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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

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silence': The Silence of God
in the Bible*

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The Wedding of Cana –
A Biblical Meditation

November 2022
€4.50 (inc. VAT)

AR FÁIL ANOIS tríd an bpost ó:

Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad,
Maigh Nuad, Co. Chill Dara.

Pádraig Standún:

SAGART 'a RÚN



Séiplíneach Iris Meán, Pádraig Standún, leis an Ardeaspag Seosamh Ó Casaidé, 28ú Meitheamh, 1988 ar an slíp.

Tadhg Ó Dúshláine

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The Furrow

A pastoral monthly founded 1950.

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

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

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

Rates: Single copy €4.50 (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.

‘You speak also in your silence’: the silence of God in the Bible

Massimo Grilli¹

‘In the beginning was the Word/*en archē ēn ho logos*’ are the opening words of the prologue of the gospel of John. But here, like Goethe’s Faust, we should perhaps pause.² This is the problem: does the Word reveal God or does Silence reveal God? This question is like many others about God: is it power that reveals God or impotence? Does God reveal himself in dazzling light or in the dark night of the cross?

It is no accident that the Hebrew term for the Face (of God) is plural: *panim*. *Panim* is a special and suggestive word; it implies that the Face of God is one and many, expressed and un-expressed, known and unknown. The Face is both otherness and relationship, Word and Silence. The Face reveals but also obscures. The Face of God (like the person made in God’s image) represents the irreducible totality of personal identity, but also its mystery.

This means that every definition of God is inadequate and whatever is said about the Silence of God must be joined to its reference point, the Word, but also to the mystery that every Word and every Silence contain. This means that we can only know *traces*, never the Face. *Panim!*

So what are the traces that enable us to understand the silence of God in the Bible? Why does God remain silent? I want to follow *three* pathways – and there are others – that are significant in the biblical panorama.

1 Translated by Bishop John McAreavey (Bishop emeritus of Dromore) who attended this lecture and was moved by it. He translated it so that others who struggle with the silence of God will draw strength from it.

2 ‘Tis writ, ‘In the beginning was the Word’. I pause, to wonder what is here inferred’. *Faust*, Part 1, Faust’s study (ii), tr. Philip Wayne, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971, p. 71.

Rev Massimo Grilli, emeritus professor of New Testament at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, delivered this paper on 7th March 2019 at a conference in the University. It has been published in Barbara Aniello-Dariusz Kowalczyk, *Silenio, polifonia di Dio* [Atti del convegno, (Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma-Cività di Bagnoregio, 7-9 marzo 2019)], GBP 2020, pp. 31-9.

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1. SILENCE OF ANGER AND DISDAIN

I will begin with a series of reasons for the silence and absence of God. God is silent because the human person, in their arrogance, force God to be silent! In the history of Israel the prophets denounced sin as a reason for the absence of God: 'Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Should you not know justice? – you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh of their bones, who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a caldron' (Micah 3:1-4). The prophet Micah accuses those responsible for the nation of a grave sin: they should be shepherds but instead are cannibals; they should take care of the sheep but, instead, devour them, ignoring justice and trampling the law. This will be their punishment: 'Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have acted wickedly'. This is a reference to the silence of God during the period of exile, when they have lost their land and their security. God is silent and the leaders, when they have lost everything, will search for a stopgap God, sure of finding God in their hour of need, 'but he will not answer them'.

The same reasoning can be found elsewhere in the prophets: 'O that you would tear open the heavens and come down ... Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and so not remember iniquity forever ... Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation ... After all this, will you restrain yourself, O Lord? Will you keep silent ...? (Is 64: 1, 9-12)

In response to this prophetic denunciation, we cannot fail to recognise that often the silence of God, today as yesterday, is due to wickedness and idolatry in the hearts of people who seek salvation in deaf and dumb idols that have no power to speak. And then the One who can speak remains silent, the One who created the universe with the Word of his mouth. A large share of the evil and pain in the world and in the Church can be traced to the silence of a God who has been expelled, reduced to silence by the abuse of power and arrogance.

God is silent because the temple has become a den of thieves, false prophets have the last word, the people has become not-my-people and the loved one has prostituted herself. Nevertheless, this interpretative framework of the silence and absence of God is *insufficient*, for the calamities that afflict people cannot all be attributed to human degeneration. Faced with much illness and suffering, the attempt to attribute everything to human sin is unsatisfying and inadequate. I think of the Algerian writer,

Albert Camus; at the age of seventeen seeing a baby girl run over by a lorry, he turns with his finger pointing into the sky and says to a friend, 'You see, he is silent'. We find the same sentiment in the cry of the Italian poet, Giuseppe Ungaretti: 'I am a wounded man ... I am tired of screaming without a voice ... mourn with us, cruelty'.³ This is also the voice of the psalmist praying in psalm 35 and many others: 'You have seen, O Lord; do not be silent! ... Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defence' (Ps 35: 22-23); 'Why do you hide your face?' (Ps 44:24). When the voice of the innocent is stifled, when the law is silent and only violence finds expression, when truth is muffled by lies, surely the silence of God becomes a scandal? How many women and men have lamented the silence of God precisely when God should have spoken! Job, Jeremiah, the despairing who live in the dark night of the olives, the agony of blood ... This brings us to the *second* perspective in the Scriptures that seeks a reason for the silence of God.

2. SILENCE THAT EDUCATES

A silence that educates is a suggestive and fascinating theme. It is the experience expressed magnificently in the story of Elijah (1 Kings 19). After the crushing victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah travels from Carmel to Beersheba and then from Beersheba to Mount Horeb. It is a journey of experience rather than a geographical one. Elijah travels to find a God who will speak to him and reassure him. It is not sufficient to say that he undertakes this journey to find refuge from a wicked queen who seeks to kill him. Beersheba is where Abraham had invoked the name of JHWH (Gen 21:33); where JHWH appeared to Isaac saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, your father; do not fear for I am with you' (Gen 26:24). At Beersheba God spoke to Jacob 'in visions of the night' (Gen 46:1-4). So, it is the place where the ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had called on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:1-5; Amos 5:5, 8:14) and God had replied. Mount Horeb, towards which Elijah 'walked for forty days and forty nights', is the Mount of the Word where Moses was called by JHWH by name out of a bush (Ex 3:4). The God Elijah knows is a God of the Word, an implacable warrior, a sharpened sword. He is the God of armies, because 'the sons of Israel have abandoned your covenant, have demolished your altars and have killed your prophets with the sword; I alone remain, and they are trying to take my life' (1 Kg 19:14). This is the God that Elijah is seeking. And yet ...

The Lord passed by. A strong, angry wind was splitting the

3 *Sentimento del tempo*, Milan, 1981, p. 95.

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mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces ... but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, *Qol demamah daqqan*, a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave (1 Kg 19:11-13).

Qol demamah daqqan, a sound of sheer silence. The Hebrew expression is extremely problematic, one on which rivers of ink have been spilt. The Septuagint and Vulgate transformed it, translating it as 'a gentle wind'. However, the text states that God was found in the voice of a light *silence*. The meaning is not far from what a German mystic used: 'no one knows anything; He is here, there, distant, near; he is deep, he is high. But no, I have lied; it is neither this nor that'. This distant God in the theological mindset of Elijah is radically different from the concept he had until that point. The God of Horeb is no longer the One he had known before, and certainly not the God of Mount Carmel! Elijah, the devout follower of God, now must question the image of God that is rooted in his tradition and in his own experience. For the true encounter with God is not nourished on words. The risk of (using) words is not silence but banality, a word-centredness that seeks only itself. Elijah must learn that God is not primarily spoken but searched for; God's name is not pronounceable and only has meaning when it emerges from an experience.

Elijah must endure the absence of the God whose voice he knows in order to learn to know the God who hides and manifests himself in '*the sound of sheer silence*'. God who had revealed himself to the ancestors with a voice fit to shake Mount Sinai now presents himself as *Qol demamah daqqan*.

Søren Kierkegaard expresses this poetically in this evocative passage:

Father in heaven, you speak to a man in many ways; you who alone possess wisdom and understanding, you nevertheless wish to make yourself understandable to him. You speak with him also in your silence, for he also speaks who is silent in order to examine the pupil; he also speaks who is silent in order to test the beloved; he also speaks who is silent in order that the hour of understanding, when it comes, might be all the more inward. Father in heaven, in the hour of silence when a man stands alone and abandoned and does not hear your voice, does it not seem to him that the separation will last forever. In the hour of silence when a man stands alone and abandoned and does not

hear your voice, does it not seem to him that the separation will last forever. In the hour of silence when a man is prostrate in the desert where he does not hear your voice, does it not seem to him as if it had disappeared completely. Father in heaven ... bless this silence, then, as you bless each and every one of your words to a man. Let him not forget that you also speak when you are silent. Grant him the confidence, if he prays to you, that you are silent out of love, just as you speak out of love, so that whether you are silent or whether you speak, you are still the same father, whether you instruct by word of mouth or educate with your silence.⁴

Silence as education: Elijah must continue the journey of life and commit himself to the mission that remains to be completed with the awareness that the human person does not live by virtue of the Word of God but also by virtue of God’s silence. Listening to the silence means listening to God. The silence of God frees the human person from scaffolding, makes them recognise the naked and vulnerable, purifies and transforms them, avoiding the great temptation that is always lurking: the temptation of living their own condition with defence structures, because it is only through this discipline that they will learn to speak authentic words. Education is an essential component of paternity and maternity, and fathers and mothers educate both with their words and their silence.

However, we sense that this perspective, though partly wise and true, cannot be definitive. We must acknowledge that a more refined education does not justify a silence that is unjust and mortifying. There are *limits* to the growth produced by suffering: this is an unbalanced, inexplicable, and unjust test. There are situations when to speak of a divine education becomes blasphemous. What father brings his child to an extreme limit to teach him that the human person does not live by bread alone?

3. SILENCE OF LOVE

Søren Kirkegaard has already offered a reason, writing that ‘just as you speak out of love, so that whether you are silent or whether you speak, you are still the same Father’.

It seems to me that the evangelist Mark offers the *most* adequate understanding of the mute mystery of a God who loves with his silence when he describes the death of Jesus on the cross. Mark speaks of the darkness that envelopes the earth from the sixth to

4 Howard V Hong and Edna H Hong, [Editors and Translators], assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, *Søren Kierkegaard’s journals and papers*, Vol 5 [L-R], Indiana University press, Bloomington and London 1975, pp 558-9.

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the ninth hour and of the cry of Jesus in the darkness exclaiming in a loud voice, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’ (Mk 15:34). On the cross, Mark presents a mysterious God who ‘would dwell in thick darkness’ (1 Kg 8:12 and 2 Chr 6:1) and in the most atrocious silence. Jesus is presented as dramatically alone, abandoned by his disciples who fled at the time of his arrest (Mk 11:50), condemned by the authorities who, at that moment, act in concert (Mk 15:1), abandoned even by God who does not respond to his cry. The death of Jesus takes place in the silence of God, ‘a sort of execration’ in the literal sense of the term, as opposed to consecration.⁵ It is ‘the mystery of the ultimate test’.⁶

This is the *paradox*: precisely in the extreme moment of the silence of God who does not respond to the cry of his Son, a voice – not that of the disciples who had fled nor of the women who followed from a distance – but that of a pagan centurion, “saw that in this way he breathed his last, and said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son’” (Mk 15:39). The moment of the *silence* of God becomes therefore the moment of the response, the moment of supreme *revelation*: ‘Truly this man was God’s Son’. The film director, Ingmar Bergman, in one of his masterpieces, *Winter light* (1963) presents a conversation between a sacristan and a young priest in crisis:

Just think, Father, of Gethsemane, all the disciples were asleep; they had understood nothing, and he remained alone. The suffering must have been immense. To realise in that moment that no one understood anything ... But that was not the worst: When Jesus was nailed to the cross and hung there in torment, he cried out “God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” He cried out as loud as he could. He thought that his heavenly father had abandoned him. He was full of doubt at that moment, a doubt that comes to us all; this must have been the worst suffering. I mean God’s silence. But that story finishes with silence, or was there a response? I don’t remember how it ends ...⁷

Perhaps we should say, when confronted by many human situations, where people live with a desperate need of a response, it is true that God does not give a response. However, if the Son at the hour of his death endured the silence of God, this means that every situation, even the darkest and most tragic, has a *meaning*. Perhaps the silence of God does *not* offer a response (for there is no response

5 A synonym of the verb ‘execrate’ is ‘curse’.

6 Cf. A Vanhoye, ‘I racconti della passione nei vangeli sinottici’ in A Vanhoye-I de la Potterie-C Duquoc-É Charpentier, *La Passione secondo I quattro Vangeli*, Editrice Queriniana 1983, p. 50.

7 <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=ingmar+bergman+winter+light+quotes>.

to the suffering of a just person) but *rather* a meaning. This will not be the automatic granting of a meaning, for we cannot transform the silence of God into an emotional tranquillizer or provide a facile consolation. 'This offer of meaning implies concretely that, however desolate, pointless, or desperate my situation may be, God is here too. Not only in light and in joy, but also in darkness, grief, pain and sadness, I can encounter him'.⁸ This means that 'my suffering, too – despite Godforsaken-ness – can become the point of encounter with God'⁹, a God who is in solidarity with my silence and who can make it fruitful, so that a cry of pain is not the gasp of a dying person but the pain of a mother giving birth.

This is the core of the paschal mystery that helps us to say this. It is not by chance that the Byzantine tradition has dug deep to grasp the meaning of silence during the paschal triduum. The Great Sabbath, as it is called in the Eastern tradition, that precedes Easter, is a Day of Silence, a day of the silent and deserted tomb. An ancient homily for Holy Saturday attributed to Epiphanius states: 'Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence, and stillness'.¹⁰ It is the silence of a further *kenosis*, as the Byzantine liturgy sings on the morning of Holy Saturday: 'you descended to search for Adam, and not finding him on earth, O Lord, you have gone to search for him in the underworld'. In another Syriac homily, we read: 'the Creator of Adam has visited Adam in the underworld; having descended, he called, 'Adam, where are you?' just as he had in the garden (Gen 3:9). The same voice that called him among the trees (of the garden) has descended among the dead to call him'.¹¹

The day of the great silence, paradoxically, is the Day of the Search, of Encounter and of Love. Mark is right to end his gospel with the fear and silence of the women (Mk 16:8). People who pay attention to life will find a hundred reasons to believe and a hundred not to believe. However, the events of the Cross tell us that defeat, loneliness, and silence now belong to God and are assumed into the mystery of salvation. Dietrich Bonhöffer, the witness of the Confessing Church, has written:

God comes to people who have nothing but space for God, and the language of Christianity calls this void, this emptiness in human beings 'faith'. In Jesus of Nazareth the bearer of God's revelation, God inclines towards the sinner, follows them with limitless love; Jesus wants to be where human beings are no longer anything. The meaning of Jesus's life is the documentation

8 Hans Küng, *Does God exist?* Collins London 1980, pp. 694-5.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Cf. *The Divine Office*, vol II, p. 320.

11 Cf. S Chialà, '*Discese agli inferi*', Magnano 2000, pp. 34-39.

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of this divine will towards the sinner, towards the unworthy. God's love is wherever Jesus is. This documentation however acquires its true seriousness only when Jesus or God's love not only is present where human beings are mired in sin and misery, but when Jesus also takes upon himself that which stands above every person's life, namely, death; that is, when Jesus, who is God's love, genuinely dies. Only thus can human beings be assured that God's love will accompany and lead them through death. Jesus's death on the cross of the criminal however shows that divine love extends even to the death of the criminal, and when Jesus dies on the cross with the cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' It shows once more that God's eternal love does not abandon us even when we despair and feel forsaken by God.¹²

A poem of an Italian poet, Father Turolto, comes to mind. He composed it in severe pain at the end of his life, when the crutches fall away, dreams of power fade and all that remains is our weak voice, our final cry and the silence of God:

No, belief at Easter/ is not proper faith/ you are too beautiful at Easter! True faith is faith on Good Friday/ when you were not up there! / when not even an echo /replies to his loud cry and almost nothing/ gives shape to your Absence.¹³

12 Clifford J Green, [Ed], *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931* [Dietrich Bonhöffer Works, vol 10], Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2008, pp. 356-7. The Italian text refers to the abandonment and silence of God.

13 D M Turolto, *Canti ultimi*, Milan 1991

Liturgy, Mission and Ministry in Ireland Today: *Random Reflections and Thoughts*

Thomas R. Whelan

PART TWO: PASTORAL LITURGY

Attendance at Sunday worship is seen to constitute the core of what being a Catholic christian is all about. Catholics ‘go to Mass’. However, something much more important and central to our faith is at stake. An authentic celebration of liturgy points the assembly to the deeper reality of the cosmic liturgy (the context of our ritual engagement) and to the ‘liturgy after the liturgy’: the worship of the ‘real presence’ of Christ in the poor, in the marginalised, in the hungry ... and in creation. The desire for a liturgy that is more ‘meaningful’ is expressed in the synodal Synthesis document (section x) and this highlights a yearning for full participation and for liturgical celebrations that ‘speak to people’s lives’. Nothing can be more relevant and Gospel-filled than celebrating the Mystery of Christ in a way that is inclusive and that moves the assembly out to the margins.

Much pastoral energy has been given over to forms of online worship since the beginning of the pandemic. Some places used the opportunity to create an awareness of the need to reach out to others. However, this outward movement was not always evident or even alluded to and the aspiration was that, as quickly as possible, people would be able to return to in-person church attendance on Sunday mornings. This has had the unhelpful effect of reinforcing

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a form of idolatry centred on liturgy and church attendance. The article by Denysenko, mentioned in Part One, refers to this:¹

Pastors tend to practice a form of liturgiolatry in the way they explain liturgy to the people. Public messaging that depicts the liturgy as a requirement to be fulfilled at the risk of divine penalty is one symptom of liturgiolatry. [296] ... Has maximal attendance at [liturgy] become the destiny of the Christian journey? If so, then the church has replaced the altar designed to honour God with an altar glorifying the human contribution to liturgy. [297]

It is so easy to *reduce* worship to law and obligation and make it seem as if the purpose of our Christian existence was Sunday attendance at worship.² The relationship between liturgy and Christian living is complex and multifaceted and cannot be explained in a simplistic and fundamentalist account of the liturgy. When this happens it easily becomes an act of idolatry. Moltmann has observed that ‘The reduction of faith to practice has not enriched faith; it has impoverished it. It has let practice itself become a matter of law and compulsion’.³

The purpose of a ritual assembly is to create an environment which would facilitate our transformation and our graced condition in God through our engagement with the word and the sacraments of liberation. Spoken word leads us to the Incarnate Word and is sacramental. In the words of David Power, all sacrament is ‘Event eventing’. We are fed, not as an end in itself, but as a means of being nourished by life in the Trinity which finds expression morning, noon, and night in disciples of Christ and in all of creation. Immersed in word and sacrament, we are made participants in the life of a Triune God as well as in the mission of God (*missio Dei*).⁴ To what end? That we collectively point to the fundamental sacrament of creation wherein praise is offered to

1 Nicholas Denysenko, ‘Liturgical Theology in Crisis – Twenty-First Century Version,’ *Worship* 95 (2021): 292-298 [henceforth, page references will be in the main body of the text in square brackets]. See also his, ‘Finding Divine Beauty in an Age of Liturgical Idolatry,’ *Worship* 96 (2022): 34-54, esp. 47-51.

2 The Irish Episcopal Conference issued a statement after their Spring meeting (published on IEC website, 9 March 2022) that from Easter Sunday 17 April, attendance at Sunday Mass will ‘once again be deemed an essential expression of faith for all in our Church in Ireland’. Those who are unwell ‘will not be under any *obligation* to attend Mass’. [emphasis added]

3 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 8.

4 To understand worship as having an instrumental role in relation to mission (e.g., as a tool of mission) is to misunderstand both ‘worship’ and what is referred to as the *missio Dei*.

LITURGY, MISSION AND MINISTRY IN IRELAND TODAY

Father, through the Son and in the Spirit and thereby glorify our wonderment at the earth which reflects God's marvels (see Psalm 8, etc.).⁵ This is the same earth which we have succeeded in all but destroying wantonly. To be authentic, this act of glorification must overflow into *service* of God's Reign which prioritises the margins of society. Human reality is the only context in which we can carry out sacramental worship: ritual behaviour helps us interpret our lives as a Gospel people, pointing *beyond* itself to something more important. If our ritual celebration is transformative and graced, there might be some chance that our sacramental engagement in world and creation be transubstantive of society and world.

'PASTORAL LITURGY'

The term 'pastoral liturgy' is used frequently without much consideration given to what it could mean. The significance of the term in various languages changed somewhat from its initial use in the 1920s. German thinking brought a critical approach into play as a necessary dialogic component of the pastoral experience.⁶ In the romance languages, the term generally refers to the *liturgical dimension* of pastoral theology/activity – rather than to the study of liturgy as an object that can be reduced to the 'pastoral/practical'.⁷ This envisages that the actual celebration of liturgy is *shaped* by an understanding of ecclesiology, proclamation, sacramental theology, ritual studies, etc. – all valued as theological explorations of salvation. Here 'liturgy' is seen to be a dimension of pastoral theology. From 1943, with the foundation of the *Centre (National) de Pastorale Liturgique*, the French term referred unapologetically to a discipline which was at once theological, biblical and pastoral. Still existing, and through its scholarly organ, *La Maison-Dieu*, it continues to bring the very best of historical, theological and liturgical scholarship – framed by rigorous academic critical reflection – to bear on the worship needs of Christian people in the early twenty-first century.

For many, liturgy remains the most important expression and means of pastoral ministry in the church. Two Benedictines, seminal figures in the reform movement of the early twentieth century (the Belgian Lambert Beauduin, d. 1960 and the American

5 See Michael Plekon, "The World as Sacrament" in Alexander Schmemmann's *Vision*, *Logos* 50 (2009): 429-439

6 The German term (*Pastoralliturgik*) referred to a theological discipline which explored how liturgy could be best understood as serving the salvific work of Christ in the assembly and in the world. What precisely this might mean was much debated in later years.

7 French, *la pastorale liturgique*; Italian, *la pastorale liturgica*; Spanish, *la pastoral litúrgica*.

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Virgil Michel, d. 1938), were motivated principally by *pastoral* concern and their vision of worship saw a direct link between reform of liturgy *and* social justice. ‘Justice’ was understood to embrace everything that related to the amelioration of the daily lives of ‘ordinary’ people. In fact, justice was initially the dominant driver towards reform.⁸ However, the preoccupation of the liturgy reform movement throughout much of the twentieth century became reduced to the study of text and ceremony – important as these are – but with little emphasis on the pastoral or on the more radical question (posed by Guardini) of the capacity of the contemporary person to even engage in liturgy. Tragically, the underpinning of the vision by justice is all but absent in the Conciliar Liturgy Constitution (the 60th anniversary of which will occur in December 2023).

The Rahnerian insight is important here: the pastoral purpose of *all* theology is to assist the church in its call to become the realisation of the mystical body of Christ. It should be noted that what has occasionally been referred to in Ireland as ‘pastoral liturgy’ has little in common with the continental debates, and less to do with how a similar term – pastoral liturgical studies – is employed in the USA.

AN ‘APPLIED’ DISCIPLINE?

Unfortunately, ‘pastoral liturgy’ is often reduced to ‘applied’ studies – something which involves little more than implementation and execution: the ‘how to’ of liturgy enacted from beginning to end, almost as an exercise in the mechanics of performing that which is found in the rubrical material of the official ritual books. When it is reduced to being a ‘practical’ or ‘applied’ discipline, it generally ends up becoming devoid of solid theology and scholarship. It also has the unintended outcome that participants in programmes leading to academic qualification do not receive sufficiently broad immersion in foundational material to develop for themselves the necessary basic knowledge, competences, and tools with which to develop appropriate critical skills. For some, ‘pastoral’ is taken to refer to a form of ministerial empathy. This reflects a gross misunderstanding of a statement which, in itself, is true: that pastoral liturgy is the practice of liturgy *as it relates to people*. At surface level, the phrase is generally taken to suggest that liturgy is *not* intrinsically bound up with theology. There are several issues at stake here.

8 Beauduin was motivated by his involvement with the Catholic Workers’ Movement; Michel, a social scientist, later saw in liturgy – and its necessary reform – the key to the ‘social regeneration’ of American society.

LITURGY, MISSION AND MINISTRY IN IRELAND TODAY

- a) The fundamental question for ‘pastoral’ liturgy (no matter how it is understood) is whether the assembly is the starting point for theological reflection (assembly as *subject*) or the end toward which that reflection is directed (assembly as *object*)?
- b) Liturgy is not a spectator activity inviting passive attendance, nor can it be reduced to a study of the action of the priest/presider, cantors/musicians, or other ministers – as important as these are. These people are merely *servants* within the assembly, which is itself the principal actor (in Christ) in the celebration.
- c) Liturgy cannot be reduced to the implementation or execution of the ritual books in the assembly. This reflects an erroneous sense that ‘good liturgy’ requires ceremonial rectitude and fidelity to the detail of the rubrics. Rather, a ‘living’ liturgy is one that invites *interiorisation within the assembly* (Congar) – ‘assembly’ understood as a corporate entity rather than a collection of individuals.
- d) Neither can liturgy become a free-for-all without any awareness of both formative and expressive roles of ritual. When ministers and presiders approach the worship event with informality, the resultant if unintended effect is that of drawing attention to the personalities of those whose task it is to lead the celebration and make of it a performance that includes, at best, ‘audience participation’. Formality does not equate with being cold.
- e) The criterion for evaluating local worship is supplied by the sacramental agenda that underpins the juxtaposition between daily life and the mystery of the liberating death and resurrection (which roots this in reality, in faith, and around the Cross of the Risen Lord). This is also a non-negotiable criterion for good liturgical formation.
- f) We need to move away from an instrumental concept of liturgy, one which sees the worship event as a productive exercise leading to a measurable outcome. Grace cannot be measured. On the contrary, the liturgical event is an incarnational encounter that actualises in our midst (in *this* assembly, *now*) God’s continuing revelation and graced presence. An understanding of the worship event that is subservient and tangential to the Mystery does not help us understand that all worship, an embodiment of salvific presence, unfolds for every assembly in the intersection between the lives, angsts and hopes of those gathered now and God’s saving and transformative outreach in Christ. It happens in the ‘*today-ness*’ of the life of the assembly.
- g) Mystagogy is central to this process. *Explanation* of symbols can unhelpfully take priority over *mystery*. A flat-minded literalism is intrinsically ‘anti-sacramental’ and diminishes the potential for an engagement with the ‘Catholic imagination’.

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What is 'real' to a faith community cannot be accessed through a scientific mode of knowledge.

- h) Society has changed how it perceives 'reality' and has, to a large extent, lost a sense of the religious imagination. Sacramental imagination intuitively sees the workings of God in all things that upbuild, that radiate beauty, that work towards harmony in creation and among people, and that have justice at the heart of its endeavours. It is central to how we perceive things. It is by means of imagination and its related mystagogy we uncover the sphere within which faith is developed and nourished rather than through a catechetical re-visitation of professed belief statements and creed (as important as these are).

PASTORAL LITURGICAL STUDIES: THE CONVERSATION TODAY

Contemporary reflection has developed from elements of the seminal thinking of the British-American scholar Mark Searle, moving the discussion in new directions.⁹ For Searle, 'pastoral liturgical studies' is a rigorous and demanding subdiscipline lodged in an interpretation of how an *assembly* is engaged in liturgy. It has little interest in the rubrical dimension of worship and even less in ceremonial efficiency. He spoke of the need to recognise the limitations of forms of scholarship that prioritise text and a narrow sense of history over a willingness to grapple with new problems, new forms of research, and new ways of understanding. Today, pastoral liturgical studies needs to sharpen its critical approach. Fresh fields of scholarship have opened up in more recent times, not least the development of a social history of worship in which, as Robert Taft would see it, space is given to how ordinary people experienced and thought about the way they worshipped. This remains a greatly unexplored goldmine. Findings must be filtered in the light of how the official texts and expectations considered these popular movements.¹⁰

Such an approach will require that more attention be directed at ritual embodiment and expression, and not just to texts. According

9 See especially his, 'New Tasks, New Methods: The Emergence of Pastoral Liturgical Studies' [*Worship*, 1983], reprinted in, *Vision: The Scholarly Contributions of Mark Searle to Liturgical Renewal*, eds., Anne Koester and Barbara Searle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 27-48; and Stephen S. Wilbricht, *Rehearsing God's Just Kingdom: The Eucharistic Vision of Mark Searle* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013). Others who worked along similar lines, without always using this term, include David N. Power, Mary Collins, Angelus Häußling, Bernard Cooke, Gerard Lukken, Andrea Grillo, and Louis-Marie Chauvet.

10 One of the widely recognised weaknesses of the narrative of liturgical history until more recent decades is that it presumes to offer a 'universal' reading based on what is found in the manuscripts that come from the patristic, as well as the major cathedrals and monastic centres throughout medieval Europe. David Power was fond of saying that the most significant historical developments in sacramental theology are to be found, not at the 'centre', but at the periphery.

to Searle, this will permit us to understand pastoral liturgy better as being not just expressive of the faith of the assembly but also *formative* of it.¹¹ A deep sense of the Catholic sacramental imagination informs this, thereby respecting the indispensable presence and role of human imagination. Pastoral liturgical studies can never be reduced to the descriptive but rather privileges ‘tradition’ (understood as a living entity) over both history and a deductive approach by theology. In this context it can be suggested that the primary task of the pastoral liturgist is not so much to be aligned with the official reform programme but to challenge how *local church* embodies the Mystery of Christ in its worship. Its critical task will include a reading of how official reforms are implemented, and if the official rationale presented to support a programme is theologically sustainable.

Liturgical ministry will recognise that the reality of life, faced daily by christian people, requires a fresh language to support engagement with the salvific reality found in Christ.¹² Even the vocabulary and concepts employed need to be re-evaluated with care. This will help shape how a local christian community begins to image the world in which it lives and of which it forms part. As church is, so will liturgy be. The converse is also true. Both need to be credible and reflect the best of humanity. Otherwise the relationship falls. And, as the Synthesis of the synodal process confirms, this church needs to be known for welcoming all, including those who identify as LGBTQI+, those in second relationships, and those whom society deems to be the ‘have-nots’. Only then can we speak of liturgy being leaven that evangelises. Anything else smacks of gimmicky. A cultural and theological evaluation of contemporary society will emerge from and effect the empirical in a way that little else can. The rewards are lasting. There is nothing magical about this process. Contemporary sacramental theology is seeking to move away from a narrow sense of ontology¹³ and to explore the implications of the acceptance of the New Cosmology, of a contemporary phenomenology (important for sacramental theology), and of a reading of cultural and social movements that infuse the very air that we breath in Ireland.¹⁴

11 Movements towards renewal of church have always involved liturgical reform. It is almost an axiom to say that liturgy is at the heart of all forms of church renewal.

12 All forms of liturgical ministry – including proclamation, leading worship – are attempts to embody faith reality. This is an important issue which continues to be discussed by the Council of Liturgy of the Episcopal Conference.

13 One needs to ask if medieval philosophies, at least in terms of the narrow forms inherited, continue to serve adequately. Much sacramental theology today dialogues with contemporary philosophies, as with, for example, David Power, Louis-Marie Chauvet, Andrea Grillo.

14 Over many years, the writings of Professor Michael Conway (Maynooth) in this journal and elsewhere, offer a good entry point for helping us understand the questions which are framing, and in turn being framed by, contemporary culture.

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LITURGICAL FORMATION — AGAIN

The type of liturgical and pastoral formation that is offered must relate to the needs of those engaging with it (respecting appropriate ‘learning outcomes’ for each group). Regarding the ‘content’ of such immersion, it must be accepted that *all* liturgical study (as is also the case with the serious study of scripture, moral and systematic theology) is *pastoral* at its very roots. Questions that shape the programme emerge from a discussion of lived experience in order to return to a pastoral context, now infused with a new sense of how the Mystery of Christ intersects with the lives of baptised today. To offer ‘pastoral’ liturgy (however this is understood) to people without a solid theological foundation in liturgical studies (albeit at a level suitable to the group, whether parish/diocesan workshop or Third Level) is unhelpful and can be even harmful. At best, it is akin to offering answers to questions never posed in the first place. Rather, participants will be enlightened by serious foundational theology of worship and will seek opportunities to identify some of the underlying problems sacramental theology encounters as it negotiates with contemporary society. They will be encouraged to learn to interact with an enfleshment of Christ, discerned through the *living* Body of Christ which in turn filters and is filtered by social and cultural perception. This embodiment deeply values human emotions and feelings. Liturgy, properly celebrated, requires that we engage corporately and corporeally in the name of Christ, and respond in a graced relationship in and through our humanity. Formation will draw people’s attention to this and become an exercise in ritual awareness as well as mystagogical familiarity.

A particular approach will be required for those who are members of diocesan and parish liturgy groups / pastoral councils and people involved in various ministries. This must include parishioners who desire to be immersed in a fuller investigation of what it means to be a believing and active ritual participant in their local assembly’s regular worship. This exercise will embrace the findings of the *entire* Irish Synthesis of the synodal process – and not just section x (‘liturgy’). They will gradually come to a realisation that it is precisely in *their* context (i.e., the local assembly) that the sacramental encounter with the Risen Lord is actualised and will challenge them to place the excluded at the very centre of the community. It is primarily mystagogy, not academics, that will allow people to understand this.

The nature of the liturgical formation given at Third Level colleges is significantly different to what must be offered in parishes and in other pastoral contexts. Here, participants preparing for

academic qualifications, must develop the ability not just to know, but to critically appraise theological approaches to sacramentality and of 'reading' pastoral situations. They will need to be grounded in a solid *liturgical* theological understanding of sacrament, and not just in the biblical foundations or the ritual / theological history of the sacrament (being conscious that every sacramental rite developed differently). A person with a specialised master's qualification should be of sufficiently high standard to be capable of becoming a trainer of trainers at parish and diocesan levels.

Liturgical formation of a high standard must become available so that training can be decentralised and take place at regional and local levels. This means that such a person is at home with the various theological and liturgical discussions and debates that are currently in the ether as well as being familiar with anthropological and ritual studies suitable to their needs. They need to be capable of evaluating these. Appropriate skills will be required to assist others in their pastoral task, as well as having the competency to apply their studies in various concrete situations. There should be no difference in the quality of the 'content' and the level of theological education offered to degree students and what is on offer to those preparing for ordained ministry or in 'clergy-renewal' days. Otherwise, it would smack of clericalism, which is seriously sinful.

Pastoral Liturgical studies is predicated on two principal factors:

- (a) on a sacramental theology that is sourced in the graced and transformed encounter found in Christ, that is, in the rites themselves *as celebrated* ('Liturgical Theology') rather than from a theology that is 'of' liturgy (i.e., at a step removed). The empirical approach is therefore central to formation.
- (b) on academic credibility. Kathleen Hughes, with reference to Jungmann, offered the opinion that,

The Church is filled with pastoral liturgists today who have lost their theological and historical moorings and have become liturgical dilettantes. ... [today, like Jungmann, scholars must ground their] convictions in meticulous research into the ... multiple factors which produced liturgy over the centuries ... [and which examine] equally complex reality of the liturgy as it unfolds in the political and cultural context of today.¹⁵

15 Kathleen Hughes, 'Meticulous Scholarship at the service of a Living Liturgy,' in Joanne M. Pierce, Michael Downey, eds., *Source and Summit. Commemorating Joseph A. Jungmann SJ* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 21-32, at 31.

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And, Yves Congar, writing on liturgy in 1948, said that the last thing we need today ‘is not less intellectual or less scientific, less rigorous or less traditional academic formation. What we need ... are studies that ... respond to the real needs of real persons.’¹⁶

16 Yves Congar “‘Real’ Liturgy, ‘Real’ Preaching’, in *At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar*, trans / ed. by Paul Philibert (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 1-12, at 12.

Van Gogh. Vincent Van Gogh identified with the ‘man of sorrows’ who shared the lot of the poor, humiliated and broken. He saw his art as showing solidarity with the broken and the outsider. In a letter to his brother Theo he said: “That does not keep me from having a terrible need of – shall I say the word – religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars”. He looked at the poverty, loneliness and rejection suffered by Jesus who gave life to those in sorrow. He saw God in nature. When he painted the ‘Starry Night’ he said: “When all sounds cease, God’s voice is heard under the stars”. He saw the stars and the night sky as expressions of the love of God. He said “the moon is still shining and the sun and the evening star, which is a good thing – and they also speak of the love of God and makes one think of the word, ‘So I am with you always, even to the end of the world’ (Mt 28:20)”. He saw his art as consoling those who had been broken by life. It was a new way of expressing Jesus’s ministry of compassion.

– JOHN O’BRIEN, OFM, *At Eternity’s Gate: Artist of the Infinite*, Amazon, 2020, p72.

Fratelli Tutti: An Authentic Vision of Dialogue?

Ryan McAleer

INTRODUCTION

It was the publication of the motu proprio *Traditionis custodes* in July 2021 and the subsequent reaction among some theologians and commentators which invites me in the present paper to ask: how dialogical is the theology of Pope Francis? To echo the words of Gregory Hillis, professor of theology at Bellarmine University in Louisville and regular commentator in the Jesuit magazine *America*, and certainly not one who would be described as a traditionalist (liturgically or otherwise): “I have long found Francis’ vision of dialogue attractive. For this reason, I find myself confused by his response to Catholic traditionalism.”¹ When one considers his encyclicals *Laudato si’* (2015, hereafter LS) and *Fratelli tutti* (2020, hereafter FT), the concept of ‘dialogue’ – especially dialogue with those beyond the church – is evidently an important element in the theological approach of Pope Francis. FT, in particular, is underpinned by the concept of dialogue with its call for universal fraternity and social friendship. While the current, ecclesial programme of synodality could rightly be understood as an outworking of a more dialogical magisterium, Catholics who feel particularly attached to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite might be forgiven for thinking that Francis’ latest motu proprio is quite the opposite of his stated vision. After a cursory consideration of FT’s understanding of dialogue, this paper

1 Gregory Hillis, “I love Pope Francis’ commitment to dialogue – which is why his Latin Mass restrictions confuse me,” *America* (December 22, 2021), retrieved from <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/12/22/francis-latin-mass-traditionalists-synod-242111>

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will critically assess its approach with the help of the dialogical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and offer some tentative pointers for how theology might respond to Francis' call for dialogue in a way that views difference as a *privileged place* for dialogical encounter rather than something to be overcome.

THE CALL FOR DIALOGUE IN FRATELLI TUTTI

As with LS, FT is an encyclical concerned with the social doctrine of the church, but this time concerning the theme of fraternity and social friendship. The fact that Francis offers a second social encyclical is worth mentioning in itself: it reveals a central concern in his magisterium for those issues which touch the lives of *all* people, beyond membership of the Church. The universal scope of the topic and the fact that it is addressed, like LS, to all people of good will demonstrates a desire on the part of Francis to have the broadest possible reach in his teaching. The language of dialogue is central; "I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will."² The pope is not simply setting out new teaching to be adhered to by the faithful but entering an ongoing conversation about an issue of universal concern. Used no less than *48 times* in the encyclical, 'dialogue' is a constant theme throughout.

The structure and methodology of FT offers an example of how Francis engages dialogically with the topic at hand. Indeed, the document itself is a *call to* and an *example of* dialogue. Throughout the encyclical, the pope systematically makes references to the reflections of various episcopal conferences from every continent.³ What is more, Francis writes that he finds inspiration and encouragement for the topic of fraternity from the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.⁴ Francis makes several references to their joint *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, published in Abu Dhabi in February 2019, which the pope says was not a "mere diplomatic gesture but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment."⁵ A Jewish rabbi, Rabbi Hillel, is also referenced.⁶ Indeed, the pope not only includes the

2 FT 6.

3 Quotations from episcopal conferences in FT include every continent: the United States (§124), Portugal (§178), Australia (§205), the Congo (§226), South Africa and South Korea (§229), Columbia (§232), Latin American (§234), Croatia (§253), and India (§271).

4 FT 5.

5 FT 5. Mustafa Genc ("Fratelli Tutti: An Interpretation of Dialogue and Friendship in Society: An Islamic Perspective," *The Journal of Social Encounters* 5 [2021]: 33-35) offers an interesting Islamic perspective on aspects of FT and reflects the extent to which it mirrors, especially in chapter six of the encyclical, the views of Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.

6 FT 59-60.

reflections from various episcopal conferences, an imam, and a rabbi, but also those from individuals and groups throughout the world who have written to him. Francis evidently desires to offer a reflection that is as open and dialogical as possible.

Not only can one see FT as an example of how dialogue can operate theologically, but one might regard the entire encyclical as an apologia for the inherent need for dialogue which goes beyond the mere functional. Chapter two's exegesis and reflection on the Good Samaritan presents the foundational motivation for dialogue, that is, love. The call to love of neighbour, love of the other, is the very means by which we become truly human. Following the example of the Good Samaritan, the making of oneself as a gift to those who are completely other is part of the mystery of authentic human existence.⁷ Francis refers in FT to the ultimate source of love, the life of the triune God where "we encounter in the community of the three divine persons the origin and perfect model of all life in society."⁸ Moreover, Francis makes it clear that if we want to encounter each other, we have to dialogue.⁹ Our intrinsic need to encounter the other, and therefore dialogue, can be understood as both trinitarian and anthropological. While dialogue can often be mutually beneficial, encountering and welcoming the other in dialogue is worth pursuing even without any gain. It is a style of life, a way of being.¹⁰ Thus, for Francis, dialogue is *more* than just a method but a way of life.

It's worth noting the encyclical's references to and understanding of consensus. The end of dialogue is not some sort of ephemeral or superficially bartered agreement. Francis understands consensus as a dynamic reality whereby dialogue allows people to acknowledge fundamental values that rise above consensus and transcend concrete situations.¹¹ It's difficult to imagine everyone would agree with the pontiff on this point, but he is convinced that only dialogue in a pluralist society will result in the realisation of those values which always ought to be affirmed.¹² Francis adopts the image of "a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity" for this culture of dialogue where "differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations."¹³ The encyclical calls for a new cultural paradigm based on dialogue which can accept and welcome difference.

7 *Ibid.*, 87.

8 *Ibid.*, 85.

9 *Ibid.*, 198.

10 *Ibid.*, 216.

11 *Ibid.*, 211.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, 215.

Even just a cursory reading of FT reveals how Francis has embraced the category of dialogue in his magisterial teaching and invites everyone to engage meaningfully in the same task. Indeed, the pope makes it quite clear that dialogue is not to be understood as a utilitarian means for some benefit, even if this benefit is mutual, but is a value in itself. It is not just that Francis employs a dialogical methodology in the way he approaches a theological issue, but advocates dialogue and encounter with otherness as a fundamental way of being human with both trinitarian and anthropological foundations. The relational and communal life of the Trinity is reflected in creation, not least the human person.¹⁴ Creation itself, therefore, as a part of God's revelation is inherently dialogical. Openness to otherness and openness to God go hand in hand; one is not possible without the other. While this trinitarian and anthropological foundation for dialogue is referenced in FT it could certainly be developed more fully.

FT is underpinned by the *four* principles Francis outlines in *Evangelii gaudium* (2013) which he claims are based on the pillars of Catholic social teaching and form what he regards as his own "social criteria."¹⁵ These four, which have been referred to as the 'Bergoglian principles,'¹⁶ include:

- i) Time is greater than space,
- ii) Unity prevails over conflict,
- iii) Realities are more important than ideas,
- iv) The whole is greater than the part.

These principles are a simplification and summary of the polarity model in the dialectical philosophy of Romano Guardini, which formed the inspiration for Bergoglio's unfinished doctoral research in the late 1980s.¹⁷ Guardini provides Francis with a synthesising model with which to hold polar, perhaps even contradictory, opposites together that can be "resolved" (in the words of Francis)

14 Francis' trinitarian and anthropological argument echoes *Verbum Domini*, which states that God discloses the filial and relational nature of human existence and that we cannot understand ourselves unless we are open to dialogue with God: "in this dialogue with God we come to understand ourselves" (§22-23).

15 Ethna Regan, "The Bergoglian Principles: Pope Francis' Dialectical Approach to Political Theology," *Religions* 10 (2019): 4.

16 Regan, art. cit., 1; cf. *LS* 178.

17 Massimo Borghesi, "The Polarity Model: The Influences of Gaston Fessard and Romano Guardini on Jorge Mario Bergoglio" in *Discovering Pope Francis: the roots of Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Thinking*, edited by Brian Y. Lee and Thomas L. Knoebel (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019): 108. The first and second of the Bergoglian principles relates to Guardini's second pair of 'intra-empirical opposites,' *fülle-form* (fullness-form), whereas the fourth sums up Guardini's third of the intra-empirical ones, *einzelheit-ganzheit* (individuality-totally.) Only the third principle does not have a parallel in Guardini's philosophy.

at a higher level while maintaining the tension between them.¹⁸ Principles *two* and *four* are worth closer examination. The second, ‘unity prevails over conflict,’ embraces solidarity in its deepest and most challenging sense where the common good is more important than any individual position.¹⁹ While Francis makes it clear that this principle is not one that will result in some kind of syncretism, one can arguably see in it traces of a Hegelian dialectical vision of reality. He argues that this principle “overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis”.²⁰ Regan notes, for example, that while Francis did not develop these principles in the Hegelian or Marxist sense, it’s difficult to claim Francis is completely uninfluenced by Hegel.²¹ For example, in one line he says that respectful dialogue aims at “achieving agreement on a deeper level.”²² He hopes for a time when “we will think no longer in terms of ‘them’ and ‘those’, but only ‘us.’”²³ What he means by a dynamic ‘consensus’ through dialogue, where fundamental values can be acknowledged by everyone, isn’t exactly clear. The priority of unity over conflict risks *suppressing* difference. While Francis actively calls for dialogical processes of encounter where people accept differences, the underlying tendency arguably sees the end of dialogue as leading to an overarching synthesis and therefore falling short of what one might describe as authentic dialogue.²⁴ The *fourth* principle underlying Francis’ social doctrine, ‘the whole is greater than the part,’ mirroring Guardini’s polarity between individuality and totality (*einzelheit-ganzheit*),²⁵ also risks marginalising ‘parts,’ or individuals, over a particular version of the whole.²⁶ Grounded in trinitarian theology, Francis wants to preserve unity in diversity for which the image of the polyhedron is proposed as a metaphor where there is convergence of every part, each of which can preserve its distinctiveness.²⁷ At the same time, FT interprets the parable of the Good Samaritan, for example, as a call to “put aside all differences.”²⁸

For philosophers who think from difference, such as Emmanuel Levinas, authentic dialogue does *not* eliminate difference. Far from

18 Antonio Spadaro, “Le orme di un pastore: una conversazione con Papa Francesco,” in *Nei tuoi occhi è la mia parola: Omelie e discorsi di Buenos Aires 1999-2013*, Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Milan: Rizzoli, 2016).

19 Regan, *art. cit.*, 8-10; *EG* 226-230; cf. *LS* 198; cf. *FT* 245.

20 *EG* 230.

21 Regan, *art. cit.*, 9.

22 *Ibid.*, 201.

23 *Ibid.*, 35.

24 Cf. *FT* 217.

25 Borghesi, *art. cit.*, 108.

26 Regan, *art. cit.*, 13.

27 *EG* 234-237; cf. *LS* 141; cf. *FT* 145, 215.

28 *FT* 81.

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it! Dialogue is not an ‘I-Thou’ process which tries to transcend separateness and create a new ‘we.’ It is in the very gap between the I and the other where dialogue takes place in a way that respects and maintains the other *as other*. Dialogue is not the same as dialectics. Its purpose is not to lead towards a new synthesis or consensus as a way of overcoming the differences between dialogue partners. Indeed, Levinas uses the language of ‘totality’ in an extremely negative sense, in comparison to Guardini, and associates it with what he calls ‘dialogue of immanence’ whereby plurality and its contradictions are surpassed by an all-encompassing unity/totality.²⁹ ‘Dialogue of transcendence,’ on the other hand, is a non-violent exchange, which forms the condition of possibility for an authentic, unreserved, and peaceful relationship.³⁰ In this type of dialogue, plurality is not a source of violence to be overcome. In authentic dialogue, according to Levinas, the self involves itself with the other as the radical other and doesn’t assimilate difference but deepens it.

CONCLUSION: RESPONDING TO POPE FRANCIS’ CALL FOR DIALOGUE

While Pope Francis’ call for dialogue in FT is certainly welcome and marks a notable change in magisterial tone, there remains an underlying *risk* in his approach whereby one particular version of unity and wholeness has the definitive priority in any encounter with otherness, ultimately assimilating or ignoring that which is different. Perhaps one can see an example of this in the current ecclesial approach to the traditional liturgy mentioned at the outset. It is precisely in the name of unity that *Traditiones custodes* severely restricts more traditional expressions of the Roman liturgy. Such an approach is all the more surprising given the incredible diversity of liturgical rites within the church. And indeed, one could hardly describe the Extraordinary Form as ‘other’. Although it would be difficult to advocate for a wholesale theological adoption of the thinking of Levinas, such dialogical philosophies can help theology – not least the social doctrine of the church and ecclesiology – embrace diversity and prioritise the valuable place of the other, discovering therein what God, the ultimate Other, might be revealing of Godself *amongst* otherness and diversity. Greater appreciation of otherness might, for example, open space for a more grounded trinitarian foundation for dialogue that

29 Roger Burggraeve, “Dialogue of Transcendence: A Levinasian Perspective on the Anthropological-Ethical Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue,” *Journal of Communication & Religion* 37 (2014): 7. This monological, or symmetrical, approach to dialogue fits in with Levinas’ idea of the same and the self where plurality is viewed as a source of violence.

30 *Ibid.*, 8.

puts priority in neither the whole nor the part, neither unity nor difference, but sees *both* in a mutually dynamic interplay.

Perhaps we might turn to the Good Samaritan, cited in FT so prominently, as the example of an authentically dialogical approach. It is not *despite* the Samaritan's different identity – seen as radically, even insurmountably other to that of the priest and the Levite – but *because* of it that an authentic encounter could take place. Indeed, without this radically otherness the parable would lose its force. To quote Teresa:

The particularity of the Samaritan in the parable as belonging to a specific cultural group, as well as the identities of the other characters in the parable, is not incidental to the construction of a new set of relationships that are more solidary and just. They are described as essential to this process, not because some represent a superior or inferior way of life, or because the characters must strip themselves of these identities, but because the healing of relationships occurs within them.³¹

The parable teaches us that dialogue with the other, starting from one's own identity and at the same time resisting any negation of the other's difference, is in fact a *privileged* place of encounter. Indeed, therefore, authentic dialogue would highlight and celebrate difference precisely because it is the privileged place where fraternity and social friendship emerges.

31 María Teresa, "The Political Anthropology of Fratelli Tutti: The Transcendent Nature of People's Political Projects Grounded in History," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 19 (2022): 92.

War and Politics. The war threw me into political action. I joined the French Resistance. But total war makes for total politics as well, and anyone who is exacting discovers sooner or later that total politics justifies anything and everything. It justifies lies and violence, with no longer the recognition of any limits-whether what Camus calls a limit of honour or what Solzhenitsyn terms the limit of cannibalism.

– OLIVER CLÉMENT, *The Other Sun*, Gracewing, 2021, p.43. [Translated by Michael Donley].

The Word as Lived Experience: Special Revelation after *Dei Verbum*

Jonathan W. Chappell

Philosophically speaking, it could be argued that there are *three* basic positions concerning belief (or non-belief) in the existence of a creator God who exists outside space and time: atheism, deism and theism. As the categorical denial of the objective existence of God, *atheism* is fairly straightforward.¹ However, while deism and theism are related, a careful distinction must be drawn between them. *Deism* affirms the existence of a creator, but holds that such a being does not concern itself with the affairs of its creatures; ‘God’, according to this view, does not intervene in the world but merely constitutes a distant ‘first cause’ of the universe.² For a *theist*, by contrast, God, although transcendent, has nonetheless elected to reveal God’s self to humanity, and is thus actively involved in the vicissitudes of human history. The Judaeo-Christian tradition strongly affirms the theistic model of the creator.³ And the Catholic Church holds that such divine revelation falls into (at least) two subcategories: special revelation (the Bible as the ‘Word of God’) and general revelation (the ‘acts of God’ in creation). This brief article concentrates discussion on the *former*.

THE BIBLE AS THE ‘WORD OF GOD’: A CONTESTED NOTION

While to speak of the Old and New Testaments as the ‘Word of God’ might, on the face of it, appear unambiguous, it is in fact a complex and highly contested claim. Indeed, as the background (and ongoing theological discussion) concerning the Second

- 1 For an excellent analysis of the moral grounds for the repudiation of theism, see Stewart R. Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and the Brothers Karamazov*, Basil Blackwell, 1977.
- 2 See Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, Ignatius Press, 2017, p. 236.
- 3 Karl Rahner SJ, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1978, pp. 153–157. See also Herbert McCabe OP, *God Matters*, Continuum, 2005, pp. 18–20.

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THE WORD AS LIVED EXPERIENCE:

Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum) (DV)* aptly illustrates, the Church's understanding of what it means to assert that the Scriptures are 'God's Word Written' has undergone considerable theological development in recent decades. And this development has not been without controversy.

THE CRUCIAL HERMENEUTICAL SHIFT: VATICAN I AND VATICAN II

In order to understand the nature of this shift in theological understanding regarding the Bible as the revealed 'Word of God', it is necessary to focus on some of the key differences between the teaching of the First and Second Vatican Councils.⁴ Although the issue of revelation was touched upon by the Council of Trent, Vatican I (1870) was the first council to deal systematically with the character of divine revelation. In the judgement of many of the Fathers of Vatican I, fideism and deism were heresies which had to be challenged. *Fideism* stemmed in many respects from the theology of Martin Luther, and held that it was impossible for the fallible human intellect alone to possess direct knowledge of supernatural realities.⁵ *Deism* was largely the product of the rationalism of the Enlightenment; it denied the possibility of divine revelation altogether. As a means of combatting fideism, Vatican I, in *Dei Filius*, built on philosophical arguments adduced by St Thomas Aquinas, decreeing that it was possible for the human mind to apprehend God via unaided human reason.⁶ It resisted deism by affirming the objective reality of revelation, and strongly emphasised our dependence on this revelation in order to fully grasp humanity's true *telos* in this world. The accent was primarily on a very abstract and cerebral notion of revelation: the 'deposit of faith' was perceived in propositional terms, and 'doctrine' was presented as a corpus of immutable and trans-historical/trans-cultural truths which had been transmitted through the Bible and then interpreted (and defined) by the Church's Magisterium. What

4 On this point, see John W. O'Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018, pp. 242-247.

5 Fideism is also apparent in the thought of Protestant philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), as well as in the work of Karl Barth (1886-1968), arguably the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. For a scholarly exploration of the philosophical contours of fideism, see D.Z. Phillips and Kai Nielsen, *Wittgensteinian Fideism*, SCM Press, 2005.

6 See Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. E. Quinn, Collins, 1980, pp. 510-514. See also Brian Davies OP, *Thinking about God*, Wipf and Stock, 2011, pp. 244-245; D.C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013, pp. 262-264; Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait*, Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 105-6, 108-12, 115-17.

is particularly striking is that very little emphasis was placed on Jesus Christ as the source of divine revelation.⁷

In dramatic contrast, *Dei Verbum* represented a key hermeneutical shift in the Church's understanding of how the Bible is perceived as God's revealed Word. Indeed, as scholars such as Joseph Ratzinger have observed, there is a marked difference between the first draft of the Vatican II decree, produced in 1962, and the final text, submitted and approved for promulgation in 1965.⁸ While the *first* draft placed the same stress as Vatican I on revelation as a corpus of static, ahistorical verities, the *final* document perceived revelation in a radically new way. Although it stressed continuity with the spirit of Vatican I, the final version of *Dei Verbum* perceived revelation in much more dynamic, concrete and personalist terms. Revelation was the progressive self-disclosure of God to His people in the history of salvation, a self-disclosure which reached its supreme consummation in the person of Christ – and in his life, death and Resurrection. Ratzinger, who as Pope Benedict XVI was at pains to stress the 'hermeneutic of reform in continuity' between Vatican I and II (as opposed to the 'hermeneutics of rupture') was nonetheless driven to refer to the clear shift in theological thinking between the first and final drafts of *Dei Verbum* as 'one of the most important events in the struggle over the Constitution on Revelation'.⁹

The *contrast* with Vatican I is thus palpable. Moreover, as Dermot A. Lane has argued in this connection, 'revelation [in *Dei Verbum*] no longer appears simply as a body of supernatural truths contained in Scripture and taught by the Church'. On the contrary, the document firmly emphasises God's personal disclosure (*revelatio*) to human beings as opposed to the mere vouchsafing of eternal, propositional truths (*revelata*).¹⁰ This is summed up in *Dei Verbum*'s statement that revelation is, in essence, an expression of the abundance of divine love: it is God's will that humanity, through Christ, the Word made flesh, should 'become sharers in the divine nature' (*DV* 2). Revelation thus also has an unmistakably Trinitarian dimension: God the Father discloses God's self through the Incarnation of the Logos – and then sends the Holy Spirit as a means by which human beings can be brought ever closer to the Divine self (*DV* 2). Notwithstanding Gerald O'Collins's contention

7 Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to do Theology*, Veritas, 2003, p. 66.

8 Joseph Ratzinger, 'Revelation Itself', in H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II. Volume III*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, Burns and Oates, 1969, p. 170.

9 Ibid. An intriguing evaluation of Ratzinger's commentary on *Dei Verbum* is offered by Robert Royal, *A Deeper Vision: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Twentieth Century*, Ignatius Press, 2015, pp. 266, 317.

10 Lane, *Experience of God*, p. 67.

that *Dei Verbum* did not constitute a rejection of Vatican I's account of revelation, few theologians would wish to contest the claim that Vatican II stressed the personal, Christocentric (and Trinitarian) nature of biblical revelation in a way that the First Vatican Council had singularly failed to do.¹¹

Furthermore, Vatican II strongly underscores the universal character of revelation. As Lane observes, *Dei Verbum* 'recognises a line of continuity between universal revelation, Judaic revelation, and Christian revelation'.¹² In this vein, the Council document refers to the majestic sweep of salvation history, as recorded in the biblical text, and recognises the significant stages on this soteriological journey. Beginning with God's revelation to our first parents, and continuing through our post-lapsarian state – most notably with the call of Abraham, the era of the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets – Scripture articulates the fact that God, through the formation of Israel, worked diligently to prepare a people for the eventual coming of their Saviour (*DV* 3).

Moreover, while Vatican I regarded the Bible as containing propositional truths which required intellectual assent, *Dei Verbum* stressed the holistic, integrative (nay, gestalt) nature of biblical revelation, and insisted on the centrality of a response by the whole person (*DV* 3).¹³ The person of Christ and the promptings of the Holy Spirit move both the mind *and* the heart; accordingly, both the 'notional' and the 'real' assent (as John Henry Newman called them) are vital.¹⁴

Perhaps the most significant innovation on the part of *Dei Verbum* was its endorsement of the role of *experience* in the reception, and discernment, of biblical revelation.¹⁵ This was a very important development. The experiential aspect in the interpretation of Scripture had been championed by 'Modernists' such as Alfred Loisy, Baron Friedrich von Hügel and George Tyrrell in the early twentieth century.¹⁶ However, it had been vociferously condemned

11 Gerald O'Collins SJ, *Revelation: Towards a Christian Interpretation of God's Self-Revelation in Jesus Christ*, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 13.

12 Lane, *Experience of God*, p. 69.

13 Robert Murray SJ, 'The Human Capacity for God, and God's Initiative', in M.J. Walsh (ed.), *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, pp. 6-31.

14 See John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, Assumption Press, 2013 [1870], pp. 27-66. See also in this connection David G. Bonagura, Jr., 'The Relation of Revelation and Tradition in the Theology of John Henry Newman and Joseph Ratzinger', *New Blackfriars*, Jan. 2020, Vol. 101, 67-84.

15 George Weigel elaborates on this point in *The Irony of Modern Catholic History: How the Church Rediscovered Itself and Challenged the Modern World to Reform*, Basic Books, 2019, pp. 152-155.

16 See Gabriel Daly, 'Theological and Philosophical Modernism', in D. Jodock (ed.), *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 107-112. See also Lester R. Kurtz, *The Politics of Heresy: The Modernist Crisis in Roman Catholicism*, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 156-157.

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as heresy by Pope Pius X in his encyclical letter *Pascendi Dominici gregis* (1907). So the fact that the Vatican II decree now gave its imprimatur to the role of experience in theological reflection was little short of revolutionary. It suggested, *pace* Vatican I, that the human individual was not a passive receptacle into which immutable supernatural truth was breathed. On the contrary, revelation was an active, interpersonal, dialogical *encounter* with the divine, which was ineluctably conditioned by the contingencies of time, place, language and socio-historical context.

ONGOING THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

So far, so good. However, much of the theological debate and ideological tension in the Church *today* is characterised by the adoption on the part of both ‘conservatives’ and ‘progressives’ of the two differing positions regarding the epistemic status (and interpretation) of biblical revelation articulated by Vatican I and Vatican II respectively. A recent case in point is the debate concerning the reception of communion by the divorced and remarried, which dominated the Synod of Bishops in 2014 and 2015. While Rowan Williams has claimed that very few contemporary theologians would accept a propositional account of revelation, this does not seem to hold true for many in the Catholic Church.¹⁷ Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, for instance, appears to possess views regarding revelation which are, at the very least, quasi-propositional. He objects to any modification of the Church’s pastoral practice (and hence, perhaps, doctrine) concerning communion on the grounds that it would contradict the clear teaching of Christ revealed in the Gospels.¹⁸ For Burke and many others, Christ has spoken, and His eternal Word is immutable and infallible.

‘Progressives’ such as Walter Cardinal Kasper disagree, however, and condemn this stance as ‘theological fundamentalism’.¹⁹ Instead, they argue in favour of a *dynamic* model of biblical

17 Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000, p. 131.

18 Raymond Leo Burke, ‘The Canonical Nullity of the Marriage Process as the Search for the Truth’, in R. Dodaro (ed.), *Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, 2014, pp. 210–242.

19 Mark Brumley, ‘Cardinal Kasper Resorts to the “F” Word in Addressing Critics’, *Catholic World Report*, 4 October 2015, <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/4228/cardinal_kasper_resorts_to_the_f_word_in_addressing_critics.aspx>. This point is also echoed by Timothy Radcliffe OP in his book *Alive in God: A Christian Imagination*, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019: ‘We shall only infect people with the contagious freedom of the “dogmatic imagination”’, he writes, ‘if they see that Christians are unafraid to engage with complex questions to which they do not know the answer, to learn as well as to teach, to entertain views that they had not considered. Faced with mindless fundamentalism and its consequent violence, the best response is to think’. See p. 147.

revelation which is far more akin to *Dei Verbum*. Kasper holds that, when we look at the message of Christ in the New Testament holistically, rather than attempting to deduce everything from one isolated ‘proof text’, it becomes impossible to sustain any form of legalism or pharisaical rigidity in pastoral practice.²⁰ Furthermore, the *lived* experience of many divorced and remarried Catholics, who have wrestled greatly with their consciences, tells us that allowing them a ‘second chance’ (perhaps along the lines of the Eastern Orthodox practice of *oikonomia* – understood as ‘mercy’) is the compassionate and Christ-like response to their particular situation. While such a move might entail the rejection of the teaching of Pope John Paul II on this matter, it would nonetheless constitute a legitimate and much-needed form of *aggiornamento*.²¹

There are clearly strengths and weaknesses in both these approaches to biblical revelation. The more propositional approach has the advantage of presenting the faith as an unchanging set of axioms which can be deduced *a priori* in the manner of logical syllogisms.²² This offers *certainty* in a postmodern world plagued by corrosive anomie. On the other hand, this approach is clearly counter-factual: it *cannot* be denied that the Church has changed its view on positions taken in Scripture – for example, on usury and slavery. Moreover, it is very difficult to square this static approach with the findings of historical-critical scholarship, not to mention the entire epistemological world we now inhabit.²³

20 Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, Paulist Press, 2013, p. 177. For a shrewd examination of Kasper’s position, see Ross Douthat, *To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism*, Simon & Schuster, 2018, pp. 90-93. Similarly, while Avery Dulles SJ apparently remained attached to received dogmas and traditional formulations, he nonetheless stressed the importance of a dynamic view of dogma reformable in the light of further manifestations of God. See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, Orbis Books, 1992, pp. 226–227.

21 John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981) explicitly prohibited divorced and remarried Catholics from receiving Holy Communion (see paragraph 84). However, in his controversial post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), dated 19 March 2016, Pope Francis appeared to leave open the possibility that divorced persons who have remarried, as well as others living in ‘irregular unions’, might, following a process of accompaniment and discernment, be given access to the sacrament of the Eucharist. See especially chapter 8 of Francis’ exhortation. For a thorough and rigorous investigation of the theological, moral, and juridical questions raised by this issue, see Matthew Levering, *The Indissolubility of Marriage: Amoris Laetitia in Context*, Ignatius Press, 2019.

22 See Martijn Blaauw, ‘The Nature of Divine Revelation’, *The Heythrop Journal*, Jan. 2009, Vol. 50, 2-12, 3; and Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 2.

23 These matters are addressed in James G. Murphy SJ, ‘Contemporary Jesuit Epistemological Interests’, in A. Abram, P. Gallagher and M. Kirwan (eds.), *Philosophy, Theology and the Jesuit Tradition: ‘The Eye of Love’*, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2017, pp. 139-157.

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The more dynamic, inductive and experiential model also has merits. It takes seriously the fact that culture and history play a crucial role in both the production and reception of biblical texts. It adopts a more ‘critical realist’ model which holds that, although God’s revelation is an ontological fact, the data of that revelation is always *mediated* through the prism of human experience and culture. It humbly acknowledges, with St Paul, that – at least this side of eternity – we are condemned to ‘see through a glass darkly’ (1 Cor. 13:12). Its detractors, however, warn of the dangers of relativism, subjectivism and historicism, which they perceive as inevitable corollaries of the ‘experiential’ approach.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Is a *modus vivendi* (or *via media*) between these two competing models possible? If, as *Dei Verbum* claims, there is continuity between the teaching of Vatican I and II concerning biblical revelation, then the answer is surely *yes*. What might it look like? Would Newman’s notion of doctrinal development succeed in holding together the forces of stability and change?²⁴ Perhaps. But, as the bitter debates over the issue of Church reform which are currently raging among the bishops on the German Synodal Path show, even if one were to give Newman the benefit of the doubt and assume that the notion of doctrinal ‘development’ is a coherent one, the question of what might or might not constitute *sound* doctrinal development will continue to vex the minds of both conservative and liberal theologians for many years to come.

²⁴ This question is carefully considered by Ian Ker in his fine study *Newman on Vatican II*, Oxford University Press, 2014. See especially chapter 2: ‘The Hermeneutic of Change in Continuity’, pp. 40-71. A detailed discussion of Newman’s ideas concerning the development of doctrine is furnished by Nicholas Lash in *Newman on Development: The Search for an Explanation in History*, Patmos Press, 1975.

Time to celebrate Jesus the Worker?: *The mega-power of a unified vision*

Hilda Geraghty

Of late I have wondered why, when it wanted to give a Christian character to Labour Day, 1st May, the Church named the day as the *Feast of St Joseph the Worker*? Not in the least begrudging a second feast day to the great St Joseph, it nonetheless raises the question in my mind, why was it not dedicated to *Jesus the Worker*?

When God came on earth as a human being in Jesus the Christ, his first concern was to fulfill his human duty, namely, *to work*. He worked at a job for ninety per cent of his short life. Yet this has attracted relatively little commentary, celebration and praise. It must be because the remaining three years of Jesus' public life were so dramatic that everything else paled into the background. His earlier private life, except for a three-day disappearance, seemed too normal for comment.

However, hidden in plain sight, could there be a huge message in the overall pattern of this precious life? God came on earth to work. We know his great purpose, his great work, was to redeem us and lead us to a new destiny of eternal, risen life. However, Jesus first took his human duty seriously, and was human for a very long time before anyone learned to believe that he was divine. And he wanted it that way. Whatever about his divine credentials, no one can deny him his human ones, 'the son of the carpenter.' Was *Jesus the Worker* somehow too lowly a title for the *King of Kings*?

In choosing to take a human body and live in 'our world' Jesus was recognising, celebrating, and indirectly teaching the value of the ordinary human condition, and the value of human work, human effort. To earn your bread day by day and contribute to life around you. To bring your little part to the greater whole of human society and its advancement.

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To get real about this: compose your own figures for the work of a strong young man working full-time for eighteen years in a carpenter's shop, from the age of twelve to thirty. Jesus could have made something like twenty-two tables, nineteen beds, thirty cupboards, fifteen cradles, eighteen doors, forty-three stools ... (Imagine rocking a cradle made by him! Or sleeping in a bed made by him!) Perhaps he also worked on building projects in the nearby town of Sephoris. Thousands of hours of designing, measuring, marking, sawing, hammering, smoothing, testing, varnishing ... I like to think of him doing it willingly, skillfully, lovingly, taking pride in his workmanship. The Human God first contributed to human life not with his teaching, but *with his hands*. He made a possible one hundred-and-seven families more comfortable in their homes. He did good work for an honest wage, putting his heart into it, and received payment. *The labourer is worthy of his hire*. Could we celebrate all this more?

THE PROBLEM

What has set me thinking along these lines? It is the influence of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ. He was convinced that the Church for a long time had made Christianity over-spiritual, other-worldly and individualistic, as if the value lay only in the intention with which we do our work, but not in the work *in its own right*. This is part of Teilhard's thesis in *The Divine Milieu*.

Summarising this approach, he puts the following words into the mouth of a spiritual director,

Certainly, the material side of your actions has no definitive value. Whether men discover one truth or one fact more or less, whether or not they make beautiful music or beautiful pictures, whether their organisation of the world is more or less successful - all that has no direct importance for heaven.

None of these discoveries or creations will become one of the stones of which the new Jerusalem is built. But what will count, up there, what will always endure, is this: that you have acted in all things according to the will of God...The only thing that concerns him, the only thing he desires intensely, is your faithful use of your freedom, and how you give him preference over the things around you...

It matters very little what becomes of the fruits of the earth, or what they are worth. The whole question is whether you have used them to learn how to obey and how to love.... If worldly aims have no value in themselves, you can love them for the opportunity they give you to prove faithful to God.¹

1 Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, Harper Torchbooks, the Cathedral Library, Harper and Row, New York 1965, p 54.

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An approach of this kind *separates* reality into matter and spirit, higher and lower categories. It is dualistic. How does it contribute to the zest for life, the will to work, to learn, explore and create, *to be fully human*, that Teilhard felt the Christian faith should bring? Teilhard goes on to fully recognise the need for traditional Christian detachment and asceticism, lest we be owned by our ambitions, achievements or possessions. However, he sets them in the larger context of the goodness of reality. Christians had not been taught *how* to love the world but rather to suspect it, with its pits, traps and temptations. The more seriously you took your faith, the more dualistic you tended to be. Indeed, the classical expression ‘world’ as used by the older spiritual writers has often been tinged with negativity. ‘The world’ covered both all of creation and human society for the literal-minded, (which included my seventeen-year-old self, sitting in front of my Leaving Cert books in 1966 and thinking, ‘What’s the point of all this studying? All that matters is loving God’).

Both Vatican II in the sixties² and Pope St. John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, sought to correct this attitude and stressed a more human spirituality of work:

The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ’s kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God.³

THE MEANING OF LIFE?

You may have seen the wonderful series on RTE, *The Meaning of Life*, pioneered by Gay Byrne and then continued by Joe Duffy. What is striking is that most of the people interviewed (of those I have seen) said in so many words that the meaning of their lives was what they achieved in their work or career, whatever form it took, and in their family. So many had drifted away from practicing the Catholic faith they had been brought up in. They were living for very good human values, *but they did not particularly relate them to the faith in which they had been brought up.*

This is an example of what Teilhard meant when he spoke of a new form of religion he was intuiting, a ‘*religion of the earth*’ he called it, that was quietly rising and taking over minds and hearts everywhere, a religion simply of human values, a new humanism.

2 Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, 39: AAS 58, (1966), p 1057. As quoted in *Laborem Exercens*, ch. 27.

3 *Ibid*, p 1055-56. As quoted in *Laborem Exercens*, Ch 27.

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‘...Within a few generations humankind has been literally and spontaneously converted to a kind of religion of the world, vague in its dogmas yet quite clear in its moral values:

These are:

that the whole predominates over the individual;

that we passionately believe in the worth and potential of human effort;

that scientific enquiry in all fields is sacred to us.

Precisely because science has discovered the natural unity of the world – and just how vast it is – modern man can no longer easily see God, except in the guise of a universal progress or maturing.’⁴

NOT HUMAN ENOUGH?

A certain lack of enthusiasm in Christian theology for celebrating the value of this material world comes from a long tradition of Greek and Roman philosophy, which split reality into two, matter and spirit, body and soul. During the Renaissance, when humanism re-emerged, a tacit understanding formed between the Church and the new humanists: you take the body, we’ll take the soul. Teilhard would say that Christian theology on the whole hasn’t been human enough, because of this dualism. For a religion based on a Human God who spent ninety per cent of his short life working and sweating at a carpenter’s bench, it has lacked sympathy and warmth for the human vocation to build the earth. It has become too narrowly focused on the soul, sin, individual salvation and getting safely into heaven in the next life.

The best ... of the anti-Christians keep away from Christianity, not because it is too hard for them but because it seems to them not exalted enough. If they don’t accept Christ, it is because they don’t find in him the feature they reverence and look for. An earth-centred religion is pitting itself against the heavenly one. That is the real situation- in all its gravity, yet also in its hopeful aspect.’⁵

Christians themselves are not impervious to these tensions. Teilhard saw that the human sap was draining out of the Church as human progress advanced to astonishing levels. In Teilhard’s view, if the Church were to adapt its doctrines to a modern evolutionary view

4 As quoted by N.M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, p 113, Collins Sons & Co Ltd. London and Harper and Row, New York, 1968.

5 *Quelques Reflections sur la Conversion du Monde*, p 3. As quoted by N.M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, p 117, Collins Sons & Co Ltd. London and Harper and Row, New York, 1968.

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of reality, it would find those doctrines exploding to fill the space of the 'secular' world with fresh new meaning and relevance. The Church would regain credibility once its approach took account of Modernity, to where the majority have mentally migrated. 'What Teilhard desires ... is simply that theology remain true to a centuries-old tradition by expressing Christian doctrine in a language likely to be understood by men and women of today.'⁶

A HOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY

A glance at history confirms that human progress mattered to God's plan. Apart from a universe formed for him, in order to fruitfully incarnate the Divine Human needed sophisticated development on our part. It mattered to God's plan that we had invented alphabets, the technology of papyrus scrolls and quills, that a papyrus trade with Egypt operated, that a certain percentage of his Chosen People were literate. Jesus too had to be taught to read, so he could read his destiny in the scriptures before it took place. His life, death and resurrection would soon have been mere legend if his memory could not have been written down.

Imagine if we were building skyscrapers, ships, houses, railways, rockets and satellites, doing our work in wards, offices, homes, classrooms, factory floors, laboratories, nurseries, studios, imagine if we did all this work in the conviction that my small *material* effort was actually contributing to building the Whole, God's reign of Love on earth, here and now around me! That it mattered to God whether I did a good job or not! That in all humility I was co-creating with the Divine Human who spent his days at a carpenter's bench, 'whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe.' How empowering that would be! Mega-power.

UNCLAIMED CHRISTIAN TERRITORY

The 'secular' domain of human progress can be seen in this lens as unclaimed Christian territory. Secularism looks askance at Christianity's traditional ambiguity towards the legitimate pride and passion humans have for their work and achievements. But if the unified vision of Teilhard were the belief of millions working in the 'secular' domains of life, would there be a secular domain at all? *'By virtue of Creation, and still more the Incarnation, nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see.'*

Perhaps we have not fully accepted that God actually became human, that he shares in the very best of our enthusiasms. Dualism

6 N.M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, p 122, Collins Sons & Co Ltd. London and Harper and Row, New York, 1968.

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dies hard. I have a scenario in the back of my mind, that I am in the classroom and Jesus is there. And he asks ‘How is their French coming along?’ And I say, ‘You’re interested in their *French*, not just their souls?’ And he just smiles ... I might have been a better teacher had I *believed* that the human task matters for the Kingdom. To my mind, Teilhard’s vision is the first truly *lay* spirituality, because it approaches God not above and beyond the world, but through the world. It was science shot through with faith that made him see the world as whole, the world that he loved so much, right down to its very rocks and stones. The dedication of *The Divine Milieu* is significant:

SIC DEUS DILEXIT MUNDUM⁷
For those who love the world.

Teilhard tells us there is a huge positive untapped value within Christianity. *‘The most traditional Christianity can be interpreted so as to embrace all that is best in the aspirations of our times ... The traditional view of ... creation, spirit, evil ... (and more specifically, original sin, the cross, the resurrection, the Parousia, charity ...) all these notions, once they are transposed to a ‘genesis’ [becoming] dimension, become amazingly clear and coherent.’*

Teilhard takes the very symbol of Christianity, the Cross, and locates it at the centre of the human journey upwards.

‘... To sum up, Jesus on the Cross is both the symbol and the reality of the immense labour of the centuries which has, little by little, raised up the created spirit and brought it back to the depths of the divine milieu ...’⁸

NEW MEANINGS

In this holistic vision the concept of sin, for example, takes on new meaning. When I’m behaving sinfully, I’m not just blotting my own record. In failing to love I’m letting down *the Whole* in my local patch of reality, and holding others back. In failing to evolve spiritually I’m slowing down the universe in its upward journey, and failing the Reign of God around me.

By the same token, to be *holy* is to have greatly evolved, to be allowing love, the Christ-energy, to flow freely through me into my local patch, transforming it. To be deeply cooperative with the Whole. *‘In a universe where everything contributes to the gradual*

7 ‘God so loved the world [that he gave his only Son so that all who believe in him might be saved...]’ John 3:16.

8 Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 1965, Harper Torchbooks, the Cathedral Library, Harper and Row, New York, pp 103-4.

TIME TO CELEBRATE JESUS THE WORKER?

formation of spirit- which is uplifted by God into final union- every kind of work, in its palpable reality, becomes a path to holiness and communion.'⁹

Teilhard goes on to expand his faith vision *ad infinitum*:

'As our humanity takes in the material world, and as the Host takes in our humanity, the Eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar. Step by step the Eucharistic transformation irresistibly invades the universe. It is the fire that sweeps over the heath; the stroke that vibrates through the bronze.

*In a secondary and generalised sense, but in a true sense, the sacramental Species are formed by the totality of the world, and the duration of the creation is the time needed for its consecration. In Christo vivimus, movemur et sumus'.*¹⁰

Human evolution is proceeding at dizzying speed. The Church needs to claim evolution as integral, not only to the universe and life, but also to itself, by seeing itself as the unfinished evolving Christ, needing completion in this world in every new generation.

*"By showing clearly the splendours of the universal Christ, Christianity ... acquires a new value. By the very fact that it gives the earth's aspirations a goal that is at once immense, concrete and assured, it rescues the earth from the disorder, the uncertainty, and the nausea that are the worst of tomorrow's dangers. It provides the fire that inspires human effort."*¹¹

And at the end of *My Universe*, having commented on the Christian who is torn between renouncing the World and passion for the Earth, Teilhard writes,

... and this dualism in action has its source in ... a much more serious dualism of religious feeling. The soul feels itself caught, in no metaphorical sense, between two absolutes: that of experience (the Universe) and that of Revelation (transcendent God).

Judging by my own case, I would say that the great temptation of

9 L'Énergie Humaine, (Oeuvres VI) pp 221-2, as quoted by N.M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, p 117, Collins Sons & Co Ltd. London and Harper and Row, New York, 1968.

10 Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 1965, Harper Torchbooks, 1965, the Cathedral Library, Harper and Row, New York, p 125-6. *In Christ we live and move and have our being.* (St Paul).

11 *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, N.M. Wildiers, Fontana Books, 1968 Collins Sons & Co Ltd. London, and Harper & Row, New York.

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this century (and of the present moment) is (and will increasingly be) that we find the World of nature, of life and of humankind greater, closer, more mysterious, more alive, than the God of Scripture.

*For the glory of Our Lord and the triumph of his Truth, for the peace of many people of good will, I therefore cry out with all my strength for the moment when the age-old rules of Christian asceticism and direction ... will be brought together into a more organic and more rational code.*¹²

CHANGE TAKES OPENNESS AND COURAGE

The Vatican theologians were failing to cope with the rising challenge to the Christian worldview in the new science-based culture. New generations were more hesitant to opt in, despite being initiated. The faith was becoming harder to hand on. The absence of the younger generations in the Western Church is now a huge crisis.

Although coming after his time, Teilhard (d. 1955) would not have been surprised at the growth of New Age, the ever-growing ranks of the ‘spiritual but not religious’. An answer to this faith crisis, sketched out in Teilhard’s thinking, had been put into the hands of the Vatican theologians, but they failed to recognise it. The Risen Christ can be hard to recognise at times. They wouldn’t be the first not to do so.

It’s not easy to go about healing a two-thousand-year-old rift between matter and spirit, body and soul, static and dynamic, old cosmos and new cosmos, between older, smaller Christ and new cosmic Christ. To heal it would take seismic energy on the Church’s part, a heaving of mental tectonic plates. To adopt Teilhard’s approach, to start using a different language, re-interpret dogmas from static to dynamic, rewrite liturgical texts – that would take huge courage and work. It would doubtless provoke mighty controversies. But it would be a sign of life! For such an ancient institution it would be an impressive sign that it was moving with the Spirit, that it was breaking out in green buds, that it could have a third millennium, that it was, after all, perennial. Is this the intention of Pope Francis in calling a world-wide synod of the Church, trusting only in the Holy Spirit?

CONCLUSION

To conclude, in the life and example of Jesus, working long hours at his carpenter’s bench, we have the key to the holistic spirituality

¹² *My Universe, in The Heart of Matter*; p 207-8, A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc, San Diego, New York, London

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that can fully embrace the human vocation to be masters of the world and everything in it (Genesis 1, 28). This is the spirituality that can help the modern world to find its soul again. This is the spirituality the Church should be offering, and Teilhard has put it into our hands.

(For a quick easy introduction to Teilhard's thinking, google my website Seeing whole with Teilhard de Chardin @ teilharddechardinforall.com where there are four PowerPoints and a number of articles).

A Graced and Human Church. Grace is the vascular system of the church. As such, grace enlivens every aspect of the ecclesial community and orients the church to the fullness of life in Christ. The members of the church can neither instigate nor cancel grace, but are free to accept its call or close themselves to its summons. The fulfilment of God's life-giving grace extends beyond human history, beyond any vulnerability to human rebellion. Within history, however, human action, including its mode as inaction, can shroud the efficacy of grace, a fact that reinforces humanity's need for conversion. The relationship between grace and humanity that is the heart of the church establishes the church as "tillable", as a project in need of actions that mirror the "cultivation, plowing, or working" necessary for the care of the earth.

– RICHARD LENNAN, *Tilling the Church*, Liturgical Press, 2022, p. xvi.

The Wedding of Cana – A Biblical Meditation

Luke Macnamara

This year marks the 20th birthday of the Luminous Mysteries. Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* instituted the new set of five mysteries.¹ As the letter notes, the prayer of the rosary has already been practised for almost 1,000 years, although it achieved prominence only from the beginning of the 13th century onwards with the arrival of the mendicants, particularly the Dominicans. There was an inherent harmony to the traditional rosary with the prayer of the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries, giving a total of 150 Hail Marys, which matched the number of psalms in the psalter. However, the mysteries focused on the incarnation and the passion, death, and resurrection but not on the life and ministry of Jesus from the Baptism to the Passion. The *five* luminous mysteries chosen to reflect on this period are a very small selection from many possible options, much as the evangelist John chooses only a restricted number of signs from many (20:30).² The *purpose* in the choice of the mysteries and of the signs is similar, that those who meditate upon them might grow in belief (20:31). Of the five luminous mysteries, only the wedding of Cana is drawn from John's Gospel (2:1-11). It is a sparkling facet of the divine diamond that can draw those who care to meditate upon it deeper into the mystery of Christ.³ This short article will draw upon the numerous allusions and echoes within this passage to the Old Testament to develop a more holistic biblical meditation.

1 The text of the Apostolic letter is available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html

2 As there are frequent references to John's Gospel only chapter and verse number will be indicated.

3 The term divine diamond is drawn from the title of Kevin O'Gorman's recent book: *Divine Diamond: Facets of the Fourth Gospel*. Dublin: Messerian Press, 2021.

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THE THIRD DAY – SPECIAL TIMES FOR PRAYER

The wedding takes place on the third day, but there is no indication of the exact date. A third day resonates strongly with readers of the Gospel. In the following episode in the Temple, there is a dispute over Jesus' saying that he would raise up the Temple in three days. The storyteller notes the incomprehension of the Jews and how later after his resurrection, the disciples understood that Jesus was speaking of his body (2:19-21). Readers recognise this timing as echoing that of the Lord's resurrection, which invites them to interpret not only this Temple passage (2:13-22) but also the preceding Cana wedding passage with the note of the three days (2:1-12) through the prism of the resurrection. This is the temporal context, namely resurrection time, for a prayerful Christian reading of the entire Gospel.

A CAST OF CHARACTERS

The story of Cana tells of a large gathering at a wedding, including the mother of Jesus,⁴ Jesus himself, and his disciples. While the groom, chief steward, and servants are present, there is no mention of the bride, who presumably is present. Whereas Jesus is almost always the first character to be highlighted in any gathering, here it is his mother who is noted to have been invited and only afterwards Jesus and his disciples. The silence regarding the bride and the surprising order of the guest list point to a prominent role for the mother in the passage.

PERCEPTION AND REQUEST – VOICING THE HUMAN NEED

The storyteller notes in an aside that the wine has run out. No one in the wedding party seems to notice, not the bridegroom, nor the bride. Amidst all the revelry, it is the mother of Jesus who recognises the true situation, the true need. She turns to Jesus and says to him: "They have no wine." The mother's words represent a change from the storyteller's objective report. She might have simply said: "there is no wine". Instead she notes the human need, it is people who lack the wine. It is not yet clear who "they" refers to. Perhaps it refers to the bride and groom or to their families, perhaps to the guests or to the entire gathering, servants included. The mother might have averted to the fact that the reputation of the bride and groom and their families is at stake, or suggested a course of action to remedy the situation. Instead, she leaves it to open to Jesus as to how to respond. The mother of Jesus is here a *model* not only

4 Jesus' mother is never referred to as "Mary" in John's Gospel. She reappears at the cross (19:25-27) but this related episode is examined here.

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of perception and but also of appropriate intercession. Many with minds cluttered by distraction and noise find it hard to discern what is truly needed. In this context, the example of the mother of Jesus might be followed, or she herself could be invoked to perceive the true human need and to bring that need to the attention of her Son.

AN OPEN RESPONSE SUFFUSED WITH HOPE

Jesus' reply to his mother, "What is it to me and to you, woman?" (John 2:4a) seems rather brusque. The question occurs only four times in the Old Testament and twice with the same interlocutors. David uses this question in response to Abishai who wishes to cut down Shimei for insulting the king as he flees Jerusalem during Absalom's revolt (2 Sam 16:9-10). David refuses his request and entrusts the situation to the Lord that he might repay him with good in return for the cursing (2 Sam 16:12). This is later proved when after Absalom's death Abishai asks again whether he might dispatch Shimei. David responds by asking the same question, before assuring Shimei of his life (2 Sam 19:21-23). The widow of Zarephath also asks this question of Elijah since her son has died, to which Elijah responds by interceding with the Lord to raise her son (1 Kings 17:17-24). Jesus by voicing this question evokes texts associated with *new opportunities* for life, either a life spared (Shimei) or a life restored (the widow's son), through recourse to God. Within the biblical lexicon, Jesus' choice of words imply not a refusal, but that he refers the matter to God within a life-giving perspective. His words are, therefore, ultimately full of promise.⁵

MOTHER – WOMAN

Jesus appears to put distance between himself and his mother with the use of the term "*woman*". However, this address highlights the absence of the bride, who is the one that should be addressed as "*woman*". The early prominence of the mother is now even more in evidence as she is accorded the primary female role at the wedding feast by Jesus. While the address still sounds gruff to contemporary ears, it too has positive echoes in the Bible. Along with "*mother*", the term is used twice to praise the heroine in the fourth book of the Maccabees who encouraged her seven sons to remain faithful to the Lord through their martyrdom (4 Macc 15:16-17; 16:14). The context of her encouragement is hope in the resurrection. The same address, "*woman*", will be used at the well by Jesus with the Samaritan within their discussion of living water and true worship

5 For an ample and yet accessible exposition of readings of John's Gospel in the light of the Old Testament, see Seán Goan, *The Sign. Reading the Gospel of John*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2018.

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(4:21), and at the tomb (by the angels 20:13) and by the Risen Jesus (20:15) when addressing Mary Magdalene. The address and associated question resonate with hope of new life.

RESPONSE TO PRAYER – A QUESTION OF TIMING

Jesus continues to speak: “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4b). Jesus is not the subject of the coming of his hour. He speaks of a coming hour, but entrusts the timing to the will of the Father. Two attempts to arrest Jesus in the Temple fail because his hour has not yet come (7:30; 8:20) and not because he refused to accept his hour. When the hour arrives, Jesus accepts all that it entails: the manifestation of his glory is bound to his lifting up on the Cross and to the Father (John 12:23; 13:31-32). At this moment Jesus prays to the Father and is graced with a response: “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (12:27-28). The *response* indicates that the Father has long been at work in the world through Jesus and will continue to work especially through Jesus’ imminent passion, death, and resurrection. The hour of passion will become the hour of glory. The coming of the hour has multiple other resonances in this Gospel. It is the future time of true worship of the Father in Spirit and in Truth (4:21, 23) and when the dead in the tombs will rise and hear the voice of the Son of God and live (5:25, 28). The words of Jesus resonate with greater hope than might be imagined, hope in the coming resurrection and its fruits. The words also constitute an example of trust in the Father and that he will respond in time, often revealing how he has long been at work with us, something we only discover *after* the events. This is the experience of many who perhaps have suffered a close bereavement, the breakup of a relationship, the loss of a job, or the horrors of addiction and often only later recognise how they could never have managed without the Lord’s help or without the promise of definitive redemption from sin and death through Jesus’ paschal mystery.

RECOGNISING THE VOICE OF THE LORD – DISCERNING OBEDIENCE

The mother of Jesus turns to speak to the servants. She has brought the situation of human need to Jesus and no longer requires to speak to him. Instead, she paves the way for others to trust in him. Ancient readers might at first wonder that the mother deals with the servants rather than the groom or the chief steward, those directly or indirectly in charge of the banquet. The mother by bringing the lack of wine to Jesus’ attention and by directing the servants to

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him, implicitly recognises that Jesus is the one truly in charge. Any commands should come from him.

The mother's words to the servants, "*do whatever he tells you*" have a strong biblical resonance. When the seven years of famine arrive in Egypt the people cry out to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh responds by redirecting them to Joseph with the command that they should do whatever he tells them (Gen 41:55). There are many analogies that might be drawn here - the parallel situation of human need, the referral to Joseph and to one known as son of Joseph (1:45; 6:42), and the similar command. There is a slight shift in the tense of the verb "tell". Pharaoh uses the aorist subjunctive with a nuance of a punctual or once-off obedience, whereas the mother uses a present subjunctive with a nuance of *continued* obedience. The command to obey Joseph is valid for the particular moment of famine, that to obey Jesus is valid forever.

In Egypt, many come to Joseph, but only one group is given a direct command echoing the words of Pharaoh. This group comprises Joseph's 10 brothers who are in captivity on the charge of spying out the land. After three days Joseph says to them: "Do this and you shall live, for I fear God" (Gen 42:18). While obedience to Joseph brings food to the famished, it brings something more to his brothers, namely, life. The mother's command to obey whatever Jesus should tell them is expected to meet the human need, no longer of bread but now of wine. Obedience to Jesus' command once again carries strong resonances of the resurrection, with the promise of life emerging on the third day. Furthermore, both bread and wine carry strong eucharistic resonances for readers of the Gospel.

THE JEWISH SETTING – PROMISES FULFILLED AND TO BE FULFILLED

The storyteller pauses the action to describe the scene. "Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons" (2:6). The Jewish setting is strongly emphasised. Earthenware jars cannot be used for purification purposes as they can become definitively contaminated, whereas stone jars can be made clean after contamination. First century Judaism took purity concerns seriously and many stone vessels and ritual baths have been found in archaeological sites in Judea and Galilee. Furthermore, the adjective "stone" used for the jars is used 12 times for the stone tablets of the Law in Exodus and Deuteronomy, while the numeral "6" occurs frequently in the Bible to designate the 6 days of work before the day of rest and so it too recalls the Law. The number of the jars is suggestive of the imminent completion of

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time – that the seventh day is approaching, the Sabbath, which commemorates the creation (Exod 20:8-11) and the deliverance from Egypt (Deut 5:12-15). This day carries a further reference for readers of the Gospel as the day of resurrection. The adjective “stone” is also used of *hearts* in Ezekiel, a prophet much alluded to by the evangelist John, that the Lord will turn into hearts of flesh (Ezek 11:19; 36:36).⁶ This promised transformation is understood as being made possible through Jesus’ death and resurrection. The mention of the stony vessels hints that this time of transformation is imminent.

The term for water jar is mostly used in the Bible for taking water from a well (Gen 24:14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 43, 45; Eccl 12:6) but can be repurposed for holding torches (Judges 7:16, 19, 20) and for holding flour (1 Kings 17:8-16). It is this last use that is first evoked here. Elijah is sent by the Lord to the widow of Zarephath at a time of famine. At Elijah’s request for something to eat, she reports that she has only enough for a last meal before she and her son die. Elijah tells her to do as she has said and to make a little cake for him first, but issues this promise from the Lord: “the jar of flour will not be emptied, and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth” (1 Kings 17:14). The widow trusting in the Lord obeys Elijah and gives him the cake to eat. The promise of the Lord comes to pass, as he provides flour in the jar for the duration of the famine (1 Kings 17:16). The echoes with Cana are multiple, the situation of human need, the empty jar(s), trust in the Lord and obedience. The widow is a model of human cooperation which comes between promise and fulfilment. The mother invites the servants to cooperate. The careful description of the scene evokes the Lord’s long relationship with Israel and his work of salvation. Readers anticipate further salvific work through the cooperation of the servants but given the gargantuan volume of the jars something of another order.

FROM HEARING TO DOING

The storyteller reports Jesus giving the servants two contrasting orders, *first* to fill the jars with water and then to draw some out and bring to the chief steward. The exact words of Jesus are reported in direct speech (“fill the jars with water” [2:7]) because of the earlier command of his mother to the servants (“do whatever he tells you” [2:5]). Both the servants and readers get to hear the words of Jesus. This allows readers to assess the servants’ response. There is a ready response to the first order. Despite the gargantuan size and the effort involved, the servants fill the jars to the very brim. The

6 Gary T. Manning, *Echoes of a Prophet: The Use of Ezekiel in the Gospel of John and in Literature of the Second Temple Period*. LNTS 270. London: Bloomsbury, 2004.

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exact words of the *second* order are also in direct speech (“Now draw some out and take it to the chief steward” [2:8a]) but on this occasion initially only the taking of what is drawn to the steward is reported (2:8b). The ready response of the servants to Jesus’ word has already been demonstrated.

WHO KNOWS WHEN AND HOW THE LORD ACTS?

The storyteller gives access to the interactions between Jesus and his mother and then the mother with the servants, and finally Jesus and the servants, which all take place in the background during the wedding festivities. The others at the wedding are unaware of what is taking place as is made explicit in the speech of the chief steward. There is an aside to readers which explains that the steward did not know where the wine came from but that the servants who had drawn the water knew (2:9). The origin of Jesus is a commonly discussed issue in the Gospel signalled with the same interrogative pronoun “whence” (from where). Most do not know and assume that he is the son of Joseph from Nazareth (1:45; 6:42) but readers know that he is from God (1:1-5). Jesus speaks all that he has heard from the Father, so his word is indeed God’s word (12:49). Hearing and responding to Jesus’ word allows the servants not only to cooperate in Jesus’ work but also to come to know Jesus and through him the Father.

The servants had filled the jars to the brim. In antiquity, wine is always mixed with water before drinking. This wine is undiluted and of excellent quality. The chief steward, unaware of the wine’s true origin, calls the bridegroom to commend him on serving the good wine last. This indicates that the wine is the responsibility of the bridegroom. For the steward and guests it is he who has supplied the wine but the servants and the readers know that it is Jesus who has assumed the bridegroom’s role and provided the wine. In the Bible God is often viewed as bridegroom to his unfaithful bride, namely his people Israel, and the coming Messiah is to take the bridegroom’s role and restore the fractured relationship with Israel. Since Jesus here is implicitly manifested as the Messianic Bridegroom readers would draw upon these biblical traditions, especially Hosea 1-2. The setting of the wedding, the use of the address “woman”, the evocation of the betrothal of Isaac and Rebecca through the mention of the water jar which occurs (8 times) in the meeting at the well of Isaac’s servant and Rebecca (Gen 24), all point to Jesus’ identity as the Messianic Bridegroom. Within this contextual reading, the abundance of wine suggests the eschatological feast that accompanies the Messianic Bridegroom’s arrival (Isa 25:6; Joel 2:24). The time of definitive salvation has come.

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Readers will likely recall that Jesus self-identifies as the true vine in the farewell discourse (15:1-8). It is wholly congruous that he should therefore provide the wine in such quantities. The story of Israel is compared to that of a vine in Psalm 80, first taken from Egypt and then planted in the promised land (Psa 80:8-11) but then later the vineyard walls are cast down, and the vine is ravaged by beasts (Psa 80:12-13). The pleas of the psalmist that the Lord look down upon his vine and restore it (Psa 80:14-19) are answered in and through Jesus who provides abundant fruit of the vine for his people. Christian prayer of the Old Testament and especially the psalms attune disciples to the presence of Jesus in our human story, past, present, and future, and empowers disciples to receive and employ the gifts that he brings.

BELIEVING

The storyteller concludes with a summary of the passage. “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (2:11). It is only now that the disciples appear in the account after everything is accomplished. They have no role alongside Jesus and do not appear to have been present in his various dialogues involving his mother and the servants. It might have been assumed that they were among the large gathering unaware of what has happened. However, the disciples have met Jesus and spent time with him and grown to know him (1:35-51). Jesus promised Nathaniel that he would see greater things (1:50), and so he and the other disciples are attuned to this promise which is now being fulfilled at Cana. Jesus has revealed his glory, but many do not perceive. It is the disciples who have begun to know and model their lives on Jesus who recognise his saving action. It has been a long journey for the disciples, who appeared first to have been invited as an afterthought, who remained in the background and then only emerge at the end. However, through their time spent with Jesus, they are attuned to experience, recognise, and give witness to Jesus’ first manifestation of his glory and the inauguration of the final salvation. The church offers *today’s* disciples the luminous mysteries to spend time with Christ in prayerful meditation and so become attuned to his presence in their lives and to give witness to that presence in the world.⁷

7 This article is a summary of a talk delivered during the “Wine, Women, Men, and Song!” study day on the Wedding of Cana at Glenstal Abbey on 24th September 2022.

Homilies for December (A)

Tomás Surlis

2nd Sunday of Advent

December 4

Is 11:1-10. Ps 71 (72). Rom 15:4-9. Mt 3:1-12.

I once worked in a parish right beside where my father had grown up. Soon after arriving, a couple of people in the parish told me of their memories of seeing my father in training – running around one of the fields in preparation for a sports day in which he would compete in one or more long-distance running events. As one old wag put it, “That young fella is running around the field again and there’s no one running after him!” My father’s love of athletics lived on and each of his children in their turn were hauled up to the sports field, more often than not on cold, wet days, to be put through our paces: warm-up run, exercises, starts, sprints and a couple of laps for good measure. His point was that we were never going to be first to the finish line if we didn’t put in the effort in training. In a way, that’s what John the Baptist is saying to each of us here today.

There is no escape from the fact that God expects us to respond to the gift of grace which he freely offers us. Jesus calls us to follow him and following him means going to the end. It means embracing the Cross. It means reaching out in love to others without counting the cost. A German Lutheran Pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was put to death by the Nazis in 1945 because of his opposition to Hitler’s regime, wrote in his powerful book on Christian discipleship:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price, for which the merchant will sell all his goods. [I]t is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciples leaves his

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HOMILIES FOR DECEMBER (A)

nets and follows him. Such grace is costly because it calls us to *follow*, and it is grace because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*)

The Christian response to the gift of Christ means giving until it hurts. Even more radically, it means being prepared to lay down my life for the other as Dietrich Bonhoeffer did, as countless martyrs have done and, ultimately, as Jesus did.

Like the people of Noah's time, who we heard about last Sunday, the Pharisees and Sadducees were not guilty of terrible crimes but they were guilty of *complacency* and it is complacency, above all else, that John the Baptist, and later Jesus, reserved their harshest words for. In our own time, Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "We shall have to repent, not so much for the evil deeds of the wicked, but for the appalling silence of the good people." Silence in the face of wrongdoing; convenient blindness in the face of injustice; unwillingness to speak up on behalf of the poor and oppressed, the ridiculed and despised – it is for this that we who have heard the Good News of Jesus, who have been baptised into the family of God and who enjoy intimate communion with Christ each and every time we receive him in the Eucharist, it is for blindness and silence that we will be condemned.

Advent is a time for taking stock. It is a time of repentance and conversion: a time of hope. As Rosalind Brown put it, "Advent is the season of hope awakened not by our changing circumstances and fickle emotions but by the action of God in our lives, igniting the dying embers, setting fire to our passion and searing us in a way that means we are forever changed and bear the scorch marks of that flame. We shouldn't get through Advent unscathed by God." John's voice still cries out to us from the wilderness: not a wilderness of barren stone, but a wilderness of injustice, of self-seeking, of complacency, of hardness of heart. He calls us to prepare a way for the Lord in our own hearts and lives, thus blazing a trail for others to follow as little by little we cooperate with Christ in transforming this world through the purifying fire of divine love.

3rd Sunday of Advent – *Gaudete Sunday* *December 11*

Is 35:1-6, 10. Ps 145 (146). Jam 5:7-10. Mt 11:2-11.

Henri Nouwen, the great American thinker on Christian spirituality once wrote:

People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and

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there and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God. They discover that there are people who heal each other's wounds, forgive each other's offenses, share their possessions, foster the spirit of community, celebrate the gifts they have received, and live in constant anticipation of the full manifestation of God's glory. (Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*)

We discover this light most easily when we come together to pray in the name and in the presence of Jesus and this light brings joy to our hearts. That is why our community celebration of Sunday Mass is so very important. The joy that comes from being together in the presence of Jesus is infectious. It builds and grows within us until it begins to overflow and spread out into the world around us. Joy breeds hope, it nourishes faith, and it becomes love. It is this truth that the Church asks us to focus upon on this third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete Sunday*. *Gaudete* simply means to rejoice! It means to give thanks and praise to God for the mighty things he has done among us, and none mightier than sending us his Son to set us free to live as beloved sons and daughters of the Father.

What do we rejoice in this day? For what do we give thanks to God? We can *begin* by giving thanks for the words of the Prophet Isaiah in the first reading; words which are addressed to us today as surely as they were addressed to the people of Israel 600 years before Christ: "*Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, 'Courage! Do not be afraid. Look your God is coming, he is coming to save you.'*" We give thanks this day for the knowledge that God does not make empty promises and that, even now, the promises made in the Scriptures are being fulfilled. Our God is always near to us. He never abandons us. He will not let us go.

And that leads us to our *second* reason for rejoicing this day: we rejoice for the hope that the Holy Spirit has planted in our hearts – hope for the present and future salvation of the world. God's salvation is already here *and* it has not yet fully arrived. Therefore, we live in hope. In today's second reading, St James calls us to "*be patient ... until the Lord's coming.*" He asks us to be like the farmer who waits in patient hope for the seed he has planted to bear fruit. He calls us not to lose heart when we see that the struggle to believe, to hope and to love is never easy. He asks us to remember that, though it might be difficult at times, God is true to His word and all that He has promised will be fulfilled.

Our *third* reason for rejoicing this day is in the example given to us by St John the Baptist. Jesus praises John as the greatest "*of all the children born of women.*" Why? Because John knew his place and he knew his purpose in life. He was the messenger, not

the Christ. He was the one sent to prepare the way for Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. John made himself small so that the greatness of Jesus could be more clearly revealed. John walked in trust and in hope the path marked out for him by heaven and in this he provides a great example for all of us who strive to follow Jesus as he leads us to our true home in heaven.

How do we keep the hope we have experienced alive in our hearts and in our lives? In the ordinary and the everyday, how do we live as people of hope, as people who have seen the light? In his encyclical on Christian Hope, Pope Benedict XVI said that the first and most important way we do this is prayer. He called prayer a school of hope because prayer is “a first essential setting for learning hope.”¹ He reminded us that, “When no one listens to me anymore, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me. When I have been plunged into complete solitude ...; if I pray I am never totally alone.”² Prayer is essential if we are to hold onto hope and to grow in our intimacy with God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is that conversation with God in which I pour out my hopes and fears, my joys and sorrows, my doubts and my search for meaning. God already knows what is in my heart, but by pouring it all out in prayer, I create the space within me for God to fill me with the graces and blessings which he knows I need in order to live in faith, hope and love. Pope Benedict recommended that we hold fast “to the texts of the Church’s prayer: the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the prayers of the liturgy”³ as well as to our personal conversation with God. This “intermingling of public and personal prayer ... is how we can speak to God and how God speaks to us. [Through it] we become capable of the great hope, and thus we become ministers of hope for others.”⁴ That’s what prayer does. It opens our hearts and minds to God and it opens our hearts and minds to others, so that we begin to discover that we are never alone. God is always with us and we belong to that great family of God called the Church, in which we always have a place at the table of the Lord.

So, let’s hold on to hope by holding on to prayer. Let’s make use of all the ways that God has made available to us to be people of hope: to personal prayer we add regular celebration of the Mass; frequent use of the sacrament of Reconciliation; meeting with other people of faith and hope in prayer and community groups;

1 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (November 30th, 2007) 32

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid, 34.

4 Ibid.

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focusing on the sources of blessing in our lives – there are many ways of holding on to hope.

4th Sunday of Advent

December 18

Is 7:10-14. Ps 23 (24). Rom 1:1-7. Mt 1:18-24.

Over the last few Sundays, as part of our preparation for the coming of Christ into our world and into our lives, we have been presented with some great biblical figures who were of central importance in the unfolding of God's saving plan for humanity: John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. Today we are presented with the figure of that 'Just man' Joseph. He is presented to us as a model of faith and a model of fatherhood; a model of gentleness and compassion and as a man who is unafraid to take action once a decision has been made. It is no wonder that he has been venerated throughout the centuries, nor that he is called upon as the protector of the universal Church, just as he was the protector of the Holy Family.

Apart from the obvious, why is Joseph so important for us as we continue our pilgrim journey together to the Father's House? To understand Joseph's role properly – in the way that Matthew's Gospel presents it – we have to go back to the Old Testament. Matthew's Gospel, written for a largely Jewish audience, is steeped in Old Testament imagery and reference. Do you remember the story of Joseph – he of the amazing technicolour dreamcoat! – who was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt? The Old Testament Joseph was responsible for saving the tribe of Jacob his father, from famine and it was in Egypt that the people of Israel came into being as a nation, and from Egypt that they left to take up residence in the Promised Land. Like the Old Testament Joseph, St. Joseph was a key figure in helping God to bring about the new exodus from the slavery of sin into the freedom God's people now enjoy as sons and daughters of the Father because of the saving action of God.

Another reason for Joseph's importance is that he was given the task of naming Mary's Son, giving him the name Jesus, in Hebrew *Yeshua*, which literally means Saviour. Jesus' name describes his mission. It tells us *who* he is. Jesus comes to free us from slavery to sin and to lead us into the new life of freedom promised through the ages by God. Yet another reason why Joseph is so important for us is the following: You know the old saying, *Behind every good man is a great woman*. In order to understand Joseph's role, we can invert that saying to read: *Behind this great woman stands a truly good man*. It is difficult for us to understand today precisely what kind of danger Mary would have faced had it been believed that she, who was betrothed to Joseph, had become pregnant by another man. Betrothal meant that the man and woman were considered

legally to be husband and wife but that because of the young age of the woman they did not come to live together for about two years. Joseph had two options: to publicly denounce Mary as an adulteress, which would have meant death by stoning for her, or to acknowledge the child as his own. Neither option was very favourable, since if he was considered to have had sexual relations with his wife before taking her into his home, his reputation would have been in tatters.

Then comes the dream. Like his Old Testament namesake, Joseph receives an angelic message telling him not to be afraid to take Mary into his home as his wife, for the child within her has been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. This would be a lot for any man to take in but Joseph, because of the strength of his faith, believes what the angel tells him and does what is asked of him. What courage! What resolve! What trust in the word of God! What an example Joseph is to all men of faith and to all fathers, to place their trust in God's word, to put the needs of wife and family first, and to allow God's plan to unfold for their lives.

Joseph was called upon to name Jesus, to help Mary bring him to birth and to provide a home for him. We are called to do exactly the same thing. We are called to listen attentively to God's word as it is presented to us in the Scriptures, in the teaching of the Church and in the circumstances and experiences of our own lives. Further, we are called to put that word into action, allowing Jesus to come into our lives as Emmanuel, God-with-us, the God who saves. But how can we accept a Saviour unless we know ourselves to be in need of saving? We must honestly analyse our relationship with God and acknowledge that we stand in need of his help always.

Further still, we are called to introduce Jesus to others, to be unafraid to speak of and witness to him, to show by the way we live our lives that we believe that the true miracle of Christmas is that God has come from heaven, not only to walk with his people but to become one with us in all that makes us human, so that he can share with us all that makes him divine. Joseph provides us with a powerful example of goodness, compassion, trust and deep, deep faith. As we count down the final days to the great feast of Christmas, may Joseph, who made a home for Jesus, help us to make space for Jesus in our hearts, our lives and our homes so that we can help others by our example to do the same.

Christmas Day

December 25

Is 52:7-10. Ps 97 (98). Heb 1:1-6. Jn 1:1-18.

I'm not a person who particularly enjoys waiting. I think it comes from my father. As a child, I remember that if we were ever going anywhere with Mam and Dad, he would be sitting in the car half an

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hour before we needed to go, tapping his fingers impatiently on the steering wheel. Every now and again we would hear a honk of the horn as he would remind us of where he was and where we should be! At the time it used to annoy me but now I smile fondly when I think of Dad sitting waiting in the car ready to go and I think that maybe that's how we all should be: waiting and ready to go!

For many of us, waiting for something or someone can be a drag. Before the unwelcome arrival of the coronavirus, we had become unaccustomed to waiting. Waiting seemed alien to us given the fast pace at which we live our lives. Next time you're in a queue in a shop take some time to notice how different people wait in different ways. One person might look at their watch several times a minute, all the while getting more and more agitated. Another person might be staring dreamily into space, so caught up in their own thoughts that they nearly miss their turn. Yet another will be texting furiously or shifting uneasily on their feet. We are uneasy about waiting and, while waiting, we tend to think of all the other things we could be doing instead of being stuck in this queue! How often do we just savour the moment? How often do we simply enjoy the break from rushing from one point to another? How often do we relish the opportunity to relax with our thoughts? In a particular way during this time of pandemic, waiting has become a necessary evil rather than a welcome opportunity and that is why I suppose so many of us find the idea of eternity so difficult to grasp.

When waiting, why are we waiting or what we are waiting for is always at the heart of our state of mind and heart. *Context* is important. If we are waiting for a friend to take us to lunch, then the waiting is filled with happy expectancy. But, if we are waiting for the results of an exam or a Covid test, then the waiting can be filled with anxiety or even foreboding. Too often we live our lives full of the latter emotion. We fret, we worry, we wonder, we hope against hope. Are we content to live a life which constantly flits from one crisis to another, with barely a chance to draw breath in between? We can't be – not if we take today's feast seriously. God did not create us to worry or to be afraid. He created us to approach each day with confidence, with hope, with joy. Waiting is necessary because it helps us to prepare. Indeed, waiting is unavoidable. It is part of the very nature of life since we are always on the way, as pilgrims on the journey, and our longing hearts will not stop waiting until we reach our destination. The great thing is that we don't have to wait in fear; we are called to wait in joy: a joy born of the certainty that God will fulfil his promises to us. Today, the Christian community across the globe celebrates the fulfilment of promise – the promise of God, not only to be near to His people but, to actually live among us, to live within us and that makes all

the difference. Like the Chosen People who travelled through the wilderness with Moses 1600 years before Christ; like those from Jerusalem who went into the wilderness of exile in Bablyon about 1000 years later; like our forebears during the Penal times, we wait in hope for the return of God, for the return of joy and peace and fulfilment. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us this morning that “at various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.” The promise made to the Prophets has begun to be fulfilled in Mary and Joseph and it has begun to be fulfilled in us who are united with Christ through Baptism and through the Eucharist we share. It is the beginning of the fulfilment of this promise that we celebrate on Christmas morning.

With Jesus, we wait in the wilderness of the current geopolitical and social uncertainties and with him we learn how to place our trust in the promise of the Father, a promise made known to us through the Word made Flesh, “the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.” It is he who “sustains the universe by his powerful command” and it is he who will lead us out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land, where we will know freedom, where we will know peace, where we will know deep and lasting happiness. In the meantime, we watch and wait. We watch and wait in anticipation. We watch and wait in hope.

Today, the Christ-Child comes to make visible the reality of God’s presence and he calls us to be joyful because he has overcome all fear, all doubt, all despair, all sin. In him, we see the bright dawn of a new age – an age that is promised us since the dawn of time. It is in the process of becoming and while we wait in the wilderness, we pray for the grace to be able to see the signs of its emergence. Just as flowers bloom in the desert, the signs of the coming of God’s Kingdom are there to be noticed in our world and in the people who share our lives, if we but have eyes to see. Because Jesus has come and because he has sent us the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are all around us and they are within us. This Christmas Day, may we continue to watch and wait, to notice and appreciate these signs and may we continue to be for each other what Christ is for us in God.

News and Views

Faith in a time of epochal change. Paul Graham OSA, Curia Generalizia Agostiniana, 00193 Roma, writes;

‘We are experiencing not simply an epoch of changes but an epochal change,’ said Pope Francis in an address to the Roman Curia on 21 December 2019, words he has repeated on a number of occasions. The Church is living through the end of a distinctive, and extensive, period of time, when a new way of living our faith is required. Christendom, to give it a name, has come to an end, and a new epoch is dawning for the Church.

This struck me forcefully when I read in *The Tablet* (23 May 2022) that a small church in Pembrokeshire, west Wales, which has been a place of worship continuously for nearly 1500 years, is to close. There are now only two elderly worshippers, and the local diocese, in the Church of Wales, can no longer maintain it. It is dedicated to St Madoc, a disciple of St David, who evangelised Wales in the sixth century.

In recent times the closure of churches has become commonplace and we no longer give it a thought. But the idea of a church having to close after 1500 years of *continuous* worship, in spite of wars, demographic change, the Reformation and various revolutions, brings home the reality of a change of epoch. The marriage of Church and society since Constantine declared Christianity to be the official faith of the Roman Empire in the 4th century is finally coming to a close.

Christoph Theobald, a Franco-German Jesuit teaching in Paris and a foremost commentator on the state of the Church in Europe and in secularised societies, points out that the starting point of any theological reflection on this change of epoch is the fact that ‘the Church no longer reaches people in their daily lives’ (Interview, *La Croix*, May 11, 2021) .

It’s not that people are reacting against religion, or have become anti-clerical, even though elements of it have played their part in the gradual withdrawal of Christian faith for many, but that somehow they no longer feel any *need* for institutional religion. As Theobald says, it is no longer relevant to them in their daily lives. And it has happened gradually. God has gone missing, and is not missed.

Seamus Heaney expressed it well when he wrote in *A Found Poem* that his loss of Catholic faith took place ‘off stage’: ‘There was never a scene/ when I had it out with/ myself or with an other./ The loss of faith occurred off stage.’ Christian belief and practice has died for most in Europe, even if a certain cultural residue and nostalgia for it remains. And we need to acknowledge that fact, even if it poses a challenge to our own faith and forces us to ask ourselves what it means.

Theobald points out in some of his many books,¹ as yet not published in English, we must be prepared to find faith in *unexpected places*, just as the first Christians, to their surprise, discovered the Holy Spirit at work in the pagans, the Gentiles. Most people, he says, have a fundamental faith in life, a basic trust in the goodness of things. This has not gone away. People still ‘believe’, even if it is not expressed in Christian terms, and are still capable of selflessness and love.

This came home to me when I read a recent BBC report on three young people who decided to leave behind their comfortable lives in the UK, one a dog trainer, the others a farmer and a technology executive, to travel to Ukraine to help evacuate the elderly and frail from the frontline to a safe place. Refusing to give their names, they work as a team and have moved about 150 people to safety, often at considerable risk to themselves.

Religion was not mentioned when asked about what motivates them. As one of them explained, ‘We work every day because this is what we care about. This is what matters because we are all Europeans. An attack by Russia on Ukraine is an attack on all of us.’ Their care for other human beings in greater need than themselves and a sense of solidarity with them is an obvious example of the fundamental faith in life that most have, regardless of religious affiliation or none.

When we gaze upon a landscape of empty churches and indifference towards institutional religion, we should remember that the Holy Spirit is at work *beyond* the confines of the Church. God is there, even if unacknowledged, in the thousand and one acts of kindness and selflessness that continue to take place without the help of explicit religious faith. What has happened is that a certain kind of God has gone absent, leaving open the possibility of experiencing God in a new way.

In the light of this, the task of committed Christians in the midst of secularity is to be more missionary, to ‘go forth from our own comfort zone’, as Pope Francis says in *Evangelii Gaudium* (#20),

1 For example, Christoph Theobald, *Christentum als Stil. Für ein zeitgemäßes Glaubensverständnis in Europa* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2018); *Et le peuple eut soif* (Paris: Bayard, 2021)

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and be open to the signs of God's presence in all things, often in surprising places, in the 'peripheries'. There, where Christian faith meets fundamental human faith, as Theobald points out, something may happen, just as Jesus 'found' faith in the woman with the issue of blood and in the centurion, a faith which came alive in the encounter with Christ but which was already there, waiting to be ignited.

Missionary activity in our change of epoch, therefore, rather than being about 'bringing' the faith to people, is about being open to that basic faith and trust in life itself that everyone possesses. And it will be not so much with words but by the example of our lives, by demonstrations of love in Christ's name, done humbly and without fanfare, that hearts may 'burn' and the Lord encountered in the 'breaking of bread'. Our common humanity is the fertile ground for the possibility of religious faith in a secularised world, for the rediscovery of God after the 'death of God'. Or, as Richard Kearney would say, 'anatheism', God *again*.²

One of those who volunteered to evacuate the elderly and frail in Ukraine said to the BBC: 'The land here is beautiful. And I was told that if you take a Ukrainian away from that, they will die. Whenever I evacuate a woman, I will pick a flower from outside her building to take away. That's the only thing I can do'. Perhaps the only thing we can do as Christians today in the midst of unbelief is to 'pick a flower', in the hope that it will be seen as a sign of God's love – in spite of everything, including war and the closure of St Madoc's.

And maybe, just maybe, that 'flower', that gesture of love and healing done in Christ's name, will become a moment of encounter with Jesus himself, just as it was for the many in the Gospels, like woman with the issue of blood and the centurion, of whom Jesus said, 'Nowhere in Israel have I found faith like this.' (Lk 7:9)

2 See, Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Featured Review

*The Restructuring of Irish Dioceses**

Niall Coll

In his introduction to this timely volume, the editor notes that the recent appointment of the bishop of Clonfert to be, in addition, bishop of the neighbouring diocese of Galway - *in persona episcopi* - signals the start of a process of rationalising the Irish diocesan landscape. The Church of Ireland historian, Adrian Empey, pens the first chapter in which he sketches the particular twelfth-century Irish context in which the so-called Gregorian reforms gave rise to the diocesan structure which has endured to our own times. Canonist, Patrick Connolly, underlines how extraordinary it is that those same boundaries have survived for almost a millennium, not least over the last 60 years following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). After all, as both Connolly and the Canadian theologian, Gilles Routhier, point out here, Vatican II actually mandated, where necessary, the revision of diocesan boundaries. Canonist, Frédéric Fermanel, touches on aspects of church reform in France both subsequent to the Revolution in 1789 and in the wake of Vatican II with particular reference to the reorganisation of ecclesiastical provinces over the last couple of decades.

Turning to the skills and perspectives of the geographer, Des McCafferty, the reader finds a stimulating essay which situates the need for a debate about diocesan reordering in Ireland in terms of social, economic and demographic changes in the Republic (his data, unfortunately, does not extend to Northern Ireland). These changes, he indisputably asserts, have rendered diocesan boundaries not particularly coherent or meaningful in terms of the contemporary social and economic geography of the island. Economic restructuring, urbanisation, increased concentration of population, and drift eastwards on the island have confirmed these trends. And McCafferty counsels that this process will likely

* *The Restructuring of Irish Dioceses*. Eugene Duffy (ed). Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2022. ISBN 9781905604436 pp. 216, €20.

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intensify in light of the government's 'compact growth' policy set out in the National Planning Framework introduced in 2018. Looking to the future, he asserts that 40% of the anticipated growth of the Republic's population is to be accommodated in so called 'brownfield' sites. Hitherto, since the 1960s, the emphasis had been on developing 'greenfield' sites, many of them located on the outskirts of small commuter-belt towns and villages close to the major cities. Thus, it is more than likely that future population growth will largely be in the east of the country and that many dioceses along the western seaboard and in the midlands, all already small in terms of population and scattered geographically, will experience further demographic decline. Interestingly, he notes that much of the recent in-migration and that which is predicted to come in the years ahead is more likely to include many people who are non-Catholic. There is no doubt that the country is undergoing deep and rapid change. Tellingly, McCafferty cautions against the assumption, that in the face of declining congregations and dwindling number of priests, that the amalgamation of neighbouring dioceses is the way forward. He does so on the grounds that the constraints of the existing boundaries might inevitably result in 'a less optimal outcome in terms of administrative and pastoral considerations than may be achieved with a more throughgoing revision'. This call to consider a radical redrawing of boundaries, though profoundly challenging even upsetting in its implications for many now, may in time emerge as the best option.

Whatever the economic, social and demographic arguments relevant to the restructuring of Irish dioceses, theologians Eamonn Conway and Gerry O'Hanlon SJ respectively bring a most welcome, necessary and purposeful theological heft to the discussions. Conway insists that the Church in Ireland (and elsewhere) needs to be clear that her chief task now (and always) is 'to discern the changes that are necessary and vital in order that the Church remains faithful to its mission'. There should be no question, echoing Pope Francis, of our remaining stuck in maintenance mode, when a missionary one is urgently required. With a striking turn of phrase, Conway asserts, 'Blind adherence to outmoded means of ministering is a false form of fidelity, a fidelity to structures that are provisional instead of the Church's mission which is its *raison d'être*.' Drawing again from Pope Francis, he advises a spirit of *parrhesia*, namely boldness, frankness or courage. Gerry O'Hanlon, who has written poignantly and extensively to date on synodality in an Irish context, envisages the issue of diocesan restructuring giving rise to a golden opportunity 'to translate the rhetoric of synodality into institutional reality'. He draws heavily on current debates among Catholics in Australia to argue that that

the principle of lay participation in church governance ought to be a basic criterion for any diocesan restructuring in Ireland and indeed elsewhere. When all this is attended to, he expresses the hope that ‘we may expect a more vigorous proclamation of the faith attuned to contemporary ears ...’

Two chapters in this book explore certain examples of related restructuring in other dimensions of Church life. Sr Helena O’Donoghue RSM traces the evolution of the Mercy Sisters in Ireland over their 190 years history, and she sheds light on their experience in more recent times of merging communities and provinces to the point of creating a Union, bringing together all the Mercy Sisters across the globe. Shining through her article is an admirable ability to see the wood from the trees, always highlighting the importance of fidelity to the Congregation’s mission. Turning to another religious community, Aidan McGrath OFM discusses the Franciscan experience internationally of merging provinces, tantalisingly contrasting the hostility which accompanied earlier top-down amalgamations with the more recent positive experience because of much better levels of participation and engagement in decision making at a local level in the preparatory phases. Similarly, highlighting the importance of participation in decision making, retired Anglican bishop, Kenneth Kearon, offers a helpful ecumenical perspective as he outlines how the Church of Ireland has recently gone about considering and achieving, through a search for consensus at both national and local levels, the amalgamation of dioceses in the West and South-West of the country. The *final* two chapters range into particular conversations. *First*, retired bishop, Willie Walsh, reflects on his experience of being a member of Irish Episcopal Conference, and he expresses his gratitude for the support it offered him in governing his diocese. *Second*, in a multi-authored piece – Bishop Noel Treanor, Bishop Alan McGuckian, Paula McKeown and Jim Deeds - the work of the Living Church initiative in the diocese of Down and Connor is outlined and understood as an example of synodality in action.

This fine collection of essays deserves to be widely read. Many Irish Catholics - lay faithful, Religious and ordained – worry about the future of faith and Church in a very changed Ireland. This book constitutes a tentative first step in stimulating and resourcing consideration of the question of Irish diocesan restructuring. Pope Francis’s dream of a truly synodal church will be greatly assisted in taking root in this country to the degree we truly grapple with the challenges of ensuring that our dioceses, and by extension our parishes and new pastoral areas, are suitably resourced and structured for the important work that lies ahead.

New Books

The Deep End: A Journey with the Sunday Gospels in the Year of Matthew. Triona Doherty and Jane Mellett. Foreword by Jessie Rogers. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022. Pp 176. Price €14.95/£12.95

This volume, the second in a projected series that will cover the Sunday Gospel readings for liturgical years, A, B, and C, originates from a series of reflections by both authors on the Sunday Gospels in the *Intercom* Magazine between the years 2011 and 2021. The title of the book, “The Deep End,” is drawn from that given to these regular contributions. The authors, who both hold a Master’s degree in Theology from St Patrick’s College Maynooth, have two decades of pastoral experience and have become active voices in the Irish Church, especially in the areas of social justice and ecology. The first volume of the Deep End series, published in 2021, was dedicated to Year C, that of Luke’s Gospel and has been well received. This volume dedicated to Year A is also designed as a practical companion to a mediative and prayerful reading of the Gospel in the monastic tradition of *lectio divina*. Readers are equipped with a brief practical introduction to this method of reading. There are also brief introductions to each season and then a sequential approach to the Sundays and Solemnities which fall within the year. While not all the Gospel readings are from Matthew, the introduction and structure of the volume invite readers to engage with the dynamic of the full Gospel of Matthew over the course of the year. Each Sunday, short incisive and stimulating meditations on the Gospel open a dialogue with one’s personal readings. With each meditation there are pithy quotes from astonishingly wide sources which give a helpful broader horizon. These are followed by a “Go Deeper” section where readers are left with questions to explore the text further in connection with their own life experience. This volume addresses a general readership and would work well both for individual prayer and groups.

St Patrick’s Pontifical University, Maynooth LUKE MACNAMARA OSB

Davnet and Dympna: A Single Cult. Seosamh Ó Dufaigh. Clogher: Clogher Historical Society, 2021. Pp. iv+246. Price €30.00 hbk. ISBN: 0-949012-70-X.

This book by Seosamh Ó Dufaigh (also known as Bishop Joseph Duffy, Bishop Emeritus of Clogher), is a welcome addition to Irish hagiography and the result of years of devoted study of the various historical sources.

The book traces the relationship between St Davnet and St Dympna and examines arguments that they were the same person or that these were two different saints with similar names. Dympna is associated with the city of Geel, a city in the Belgian Province of Antwerp. Tradition says that she was an Irish princess. Her mother died when she was 15 and her father fell in love with her as she reminded him of her dead mother. But the virgin Dympna, who had recently converted to Christianity, rejected the advances of her powerful, but still pagan, father and fled to Geel accompanied by her confessor Gerebernus. Her father found out where she was and followed her to Geel where he killed her and her confessor. Since then there has been a strong devotion to her, especially as a patron for those suffering from mental illness and victims of incest and sexual abuse. St. Davnet is a saint that historically has had a lot of significance in different parts of the current Dioceses of Clogher and Armagh as well as other parts of Ireland. She is particularly associated with Tydavnet (*Tigh Damhnata* or House of Davnet) in County Monaghan.

In the book Ó Dufaigh traces the relationship between the two over the centuries and also to the pre-Patrician goddess Damona. He also offers the reader a wealth of analysis of place-names, geographical associations and local traditions, as well as reproducing a myriad of historical sources. The book is accompanied by illustrations and many maps of local places associated with St. Davnet. Many other local Irish saints are mentioned and the deep relationship between holiness and place in the Irish context echoes throughout this book.

The final chapter, “For today and tomorrow,” is a valuable conclusion as it brings the discussion to the present day and examines the lessons that this saint(s) can teach us. The need for the regeneration of the female religious experience and in particular the need to face sexual abuse is of special importance. This is particularly the case given that the Synthesis Document of the Synodal process in Ireland recognizes that sexual abuse has tragically become part of the story of the Church in Ireland.

The book is enriched by a wealth of footnotes, an index of persons and another of places and tribes. Helpful primary sources in translation are provided in the appendix and a rich selection of images are included.

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

NEIL XAVIER O'DONOGHUE

Occasional Prayers for the School Year. Gráinne Delaney. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022. ISBN 9781788125703.

As educators, we often find ourselves tasked with leading a school assembly or a class gathering that requires a specific reflection or prayer – and often at very short notice! Dundalk born chaplain, Gráinne Delaney, has come to the rescue with this most helpful resource, “Occasional

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Prayers for the School Year”. She has written and collated a selection of different prayers to accompany the numerous events throughout the school year and presents them to us here in this very convenient little book.

The layout of the book follows the format of the academic year and so begins in September with “Opening of the School Year” and also has a nice “Wellness Check” for students and staff as they return to school. October sees a focus on “Mission Month” and in November there are prayers for Harvest Thanksgiving in addition to prayers of remembrance for the Holy Souls.

In “Advent: A Time of Waiting”, the reflection encourages us to “slow down”, “to notice God’s presence among us” and to “be aware, prepare, notice what is there.”

The author, who works as Chaplain in Crescent College Comprehensive SJ, brings us then all the way through from Christmas to Summer and to the end of the academic year where she has written and included prayers for exam preparation and for past pupils. Along the way she has also included reflections for Catholic Schools Week and Seachtain na Gaeilge and a prayer for “On the Day of the Match”!

All of the content is concise and to the point and laid out in the most easily accessible way. A resource such as this is so valuable and really is a must-have for any busy teacher.

Tinahealy, Co. Wicklow

MARY TALLON

Being Whole. We are usually unaware of the close linguistic link between the words ‘healing’ and ‘wholeness’. We can, however, be ‘whole,’ even without being healed of our illness, if we are connected with the core of our innermost being. With this connection, we can accept our life as it is.

– JOACHIM HARTMANN AND ANNETTE UNKELHÄUßER, *Joy in God*, Messenger Publications, 2021, p. 47.

The Furrow

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More details to follow

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