the world. Lack of education and opportunity condemn new generations to the cycle of poverty and violence all across the globe. Our natural resources are disappearing at an alarming rate and huge multinational corporations tend to have the power to dictate to governments about how economies should be run. So much sadness. So much unnecessary suffering. So much waste. So much sin.

But, surely God can do something about it! So many good people pray every day for peace and justice, why does God ignore their pleas? Why does evil and suffering always seem to have the upper hand? What's the point in hoping in and working for a better tomorrow? Millions of people all over the world ask these questions every day and what do those of us who believe in a loving, compassionate God, have to say to them? Well, the first thing we can and should say, as often as we can, is that it's not all bad news. There is a tremendous amount of goodness, truth and beauty in our world and in our lives. We need the eyes to see it and the ears to hear about it. Even though it might seem otherwise at times, God's plan is unfolding as it should. His kingdom will come. Justice and peace will reign. Our job is to cooperate with him in bringing it about and we start by bringing the revolutionary power of love to our homes, our places of work, our places of recreation, to our way of talking and being with other people and to our prayer.

The second thing we can say is that there is a reason for all the disharmony and discord, the violence and suffering, the pain and broken dreams. The virtuous man of the first reading from the Book of Wisdom is to be tortured and put to death because he dares to speak the truth to unjust people whose way of life brings suffering and pain to those they use and abuse. Truth always encounters opposition. Jesus himself is *the* Truth and he paid the ultimate price for truth telling.

In the second reading, St James points out that the reason for war and battles, for violence and suffering, for pain and misery is found within the human person, in the desires fighting inside our own

selves. Greed, ambition, jealousy, envy, hatred, lust; all trying to gain the upper hand and all focused on the needs and wants of one person: myself. When we concentrate on ourselves and satisfying our own selfish needs then the result is clear: disharmony, conflict, lack of respect and even violence. Happiness cannot be ours when we seek it only for ourselves. However, when we work to achieve the happiness of others, when we put their needs first, the great thing is that happiness is far easier to achieve. Because, in putting others first, we are imitating Jesus, and therefore, imitating God who made us in his own image and who made us to be happy.

This is the mistake which the twelve disciples were making as they walked along the road behind Jesus. They were arguing amongst themselves about who was going to have the best position in Jesus' new kingdom. They thought he had come to set up a new *political* system in their country and that *they* would be his chief ministers. So they argued about who would be Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister for Finance, and so on. They really hadn't a clue what Jesus was about at all! Yet they knew, deep down, that their way was not the way forward. Look at their reaction when Jesus asked them what they had been talking about. Not a word! Heads down, feet shifting uneasily in the dust, unable to look Jesus in the eye. But he knew what they had been talking about because he knew them. Yet he didn't give out or accuse or send them away. He used the opportunity to open their eyes and ears and he did this by placing a little child in front of them.

A little child. Why? Because a child doesn't shy away from his/her need. A child doesn't have hidden agendas. A child has no major influence in society, or at least a child didn't in those days. A child is ready to receive love and care and nourishment without wondering what's in it for the person who gives them these things. Through the child Jesus is saying, if you welcome the poor, ordinary people, the people who have no influence and no wealth and no power, the people who need things done for them, then you welcome me and in welcoming me, you welcome God himself.

This is the answer to the lack of peace and justice and harmony and love in our world: to imitate Jesus. To give and not to count the cost. To put others first. To use my gifts and talents not for my own selfish ends but for others and to build a better world. If this is our decision and this is our resolve, we will speak every word and do every action with and for Jesus. Ambition can be a very good thing when our ambition is to serve others' needs first. In this way, a revolution of love will turn our world upside down. Our homes will be happier and more peaceful. Major and minor wars will be no more. The poverty gap will disappear and faces disfigured by suffering will turn into faces lined by laughter. It won't be easy to

THE FURROW

achieve. We will suffer for it. But, it is possible, Jesus said so and he is with us!

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time *September 26*
Num 11:25-29. Ps 18. Jas 5:1-6. Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

St Jerome was born in the year 345 and he died at the age of 75 in the year 420. He was a marvellous scholar who was passionately in love with the Bible. Jerome dedicated his life to uncovering the true meaning of the sacred texts for the people of God. He set up a monastery and bible school in Bethlehem, the town of Jesus' birth, because he wanted to spend his time in the land that Jesus lived in and walked upon. He spent much of his life there meditating on and writing about the meaning of the sacred texts. A hard-working man, a great man, an inspired man. The effects of his work remain with us to this day.

There is a story told about St Jerome which makes a very valid point for us in the light of our Scripture readings today. Jerome was praying one day and during his prayer he felt the need to offer something worthwhile to God. 'Lord', he said, 'I offer you my life'. The voice came back: 'It was I who gave you that. Your life is mine already'. 'Then, Lord, I offer you my heart, my love'. 'It was I who gave you those too'. There was silence. Then the Lord spoke again: 'Jerome?' 'Yes Lord?' 'Why don't you give me your sins? Your sins are all your own'.

A curious thing that! Our sins are the only things that truly belong to us and the only things we can truly offer to God. Not in the sense of: 'Here you go Lord! You take them! I don't want them!' But, rather, in the sense of: 'Lord, you have given me everything. My life, the air I breathe, the food I eat, the friendships I enjoy, the past, the present, the future. All belong to you. I give you the only things that are truly mine – my sins'. Why would we offer our sins to God? Because, the only things we truly own are also the only things that stunt our growth in love for God and for each other. Sin is the only thing which will squeeze the breath of God's Spirit out of our bodies and souls.

By its very nature, sin is selfish. It involves the love of only one person: myself. Sin seeks to satisfy the needs and desires of only one player on the stage of life: me. It involves a worldview which has a very limited horizon, and it tends to render us unable to see beyond our own problems, needs, difficulties and wants. The tragedy of this worldview is the very thing Jesus is warning us against in today's reading from the gospel of Mark. Sin is the ultimate in egoism, the habit of being so turned in on ourselves that we ignore others and therefore ignore God. It is the obstinate

choice to turn away from our duty to love our neighbour and to love God which can possibly turn into the final obstinacy which is hell. If we choose only sin for our companion on life's journey, in the end we could find ourselves alone in the misery which is the ultimate consequence of sin.

When Jesus speaks to us today about cutting off a hand or a foot, or indeed, tearing out an eye, he does not mean us to take him literally! After all, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit where God himself comes to live in us. Therefore, God requires us to respect our bodies and not damage them wilfully in any way. What Jesus means is that there is a goal in life which is worth any sacrifice and that goal is heaven, where we will reach our heart's desire and our everlasting fulfilment. The hands and feet which we must cut off and the eyes which we must tear out are the bad habits, the disordered passions, the selfishness, the jealousy, the bitterness, the pride – in other words all the attractions, tendencies, habits, excuses and attitudes which cause us to turn a blind eye to the needs of others and to our total dependence on God who is our loving Father.

Does my drinking lead me into sin? Do I spend too much time watching TV? Do I watch programmes which provoke sinful thoughts and desires? Do I spend hours on the internet or playing computer games? Do I gossip, lie, cheat, steal? Do I cause arguments at home? Do I allow my work to take me away from spending quality time with my family? In other words, what do I invest my time and energy in? Everyone, from pope to pauper, from politician to priest, has questions we can ask ourselves about the quality of our lives and, in particular, about the quality of our relationships with others and with God.

The key thing we can and must remember is that sin affects us on *three* levels: first, it affects the type of person we are and are likely to become; second, it affects our ability to love and be loved, that is, our relationships with others; third, and crucially, it affects our relationship with a God who is offended by sin, not because it involves the breaking of divine law, but because it hurts a God who has made himself vulnerable out of love. If sin were not serious, why would God have become one of us? Why else would he cry and suffer and die?

Jesus has given us the gift of himself in the Eucharist and the gift of his healing and strength in Confession. He calls us to use them! When we call on his mercy, he renews our life and leads us to *real* life, *real* happiness and *real* peace. We will not endure the pain of letting go of old habits and attractions alone. He has walked before us on the way of suffering and he is victorious over sin and death. It is a difficult journey to holiness, but it is our destiny

THE FURROW

as children of God. We can overcome the difficulty together and with Jesus. With the all-powerful Son of God on our side nothing can defeat us. With him we have a treasured possession – *hope*. Today we go forward in hope and together we offer everything – especially our sinfulness – to the God of love. Together we face the future with the hope which God’s forgiveness and the promise of eternal life brings.

Ideology. All ideology is deceptive because it distorts freedom of thought. Ideology is like wearing a pair of spectacles that oblige you to see only one way. That is quite different to ideas, which I hope everyone has, to help them make sense of the world. Ideology, in contrast, presents one, unique, unchanged points of view, which limits freedom of thought. Its reach can extend beyond the organisation of a given society or economy and define every aspect of someone’s life. Some people live as though communism or socialism were their religion, but religion may also be experienced as if it were an ideology. Fundamentalism can sometimes be the outcome of exposure to an ideology or some religions

– ARTURO SOSA, SJ, *Walking with Ignatius*, 2021 (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p. 60.

News and Views

The Marriage Conundrum. *Michael C. McGuckian, SJ, Kardesler Sokak 15, Kale Mah, Ulus, Ankara 06250, Turkey writes:*

The rather obvious absurdities around the recent wedding of the already twice-married Boris Johnson in Westminster Cathedral brings into focus the issue of just what is so wrong with the Canon Law of marriage. I can call on my experience to shed some light on the situation. I went to teach theology in Africa in 1995 and discovered what is known as the Eucharistic Famine there, the fact that millions of Catholics in Africa are excommunicated because they get married according to their local customs. That is an absurd and scandalous situation, and I set myself the task of finding out what was behind it. The result was a book I recently published called *Recognising Customary Marriage in Africa and Civil Marriage Everywhere* (Publisher: Xlibris US). I discovered that the problem arises from *three* mistakes made down the centuries in the Canon Law.

There was the introduction of the Pauline Privilege in the twelfth century. It came as a total surprise to me to discover that for the first thousand years the standard teaching was that every marriage is a sacrament of Christ's love for the Church. Marriage is a sacrament, but in a different way from the other six. It is not a liturgical rite; it is marriage itself that is the sacrament, not the wedding ceremony. The understanding was that marriage was instituted at Creation and the prototypical, foundational marriage is that between Adam and Eve. It follows that Baptism is not required for a valid sacramental marriage, and the proof of this is the fact that the most perfect sacrament of Christ's love for the Church is the marriage of Our Lady and St Joseph, and they were not baptised. This was all overturned by the medieval introduction of the Pauline privilege, based on the evidence of the one and only ancient dissenter from this long-standing doctrine, the unknown fourth-century author named the Ambrosiaster. This was a mistake, and the ancient tradition needs to be restored.

Then there was the introduction of the canonical form of marriage at the Council of Trent. Again in this case what happened went against the teaching of the Church that 'consent alone makes marriage.' This created the problem of clandestine marriages. Young people, like Romeo and Juliet, could get married without

their parents' permission and problems arose around inheritance and so on as a result. This problem needed to be solved, and the solution was the introduction of a form of marriage, the requirement of being witnessed by the parish priest. The theologian bishops at the Council of Trent insisted that this was wrong because it went against the principle that 'consent alone makes marriage,' but the canon lawyers overruled the theologians and decided to introduce a form of marriage anyway. The decree is known as *Tametsi*, for it affirmed that 'even though' it is against the teaching of the Church, we are still doing it. The problem with this solution is the fact that Church and State were inextricably enmeshed and the Church leaders had to introduce a solution to a social problem that should have been solved by the civil leaders themselves.

Then came the condemnation of civil marriage in the nineteenth century. Civil marriage was introduced in France after the Revolution as an anti-Catholic measure, taking marriage out of the control of the Church and bringing it back where it belongs as a civil matter. The difficulty here is the Catholic belief that marriage is a Sacrament and must therefore, it was thought, belong *only* to the jurisdiction of the Church. That is not so, however. When the teaching is restored that *every* marriage, celebrated in any society or religion, is a sacrament of Christ's love for the Church, then the matter can be resolved by recognising that Church and State both have control of the institution in their different responsibilities. The State has control of the civil aspects of the institution and registration and so on are its responsibility. The only interest of the Church is knowing that people who wish to marry are not married already and, therefore, free to do so.

When these mistakes are corrected, the solution to the problem is easy. Since every marriage is a sacrament, African Catholics married according to their customary forms are validly married and there should be no question of them being excommunicated. The introduction of a 'canonical' form at the Council of Trent is recognised as a mistake. What the Bishops were doing was acting as civil authorities and introducing a 'civil' form of marriage to bring the institution into the control of parents and solve the problem of clandestine marriage. It follows that civil marriages are valid sacramental marriages and the diriment impediment of defect of form lapses.

On the basis of all this, Boris Johnson's situation would be seen quite differently. His first marriage was the only valid marriage he has contracted and his wedding in Westminster Cathedral can only be understood as the blessing of an irregular union. This is all very quick and summary, but the full account is available in the book I mentioned at the start.

Featured Review

– *Like a Tree Cut Back**

Noel O’Sullivan

This compilation of poetry and prose from Cork-born priest of the diocese of Leeds, Michael McCarthy, is most engaging reading. The Drinagh native did not set out to be a poet or writer; on his own admission, he was much too lacking in confidence for that. His gradual awareness of his remarkable poetic gifts resulted in the publication of his first collection, *Birds’ Nests and Other Poems*, for which he won the prestigious Patrick Kavanagh Award in 2003. He was winner of the 2008 International Book & Pamphlet Competition, and his book *The Healing Station* was selected as Book of the Year in the *Guardian*.

Like a Tree Cut Back tells the story of the author’s life growing up on a farm in the 1950s and of his subsequent experience of boarding school in Cork, seminary in Carlow and life as a priest in Leeds. The narrative is interspersed with his poems or, more accurately, this narrative is itself a prose poem. The language and style are appropriate to the age and experiences about which he is writing. To invoke French literary categories, *fond* and *forme* are perfectly matched. This is especially evident as four-year-old Michael recounts the tragic death of his brother James in a farm accident. Not only was James killed but another brother, Tim, was to spend a long period in hospital recovering from injuries received in the accident. One moment that I will never forget is Michael’s reaction when Tim eventually returns home. He has been away so long that Michael is too shy to face his brother; he hides beside the dresser and covers his face with his hands, peering out to see the chocolate bars Tim is distributing. Eventually, Michael puts his hand behind him to take one of the bars. Poignant. Tension and tragedy are perfectly expressed in a style appropriate to a four year old; short sentences, graphic descriptions and a compelling immediacy. This is not an old man writing about his childhood; it is the child still in him who is talking to us.

* Michael McCarthy, *Like a Tree Cut Back*, Sheffield: The Poetry Business. 2021.
ISBN: 1-912196-4.

Noel O’Sullivan is a priest of the diocese of Cork and Ross. He is a member of the Department of Systematic Theology, Pontifical University, Maynooth Co. Kildare.

The impact of the accident colours Michael's entire life though he only realises that when he undertakes therapy in Canada in preparation for an eight year stint as spiritual director at Ushaw College. He has a cathartic experience on the thirty eighth anniversary of his brother's death. The waves of grief burst forth on 11th March, 1988 and the event results in a miracle of healing. He writes, 'I am at once a forty two year old man and a four year old child' (155). This release changes his life and frees him to be truly creative in his ministry and in his poetry.

I was particularly taken by the way in which the writer's turn of phrase suited his age and the period about which he was writing. We are treated to a graphic description of mares belonging to local farmers coming for service to the stallion and the cows 'visiting' the bull on the McCarthy farm. Getting paid for these services was sometimes a problem: 'Some people are the devil so slow to pay,' (62) according to McCarthy senior. Then there are the Irishisms; for example, on his 10th birthday we are told, 'My sister is after baking a cake'! (70). His account of the annual threshing gives an insight into an erstwhile agricultural ritual. The heading of this chapter is 'The Threshing,' that being the pronunciation locally. Not insignificant is the barrel of porter which even the young ones are permitted to taste: 'I like the way the froth of the porter makes a moustache on my lip' (58).

The style grows in sophistication as the writer charts his adult experiences. The renowned poet and preacher delivers his analysis of Carlow College and its *alumni* in an elevated style. He is particularly laudatory of fellow Cork men, John England (1786-1842), Bishop of Charleston, USA, and John Joseph Therry (1790-1864) who was a missionary among Irish deportees in Australia. He sums up the latter's fight for justice for the poor, highlighting 'the way he spoke truth to the powerful, and compassion to the powerless' (137).

After his negative experience of secondary education in Farna, he moves to the seminary in Carlow to become a priest. These six years changed his life and this publication is intended as a tribute to his *Alma Mater*. In a poem in memory of P.J. Brophy (College President), we find the key that unlocked the creativity and intellectual power of Michael McCarthy. We are told in *Killeshin Churchyard* that Fr Brophy taught theology 'through the medium of novels'. The poem mentions '*The Grapes of Wrath. The Ballad of the Sad Café. The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. The bridge of San Luis Rey*'. A theologian who brought a panoramic view to everything, Brophy was a man of vision, with an all-embracing mind (83). Carlow prepared Michael well for his mission in Leeds diocese. The current president, Fr Conn O Maoldhomhnaigh,

invited him back to the college as Poet-in-Residence in 2017. This was a particularly fruitful semester for the poet-teacher, who gave creative writing seminars and poetry readings with a confidence unimaginable thirty years before. It is in this second Carlow phase that the poet delves into the College's history and the result is the publication in this volume of several letters by John Therry, which the author describes as 'found poems'. These poems bring to life the ministry of this Carlow *alumnus* to Aboriginal youth and to prisoners in Australia. Some of them recount the requests of prisoners on death row who sought reconciliation with the Church and others who wanted to convert to Catholicism on the eve of their execution. Then there is evidence of Fr Therry writing to Governor Darling (in 1824) and others in authority, revealing sophisticated diplomatic skills in this caring pastor.

The seismic change that has marked seminary life in Ireland since the 1960s is recorded in the book. The author lauds the new Carlow College which is no longer a seminary but a distinguished third level institute. The poem *Moriarty Hall* pays tribute to Patrick Moriarty, founder of Villanova University, where Ronnie Delaney studied in the 1950s. Moriarty Hall is the former billiard room now dedicated to its illustrious *alumnus*. In his poem, *Theology* (140), our poet sums up the change in theological teaching from his seminary days:

'Back then theology taught us what to think. Now it is teaching us how to think.'

But the socio-cultural change is more graphically captured in the poem, *Passports* (138):

'A sheltered eighteen year old come to study for the collar.
There were no young women walking these corridors then.
Just two hundred male students, us new arrivals wearing
Borrowed cassocks while our own were tailored'.

Like a Tree Cut Back is an evocative title which draws its inspiration from the crest of Carlow College. The crest consists of a tree with this inscription underneath: *Rescissa vegetior assurgit*, meaning 'That which has been cut back burgeons forth more abundantly'. Most likely it refers to the Church in Ireland emerging from the Penal Laws (1829). Our author's life was like a tree cut back, until he had the cathartic/spiritual experience at the age of 42. Towards the end of the book he describes the enormity of the change that has taken place in him. He writes (156):

THE FURROW

‘Thirty years on I am still astounded at the miracle of healing that has taken place within me. Gone is the young, talented but needy person of my earlier years. Gone is the focus on mere externals. Inner life is what matters. The God of my life and how God is present in all of life.

I became less interested in what people might think, and more interested in living a life of integrity as deeply as I could. This was a gift that was offered to me, that I was able to share with others in retreats and workshops and in individual spiritual direction’.

Some people may have had such an experience but few are able to crystallise it so clearly and express it with such candour. The life and ‘conversion’ of Michael McCarthy offers hope to all: no-one is beyond redemption. No matter how disillusioned or lethargic one becomes there is always the possibility of change and growth. We priests, in particular, need to hear that good news.

Like a Tree Cut Back was prepared by its author before he died of pancreatic cancer in 2018, but great credit must be accorded his friends in Sheffield who ensured its posthumous publication by The Poetry Business. The book will endure as a testimony to human and spiritual growth in someone whose early life was marred by tragedy. It also provides a social history of rural Ireland in the 1950s. And it is a worthy monument to the power of language. I am delighted to accord it the highest recommendation.

An Inspiration. She opened what Pope Francis termed ‘windows of hope’. Daring to do what no one else at that time would risk, she opened ‘gateways of transformation’ for countless people. In championing the cause of the poor, she became a voice for the voiceless and a hope for the hopeless. The Nagle family motto, *Non vox sed votum*, ‘Not words but deeds’, leapt from the family plaque and was writ boldly on the canvas of her life

– ANNE LYONS, PBVM, *The Story of Nano Nagle, A Life Lived on the Razor’s Edge*. 2021. (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p. 7.

New Books

My Story by Jesus of Nazareth. Brendan Butler, (2020). ISBN: 978-1-913108-32-8. Available to purchase at www.mystorybyjesusofnazareth.org

The question, ‘Who is Jesus?’ marks the incipient step in any Christian discourse. In his book, *My Story by Jesus of Nazareth*, Brendan Butler seeks to present the ‘historical, human’ Jesus of Nazareth ‘as a credible, real person’ (p. 3). The book is akin to a personal diary of Jesus during his ministry and up to his crucifixion, with both vocalised dialogue and internalized thoughts narrated by the author. As is to be anticipated, a certain degree of poetic license is to be admitted in Butler’s imaginative endeavour.

Butler makes clear from the outset that his interest is in the human Jesus of Nazareth. His is a noble effort in that long cursus to ensure the humanity of Jesus is explored, respected, and maintained. For those whose personal piety is expressed primarily in the miraculous, this book will challenge and perhaps even upset certain sensitivities (see p. 63). Yet in taming the more spectacular and miraculous (the feeding of the multitude is done by all present sharing the food they had brought with them, [see pp. 11-13]), Butler has managed to present an untamed, uncensored, and unfiltered Jesus that is refreshing.

Inevitably the person we meet is Butler’s Jesus, or, better, Brendan Butler himself. This is not to say that Butler’s book is not replete with fact – his familiarity with Palestinian geography and social and political history is patent; rather, Butler has ventured into the realm of the internal sacred space of an historical person which depends on imagination and speculation. This process, however, makes for interesting possibilities: were Jesus and his cousin John members of the Essene community at some point (see p. 8)? What exactly were the events that triggered the Temple incident recounted in all four gospels (see pp. 23, 25-26)? In many ways, then, the book is a taking further of an Ignatian-style imaginative prayer.

The exercise of imagining and recounting who the person of Jesus concretely is for us is a valuable enterprise in the life of any Christian today. In this exercise, however, we must always take care to admit that, as with any human being, we can only ever glimpse and never grasp the intimate thoughts, feelings, and desires of Jesus of Nazareth. Butler’s enterprise in narrating the story of Jesus of Nazareth deserves *kudos* and will undoubtedly trigger many the Christological conversation.

THE FURROW

Fifty Catholic Churches to See Before You Die and Many More Worth a Detour. Elena Curti. Leominster: Gracewing, 2020. ISBN: 978-085244-962-2.

Elena Curti will be known to many of our readers from her many years of work as a reporter for different media outlets, including her time as Deputy Editor of the *Tablet* from 2004 to 2016. She has recently published this charming guidebook to some of England and Wales' most noteworthy Catholic churches. The volume fills a lacuna in the literature of the ever popular "church tourism" movement that has become famous particularly in England. We often associate this type of tourism with visits to the magnificent Anglican churches that dot the English landscape and can be tempted to think that the Catholic Church has nothing to add to the store of national treasures. Curti has selected fifty of what she considers to be the best churches to visit. There are no cathedrals in the collection and the examples she chooses are to be found throughout England and Wales. Curti hasn't fallen into the trap of choosing just Puginesque Gothic Revival churches, instead there are examples of many styles including Romanesque, baroque, classical, Byzantine, Arts and Crafts and modernist.

The book is well printed and is accompanied by a number of colour photographs of each of the churches. Each entry has the full address and postcode of the church (which is handy for those using Sat-Nav or a mapping app on their phones). Curti provides some suggestions of other close by churches at the end of each entry that are "worth a detour." At the back of the book there is a helpful list of artists and architects, a glossary and a bibliography. The book covers many famous churches like the Brompton Oratory or St Etheldreda in London and the great monastic churches. Many of the churches are Grade I listed buildings, but other lesser-known examples are also covered. While I would not make a trip to see each and every one of the fifty churches, some of them did catch my attention. I enjoyed this book and in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown that we are living at the moment, when I am only allowed to travel 5 kilometres from where I live, it reignited my desire to travel and I hope to be able to visit some of the churches on my next trip to our nearest neighbours.

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

NEIL XAVIER O'DONOGHUE

Saint Ignatius of Loyola: A Convert's Story. Patrick Corkery SJ. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2021. ISBN 9781788123273.

Five hundred years ago, in 1521, Ignatius of Loyola had a conversion experience while recovering from wounds he received at the Battle of Pamplona. This new booklet on Ignatius celebrates this anniversary by providing a moving account of events in Ignatius's life from his conversion

to the commencement of his studies in Paris in 1528. The expressed aim of the author is to present the ‘smiling’ side of Ignatius rather than the more familiar ‘soldier saint’ image. In ten short chapters he admirably achieves this goal. Ignatius lead an interesting life; his early life as a courtier; his brief military career; his conversion and mystical experiences at Manresa and elsewhere; his travels to Rome and the Holy Land; his return to education as an adult. Corkery’s booklet gently introduces the reader to the life, struggles and character of this Spanish gentleman who has left a formidable legacy to the Church and the world. Readers may be encouraged after reading this script to delve more deeply into the life and times of Ignatius and, perhaps, to engage with his *Spiritual Exercises*. Like many recent publications from Messenger Press this publication is a compact pocket size edition that is written in a very accessible style and includes helpful pointers towards reflection at the end of each chapter. The author highlights, in the final chapter, three lessons that can be learnt from the life journey of Ignatius of Loyola; Change is OK; Community is Vital; Make time for Contemplation. These three nuggets of wisdom could provide a fruitful starting point for individual reflection or, indeed, for parish -based prayer or discussion groups.

Cork

P.J. McAULIFFE

Walking with Ignatius. Arturo Sosa, SJ, in conversation with Dario Menor is published in Ireland, Europe, the UK and Australia. 2021. Dublin: Messenger Publications. ISBN 978188124553.

This timely publication comes as the worldwide Ignatian family celebrates the 500th anniversary of the conversion of the 16th century soldier and courtier Ignatius of Loyola when he had a personal encounter with God which led to the foundation of the Society of Jesus. Arturo Sosa SJ is the Superior General of the Jesuits and in this conversation with Dario Menor, he engages the reader in an exploration of what Sr Jolanta Kafka, RMI, President of the International Union of Superiors General calls “deep questions about the world, about God [and the] existence and mission” of the religious life in the Church today. This attractively presented and very readable book invites those who take it up to “identify at least one [question] that you are already mulling over, and grapple with the answer” (cf. Prologue, vii & viii). Sosa reflects on what it means to discern the presence of God in our lives in the midst of our questions and offers a pathway to seeking an authentic way to live out one’s Christianity which “brings you into communion with others, and into contact with things you don’t like. It makes you open to other people’s pain and problems” (p. 131). This is particularly important in a world that has been transformed by individualism and division in recent decades. There is a lack of serenity and prayerful reflection in contemporary society, even within the Church, and Sosa reminds us that both are necessary, today as in the time of

THE FURROW

Ignatius, in order to avoid the temptation which leads to “doing too many things and not living” (p. 132). This is something which Pope Francis has also warned against in his catecheses on prayer in recent weeks.

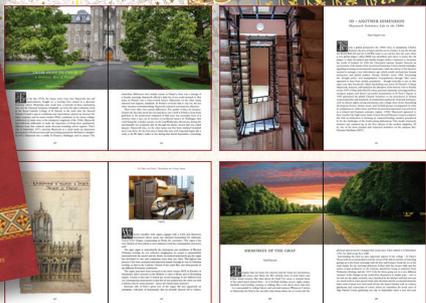
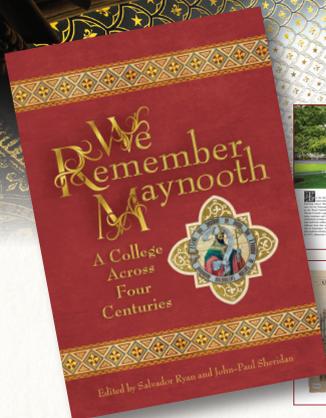
In this engaging and at times captivating conversation, Sosa reminds us that the Society of Jesus still shares in the dream of St Ignatius “of a Church united by a determination to make the Good News relevant, a Church passionate about incarnating the Gospel in every human culture and every area of our changing world today” (p.78). This book enables the reader to share in reflecting on that dream. Included is a section-by-section guide, complete with bible references, pointers for prayer and tips for spiritual conversation, that encourages the reader to embark on a spiritual journey of their own. Intended for those within and outside the Ignatian family, *Walking with Ignatius* is both an exemplar of spiritual conversation in action and a response to Pope Francis’ call for Jesuits to bring the practice of discernment to the world. Highly recommended as a summer read.

St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth

TOMÁS SURLIS

Christian Citizens. Christians are also citizens, and we have to engage with the common good, not just worry about it, which is why the Church cannot stop having an active voice in public life. No one argues over whether Caritas, the Church’s relief and development agency, should provide food for the needy, but it seems to be a surprise when the Church, inspired by exactly the same awareness of human rights, opposes a law it considers unjust. If we don’t take part in public life, we will be pure, yes, but pure “idiots” as those who evaded their political or civic duties through placing self-interest above the interests of society, were known in ancient Greece. We do not want a Church of idiots” but one that leads us to be better, more political citizens, who take care of others and of the common good. That is why we speak so much about justice, reconciliation, and peace.

– ARTURO SOSA, SJ, *Walking with Ignatius*, 2021 (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p.88.



WE REMEMBER MAYNOOTH

A College Across Four Centuries

Edited by Salvador Ryan and John-Paul Sheridan

Hardback 512pp. Illustrated throughout

Price: €50

To mark its 225th anniversary, this beautifully-presented volume captures an institution that has held a singular place in modern Irish Church history.

With contributions by current and former faculty and alumni, including Eamon Martin, Mary O'Rourke, Frank McGuinness, Susan McKenna-Lawlor and Liam Lawton, among many others.

A truly special gift for anyone who has passed through Maynooth's hallowed halls!



ORDER NOW:

W: www.messenger.ie | **T:** +353 1 775 8522