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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Suzanne Mulligan
Violence Against Women
and the Virtue
of Resistance

Michael G. Lawler
Todd A. Salzman
'Zacchaeus, Come
Down from your Tree'

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Pádraig Corkery
Looking Back and
Going Forward

Thomas R. Whelan
Liturgy, Mission and
Ministry in Ireland Today

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*It will take place from the afternoon of Monday, 7 August
to the evening of Thursday, 10 August.*

The Theme of the Congress is
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The Furrow

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

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

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Violence Against Women and the Virtue of Resistance

Suzanne Mulligan

On January 12th, 2022, Ashling Murphy went for a run along the Grand Canal near Tullamore, Co. Offaly. She was 23 years of age, and was beginning her career as a primary school teacher. She went jogging in the afternoon, in an area normally populated by walkers, runners, and dog-lovers. At 4pm Ashling was murdered. Her violent killing sparked outrage across Ireland. Tens of thousands of people held vigils in the days following. Her murder gained international media coverage, and as disbelief turned to anger, people marched in the streets of both Ireland and England to protest against rising levels of gender-based violence.

One year on, where are we now?

Vigils and protests are valuable ways of expressing solidarity, and can act as a mechanism for personal and/or national catharsis. But long after the protests cease and the vigil candles burn out, violence towards women continues to be a systemic problem in Ireland. Thus, the challenges of sustaining public discussion on gender-based violence *and* of ensuring the protection of women through necessary legal, social, and cultural reforms remain urgent.

The violence visited upon Ashling is not unique to Ireland, of course. Women across the world face danger, discrimination, and death on a daily basis. In some cases, their lack of social, economic, and cultural freedom places them at heightened risk of physical and/or sexual abuse. But gender-based violence is increasing, and women from any socio-economic background can find themselves facing violence at some stage in their lives.

A report by Women's Aid in 2020 stated that one in five young women in Ireland have been subjected to intimate relationship abuse, and that 51% of young women affected had experienced this abuse before the age of 18 years. The vast majority of these women also experienced emotional abuse. Statistics on rates of femicide globally reveal an even more disturbing situation: 137 women are

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murdered every day by someone in their family. This equates to over 50,000 women dying at the hands of a family member each year. And in Ireland since 1996, 249 women have died in violent circumstances. Of these, 63% were killed in their own homes, 55% were killed by a partner or ex-partner, and almost nine in ten women knew their killer.¹

Profound change needs to happen, including a re-examination of prevailing social narratives and the value system that underpins them. For example, when a high-profile case comes to public attention it is not uncommon for women to be told not to go running in parks by themselves, or to wear a rape alarm, or to carry pepper spray. And more often still, in cases of rape or sexual assault, a woman's choice of clothing might be questioned, or her decision to walk home by herself criticized. The burden of blame too often falls on the victims of sexual attacks, creating a clear, and unfair message: *women* must change *their* behaviour in order to keep themselves safe; *women* must not take risks (even if that is simply going for a run in the middle of the day). In other words, *women* must alter *their* lifestyles to avoid harm. It is time for a new narrative, one that places appropriate pressure on *men* to change their attitudes and actions also.

ACKNOWLEDGING GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence and sexual exploitation are complex issues. There are a myriad of factors driving these realities, and what follows is merely a brief consideration of some aspects of the problem.² At the heart of gender-based violence is a failure to see women as equals, to recognize their dignity, and to acknowledge their rights. Misogyny and sexism drive discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls, which in turn enable unjust structures and attitudes to be normalized within our communities. Religions have been among the worst offenders in this respect.

Sexism is not always revealed through violence. It is seen also where women are paid less than men to perform the same work; it is revealed through the so-called “glass ceiling”, whereby women face additional (often invisible) obstacles to promotion. It emerges more explicitly through the sexual harassment of women in the workplace, or through the tokenism that is not uncommon when

1 <https://www.womensaid.ie/about/policy/natintstats.html>

2 There are several aspects of this question that are beyond the scope of this article. I do not address the correlation between violence towards women and war, for example, nor deal with human trafficking for the sex industry, nor examine in depth the relationship between poverty and sexual exploitation. Instead, I wish to concentrate on the attitudes and value systems that place woman at risk of physical and sexual harm.

it comes to the composition of committees, boards, and working groups in professional settings. How many times have we heard of a female colleague's inclusion on a board framed in terms of "gender balance requirements"?

This sends out a clear message: that women's work, intelligence, skill, and commitment count for less, and that women are not valued in the same way as men. This can be enormously damaging to the self-esteem and morale of women. But, of course, misogyny and sexism emerge in more dangerous ways too. Physical and sexual violence towards women is increasing across the world, and as Ashling Murphy's murder demonstrates, Ireland is no exception.

The question of violence towards women has been raised by Antonio Autiero and James Keenan in December's issue of this journal. In their provocative article, Autiero and Keenan remind us of the all-too-common nature of this problem: "Gruesome life stories about many women arise because they cross paths with men who compromise their own roles as fathers, husbands, and companions. These stories arise from different eras and take place in different places and cultures, with sometimes similar, sometimes diversified variables".³

In recent times, we have gained a better understanding of the underlying causes of violence, thanks in no small part to insights from the social sciences and gender studies. Studies on masculinity are also deepening our knowledge, as well as helping us "to draw the masculine away from the toxic cravings of domination. At stake is the awareness of all the cultural weight and the multitudinous encrustations that have generated a distorted vision of the relationship between genders and of the awareness of roles based on dominance".⁴ Autiero and Keenan say too that religions have been at fault, often endorsing already deeply engrained gender stereotypes that emphasized the dominance of the male. It is crucial that moral, systematic, and sacramental theology acknowledge their culpability, and that Church leadership becomes more vocal in condemning violence towards women.⁵ Indeed, one might ask to what extent magisterial teaching on sexuality and marriage places women at risk, especially when it is misused to keep women in abusive marriages, and misinterpreted to legitimize men's dominance of women within the home. Everyone in positions of authority, but especially male leaders, must recognize the systemic nature of violence against women and girls globally. And it is even more vital for Church leaders to take a strong, unequivocal stance

3 Antonio Autiero, James F. Keenan, "Vulnerability V. Dominance: Questions about the 'Father'", *The Furrow*, vol.73 (12), December 2022, 673.

4 *Ibid.*, 674.

5 *Ibid.*, 675.

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against gender-based violence, and for magisterial teaching to address *more directly* the daily realities of danger faced by females around the world.

VIRTUE, AGENCY, AND EMPOWERMENT

Gender-based violence is only one manifestation of a deeper problem about contemporary attitudes to sex and sexuality. To understand the sexual mores of any time, and the virtues that undergird sexual values, one must examine the social narratives that shape moral formation. As Anne Patrick explains, “Narrative ... plays a key educational role by communicating and reinforcing the values and virtues esteemed by a culture. Moreover, narrative also serves to criticize views of value and virtue once their favored status in a society is seen as ambiguous. The critical role of narrative, in fact, is an important part of the dynamics of change where value and virtue are concerned”.⁶ So how do social narratives contribute to the “distorted vision of relationship” that Autiero and Keenan referred to? And how might this lead to the idealization of certain traits of character that in the long term are harmful to the person and to his/her flourishing?

The sexual and economic liberation of women has been a welcome development in the main, even if the economic and educational empowerment of poorer women remains an ongoing task globally. A woman’s sexual agency is often hailed as a positive thing; indeed, one only need think back to Ireland’s treatment of women throughout the twentieth century to see why women’s sexual and reproductive agency might be considered so important. But do we need a more nuanced reflection on sexual agency, and what might that mean for certain sexual values that are commonly heralded as liberating?

An excellent analysis of this is found in the work of American theologian Karen Peterson-Iyer. In her recent book, *Reenvisioning Sexual Ethics*,⁷ she critiques the hook-up culture in the United States, access to pornography among young people, teen “sexting”, and the commercial sex industry. These social trends are the result – in part, at least – of what she calls “hyper-individualism”, the unqualified defense of freedom of choice, and the claims of individual agency. In particular, the hookup culture prevalent in most university settings has arisen from a conviction that college “is a time for unbridled fun, experimentation, and unequivocal

6 Anne Patrick, “Narrative and the Social Dynamic of Virtue”, in Charles E. Curran & Lisa A. Fullam (eds.), *Virtue*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 79.

7 See Karen Peterson-Iyer, *Reenvisioning Sexual Ethics: A Feminist Christian Account*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2022), chapter 3 in particular.

self-focus”.⁸ But, of course, one must recognize the broader socio-cultural attitudes and assumptions that underpin this practice, including hyper-masculinity, the objectification of women’s bodies, and a lack of regard for one’s own body or the bodies of others. Peterson-Iyer argues that this often creates damaging sexual expectations among people, especially young people. She calls for a more holistic understanding of human flourishing, one grounded in the demands of justice and concern for self-care.⁹

Linked to sexual agency, the issue of *consent* has become a prominent feature of sexual discourse in recent times. But Peterson-Iyer warns that consent can often be compromised by a multitude of factors. Intoxication, peer pressure, fear, or gendered cultural expectations regularly prevent women from expressing their sexual agency in specific situations: “... individual subjectivity itself always stands in dynamic tension with the broader cultural discourses that shape and form us”. She continues: “agency itself is murky and intertwined with complexities of power, desire, and individual choice”.¹⁰ In other words, consent and sexual agency can only be properly realized in contexts of freedom, mutuality, and equality. Limiting and often toxic views of gender, coupled with unjust gender-based expectations, are contributing to growing levels of violence towards women. Gender is “performative”, as Peterson-Iyer puts it, since we act in ways that have been culturally formed around us.

Our understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman is rooted in the communities, religions, and cultures to which we belong.¹¹ Like Autiero and Keenan, Peterson-Iyer makes the important observation that our toxic narratives, our malformed stories of power and dominance damage men as well as women: “... hyper-masculinity not only harms the women who it objectifies; it also harms the men – straight or queer – who are straightjacketed by its expectations ... a 2016 meta-review of seventy-eight studies on masculinity and mental health concluded that men who place value on having power over women are more likely to suffer from depression, body image issues, substance abuse, and other psychiatric challenges”.¹²

It is therefore not surprising that James Keenan has argued for a *virtue ethics* approach to sexual morality, key to which is the virtue of self-care. The virtue of self-care “invites us to be patient with ourselves as we are with others ... [it] invites us to see sexuality and sexual relationships as goods to be pursued but precisely

8 Ibid., 55.

9 Ibid., 56.

10 Ibid., 63-5.

11 Ibid., 66.

12 Ibid., 69.

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within a virtuous context”.¹³ Emotional integrity is critical here. For Peterson-Iyer, it is constitutive of human flourishing, since it requires all aspects of our personhood to be integrated into our self, including our sexual desires and acts. Emotional integrity also includes recognizing the fragility that is an integral part of human relationships. She argues that any ethic interested in fostering genuine sexual agency and promoting human flourishing must encourage an environment conducive to mature sexual discourse and true sexual self-knowledge. What is needed are supportive contexts in which integration of the sexual into our overall identity can be achieved, encouraging an ethic of care for both the individual and those with whom we share our sexual lives.

An ethic that takes seriously sexual agency “will actively call people to consider their values, their histories, and their emotions as they make sexual choices, being honest with themselves about their fears, desires, and goals ... A Christian ethic will seek to articulate and promote what might count as supportive, safe contexts for sex – contexts that foster human wholeness and therefore emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being”.¹⁴

THE VIRTUE OF RESISTANCE

Given the level of violence towards women, and the gender norms that legitimize this violence, some scholars have turned their attention to the role *resistance* plays in social reform. Can the virtue of resistance play a part in turning the tide of gender-based violence? Recent protests in Iran highlighting the excessive powers of the so-called “morality police” provide a good example of how individuals and groups can resist oppression. In contexts where women are expected to be submissive and sexually inexperienced, challenging gender norms can be both difficult and dangerous. This is why some scholars have coined the phrase “*burdened virtues*”.¹⁵ For the virtues displayed are on the one hand morally praiseworthy traits, while also potentially damaging to the well-being of the bearer. Oppositional anger might be considered a “burdened virtue”.

Kochurani Abraham explores what a “virtue of resistance” might look like in the context of violence against women in India. She notes that even in cultures where modesty and submission in women are glorified people are nevertheless daring to resist norms that limit their integrity. “Thanks to the political underpinnings

13 James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics”, in Charles E. Curran & Lisa A. Fullam (eds.), *Virtue*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 132.

14 Peterson-Iyer, *Reenvisioning Sexual Ethics*, 75.

15 Daniel Daly, “Virtue”, in Tobias Winright (ed.), *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Ethics*, (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 69.

of the feminist movement, women are finding ways and means to give vent to their anger at whatever is distorting their human dignity”.¹⁶ The situation in India is exacerbated by cultural norms that prioritize “feminine virtues” such as submission, self-sacrifice, and passivity, while social narratives reinforce the notion that preservation of the family is primarily a woman’s responsibility. These stereotypes heighten female vulnerability since they reduce agency and make women feel less able to speak out for fear of familial breakup. “The price that many Indian women pay for being ‘virtuous’ comes in different measures. While for some it is utter helplessness before violence, for others it is an increasing vulnerability to exploitation within the ‘feminine space’ of the household”.¹⁷

But through the *virtue of resistance*, women can reclaim their agency, their subjectivity, and their sense of self, Abraham argues. It is through the virtue of resistance that power relations are critiqued and dismantled, and relations of domination are revealed. In so doing it becomes vital for an “*ethic for change*”. She writes:

Resistance can also be termed a ‘feminine virtue’, in line with the redefinition of virtue as ‘justice, fidelity, and self-care’ – where *justice* implies setting right gender relations in an egalitarian way; *fidelity* means being faithful to the truth of who a woman is as a human person; and *self-care* entails women becoming responsible to care for their own health and growth in all dimensions, resisting the ‘feminist virtue’ of being only for others. This cannot be universalized once and for all, but needs to evolve corresponding to the particularities of women in the different contexts.¹⁸

Abraham believes that in order to challenge sinful attitudes and structures we must first develop “a critical consciousness”. Forming this critical consciousness would help women see that oppression, violence, and discrimination are *not* final, that resistance offers hope, and that current injustices can be overcome.

I would argue that this critical consciousness needs to be cultivated among Church leadership also, and that magisterial teaching on the family ought to more clearly reflect the profound injustices endured by women and girls globally. Furthermore, women’s voices must be heard and their experiences taken seriously if we are to further our understanding of how best to live in right relationship with each other and with God.

16 Kochurani Abraham, “Resistance: A Liberative Key in Feminist Ethics”, in Linda Hogan, A.E. Orobator (eds.), *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 98.

17 Ibid., 99.

18 Ibid., 106.

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CONCLUSION

Resisting destructive sexual paradigms ought to be part of broader efforts towards gender equality, but resistance is not always easy and can come at considerable risk to the individual. It presupposes a skill in identifying destructive narratives, a skill that cannot be taken for granted and is easily lost. Tackling gender-based violence will require concerted effort across multiple sectors of society as well as personal growth and *metanoia*. We each must do what we can to challenge unjust discrimination, to foster life-enhancing narratives, and to imagine new horizons of possibility. As Keenan says, the job of ethicists is clear: we must examine contemporary society with a critical gaze, discerning “whether existing anthropologies and the corresponding constellations of virtues inhibit or liberate members of our global community” and “make politically possible the actual new self-understanding and self-realization”.¹⁹

19 Keenan, “Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics”, 123-4.

Listening as Spiritual Hospitality. To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even dare to be silent with you.

— HENRI NOUWEN, *Bread for the Journey*.

“Zacchaeus, come down from your tree”

Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman

Zacchaeus was a tax collector, and he was a hated tax collector for two reasons. *First*, because he collected legal taxes in Jericho for the occupying Roman government and, *second*, because he collected additional illegal taxes for himself. Zacchaeus was, therefore, a rich man. He was also a small man, small enough that he could not see over the heads of those in front of him in a crowd. And there was going to be a crowd, for Jesus the miracle worker from Nazareth about whom everyone was talking was coming to town and Zacchaeus badly wanted to see him. Scouting his options along the route Jesus would take into town, he found a solution to his problem: a tree. If he climbed up into the tree, he would be able to see the miracle worker without any problem. Into the tree, therefore, he climbed.

Zacchaeus congratulated himself for his cleverness, for as Jesus walked into town Zachaeus could see him as clearly as the crowd along the road. He could see even better than most of the crowd. He could even, if he wanted, reach down and touch the miracle worker as he passed. No reaching down was necessary, however, for when he reached the tree Jesus stopped and looked up. Zacchaeus, he said, “make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5) and have dinner with you. Luke adds that “he made haste and came down and received him joyfully.” We suggest that not only did Zacchaeus make haste to come down from his tree but that he actually fell out of the tree in astonishment that Jesus, who must surely know what kind of an avaricious man he was, would want to stay at his house and eat with him.

Zacchaeus was not the only one astonished. The crowd of onlookers was also astonished, murmuring among themselves that “he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner” (Luke 19:7). In that culture at that time, eating with someone meant

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accepting him; sharing a meal with him meant sharing also his life and activity. The onlookers, therefore, were scandalized that Jesus would share a house and a meal and an acceptance of such a hateful man. They were so focused on seeing the miracle worker and so distracted by hoping to see one of his miracles that they forgot the *real* meaning of the miracle worker's life. That has not changed today in Jesus' Church where the murmurers and naysayers still do not understand what Jesus was and is about: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

Zacchaeus, however, *understood*. He understood he could not accept the gift of reconciliation that Jesus was offering him by his presence in his house and at his table and keep living the way he had been living. "Behold, Lord," he said, "the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8). That promise, if carried through, would quickly make the rich man a poor man. Jesus responded to it and promised in response: "Today, salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). Zacchaeus is no longer an outcast, outside the pale, but once again a beloved member of the family of God. The point of Luke's parable, of course, is that *we* too will be restored to membership in the family of God if, like Zacchaeus, we respond to the invitation Jesus issues to us.

Zacchaeus' experience with Jesus is one example of a common biblical theme that describes our experience with God as an experience of *gift* and *response*: first, God's self-gift to us followed by, second, an invitation to do to our neighbours what God has done to us. The theme is emphasized in the Jewish code of Deuteronomy. What is it God does, it asks, and answers that "he executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deut 10:18). What should those who believe in God do, it then asks, and answers that they should do as God does, namely, "love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deut 10:19), and God offered you the gift of deliverance from Egypt. This is the foundation for the Jewish law of hospitality which Jewish Jesus would make a major cause for salvation or damnation in the judgment discourse reported by Matthew. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me ... as you did it [or did it not] to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it [or did it not] to me" (Matt 25:35-46). In the New Testament, the theme of God's invitation and our response is channeled through Jesus, whose disciples are invited to respond to his gifts to them with a life modeled on his life of service. "This is my commandment," Jesus instructs his followers, "that you love one another *as I have loved you*" (John 15:12; see also Mark 12:28-31).

“ZACCHAEUS, COME DOWN FROM YOUR TREE”

Zacchaeus came down from his tree, which we suggest means that he transformed his life from a life of sin to a life of being like Jesus, experienced Jesus in that most human of mutual acceptance, sharing a meal together, and responded by indeed transforming his life from a life of avarice to a life as follower of Jesus. Zacchaeus' experience is not the normal experience in the New Testament. The normal experience is the one summed up in the parable of the Good Samaritan. There a lawyer asks Jesus “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25), and Jesus responds by telling him “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37), as did the Samaritan who showed love and mercy for the man he found beaten on the roadside to Jericho. Paul puts it a little differently and more boldly, as is his wont: “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Our invitation is always to imitate Jesus to inherit eternal life. Zacchaeus received that invitation, not verbally as did the lawyer and Paul's disciples in the cases we cite, but by being with Jesus face to face and accepting him in normal human situations. It is a safe bet that the majority of Jesus' contemporary disciples will not receive any verbal communication from him, but like Zacchaeus they can be in his presence by faith and mutual acceptance in countless normal human situations. In that faith-filled presence, like Zacchaeus, they can get Jesus' non-verbal invitation: “Go and do likewise.”

Zacchaeus' model of gift and response offers an *alternative* to the one we were taught as children in Catholic schools, which was a model of *obligation* and *obedience* to the will of God. That obedience to the will of God is exemplified for Christians in Jesus' death on the cross for the sake of God's people, and Jesus' obedience to God's will serves as exemplar for the obedience of Christians to God's will and the dedication of their lives for the love of their neighbours. Obedience to God's will, like the obedience of Jesus, will lead them to lay down their lives, metaphorically or in concrete reality, for their neighbours. As *children*, this model of obligation and obedience was obscure to us and, therefore, not very helpful. As *adults*, we are comforted and motivated by Paul's insight: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Cor 13:11). The story of Zacchaeus invites us to give up our childish ways and to live the Christian life of an adult, and suggests the way we might do that. That way is the way *not* of obedience only, though obedience will be a part of it, but of personal character and relationship.

The model of *relationship* embraces a fuller, more comprehensive Christian life than the model of obedience to God's will. It is fuller and more comprehensive because it involves the whole Christian

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person, physically, intellectually, imaginatively, spiritually, and not merely his/her behavior. It is more in keeping with Jesus judgment that “out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery ... envy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man [and a woman]” (Mark 7:21-23). It is critical, therefore, to get the heart right, and that is precisely what Zacchaeus did. He got his heart right by *relating* face to face with Jesus and embracing him to transform his life, as real relationship always does. Any woman or man who has ever been in a relationship of genuine love will understand how wonderfully true that is.

The introduction of the word *love* raises the question of what that word means. In its contemporary usage it means a strong affection for another person, frequently a passionate affection for another person of the opposite sex. When we find the word in our Bible, it is easy to assume that it means the same thing. But it does not. When we read the great commandment, therefore, “You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:5; Mark 12:29-30), it means not only interpersonal affection, but also mutual loyalty, mutual service, and mutual giving way one to the other. When we read, therefore, of God’s love for Israel, we are to understand those *four* virtues, mutual affection, loyalty, service, and giving way. When we think of a genuine human loving relationship, perhaps the relationship we call marriage, we are to think the same four virtues.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The apostle Paul instructed his Roman Christians that every other commandment was “summed up in this sentence: you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Rom 13:9). It is an instruction that still holds true today for Christians, and especially for married Christians. We are to give affection and faithful love or loyalty to our spouses. In these days of prevalent disloyalty and divorce, *loyalty* is an important virtue. So important is it that the Roman Rota, the Supreme Marriage Tribunal of the Catholic Church, ruled that, if steadfast, loyal love is lacking in the beginning of a marriage, that marriage is invalid and can be annulled. The writer of the Letter to the Ephesians instructs husbands to “love your wives as Christ loves the Church (Eph 5:25)”, and we can be sure he intends the same instruction for wives. How, we ask, did and does Christ love the Church? He loved and loves the Church steadfastly and loyally, so much so that he “gave himself up [to death] for her” (Eph 5:25). Christian spouses, therefore, are to love one another steadfastly, loyally, faithfully. Christian marriage is

“ZACCHAEUS, COME DOWN FROM YOUR TREE”

indissoluble because the Christian love that is to sustain it is loyal and faithful.

In a marriage between Christians, spousal love demands also mutual service one to the other. Christians are anointed in baptism for the imitation of Christ, who came “not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45). In such a servant marriage, there is no master, no mistress, but only two servants seeking to be of service to the other. In this life of loving, loyal service they encounter not only one another but also Christ daily, become one with one another and Christ, and thus come to holiness. Paul teaches his Corinthian converts another important characteristic of marital love, namely, it “does not insist on its own way” (1 Cor 13:4). Rather, it seeks to give way to the other as much as possible, so that two persons might become one person, as the biblical phrase “one body” (Gen 2:24) intends. There are insecure individuals who for their own false security must always get their own way; there is no place for such individuals in a Christian marriage. That is not to say that there is no room in marriage for individual differences, for such differences accepted and lovingly dealt with enable spousal and marital growth. It is to say only that a spouse who insists on getting her/his own way always, who values the domination of the other spouse, will never become one with anyone, perhaps even not with herself/himself. In a Christian marriage, loyal love requires not insisting on getting one’s own way but empathy and compassion for the needs, feelings, and desires of one’s spouse, and a giving way to those needs, feelings, and desires when the occasion demands it in response to loyal and faithful spousal love.

CONCLUSION

One *final* comment about Zacchaeus, he is fundamentally *changed* by his meeting with Jesus. After meeting Jesus, the man who was an avaricious lover of money and took illegal paths to enlarge his holdings of it is moved to promise “Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” We are led to believe that Zacchaeus had defrauded lots of people, including lots of poor people, and what he now promises is enough to make him poor too. The gift of Jesus and the salvation he offers is so momentous that Zacchaeus is moved to respond in kind. It is always so with gift-giving and receiving; both giver and recipient are changed. *Marriage* is a good example of how this happens. When we give and accept the gift of faithful spousal love, we are changed, we become a different person, and we act differently. That change develops and grows as our spousal love becomes more rooted and faithful until it reaches the point

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when we would not even consider turning our back on it. That change becomes ever more active and evident if and when we have children. Our plans and our priorities, our hopes and our fears are different as parents than they were as new spouses. Neither the spousal nor the parental change happens automatically. We may experience a deep-rooted resistance to giving way to a spouse or to a child. If we persevere in faithful, loyal love, however, the roles of spouse or parent can become our deepest identity and we will hear loud and clear what Jesus said to Zacchaeus: “Today, salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). That proclamation in our lives will surely bring us down from our individual tree.

Sisters of Cluny. In 1823 the founder of the Sisters of Cluny Order, Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey travelled to Freetown on the invitation of Governor McCarthy. During her time there, she worked with the freed slaves and the sick at Connaught Hospital. Forty-three years later, on 23rd January 1866 four Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny arrived in Sierra Leone to establish a mission there. Two of the four were Irish, Srs. Emilien Kearney and Edgar Sheridan. For over 156 years the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny have been active participants at many levels of community life in Sierra Leone, particularly in the fields of education for girls, health education and women’s development generally. They have served in schools on Bonthe Island, in Freetown, Moyamba, Makeni, Magburaka and Kono, and still serve in the country. Their schools have been frequently commended in official reports for the quality of the education provided. Recognising the dedicated and distinguished work in education and development carried out by the sisters, two of their members, Sr Mary Sweeney and Sr Teresa McKeon, were awarded the highest award from the Government of Sierra Leone, the Order of Rokel.

– SIERRA LEONE IRELAND PARTNERSHIP, *Leaves from the Cotton Tree*, Dunsany, Co. Meath, 2022. p. 137.

On the Nature of Spiritual Reading

Chris Hayden

The 2013 *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests* states: ‘In order for ongoing formation to be complete, it is necessary for it to be structured not as something haphazard but as a systematic offering of subjects ...’ There, we could quite correctly substitute the words ‘spiritual reading’ for ‘ongoing formation.’ Like ongoing formation, spiritual reading needs to be structured rather than haphazard. And it needs to be systematic in *two* senses: with regard to content, and with regard to habit.

In these reflections, I will not be particularly careful of the distinction between spiritual reading and ongoing study. Certainly, there is a distinction, and an important one. During a period of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, for instance, we might do very well to ponder some lines from a commentary on St John of the Cross, but pondering some lines from a commentary on governance in the Code of Canon Law might not necessarily be the best use of prayer time!

For clergy, spiritual reading is part and parcel of both initial and ongoing formation. As such, it can help to form a bridge between seminary and priestly ministry. Those who acquire a good habit of spiritual reading in the seminary are far more likely to engage in it after they are ordained. Furthermore, a habit of spiritual reading tends to keep us more open to ongoing formation as such. At the beginning of its treatment of ongoing formation, the *Ratio* insists: ‘One must constantly “feed the fire” that gives light and warmth to the exercise of the ministry ...’¹

Workshops, clergy conferences etc. can be a mainstay of ongoing formation, but they can be attended only periodically. Yet we can ‘feed the fire’ much more frequently, through structured, systematic spiritual reading. Those who feed the fire in this way are far less likely to be cynical about the broader project of ongoing

1 *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 80.

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formation.² Let us consider just what it is we are about when we engage in spiritual reading (mindful, again, that the distinction between spiritual reading and study, though useful, does not always have to be strictly observed – we will have more to say on this below). Whenever we read good material, we ‘delay with certain minds’; we enter a conversation with others, with men and women of different experience and outlook, from different times and places. To read good material is to spend time in the company of people of intelligence and depth. Here is the advice of 12th-Century theologian, William of St Thierry:

‘You should spend certain periods of time in specific sorts or reading. For if you read now here, now there, the various things that chance and circumstance send, this does not consolidate you, but makes your spirit unstable. For it is easy to take such reading in and easier still to forget it. You ought rather to delay with certain minds and grow used to them.’³

Clearly, these words recommend the structured and systematic approach we mentioned at the beginning of these reflections. They urge us not to leave the choice of material to chance, but to consider what will benefit us; to be proactive rather than just running with what falls into our hands. While some of our very best reading material may come to us by chance, we should not ask Providence to bear the entire burden! We should approach spiritual reading intentionally, planning it and actively seeing out sound material.

Good reading, like travel, broadens the mind; though we might better say that good reading *deepens* the mind. What is the situation of the mind that is *not* being deepened? It is, by definition, liable to be more shallow, more superficial that it could otherwise be. We read in order to overcome superficiality. A good deal of contemporary culture is superficial, and if we do not stand our ground, intellectually and culturally, we can be unwittingly coached in superficial attitudes and outlooks. While the superficiality of the ‘sound bite’ culture is relatively recent, superficiality as such is perennial. Half a century ago, one commentator cautioned: ‘If, in

2 Cynicism regarding ongoing formation can be quite acute. One writer describes it as a kind of ‘disgust,’ a feeling of revulsion at the prospect of meetings and talks when there is so much to be done in parish. Some of this reluctance may come down to poor presentations, but there can be a more pervasive underlying cynicism. Reluctance to engage deeply and reflectively with what one does points, in turn, to rather poor morale. After all, should we not be happy to deepen our grasp of what we love? Cf. Giacomo Ruggeri, *Prete in Clergyphone: Discernimento e Formazione Sacerdotale nelle Relazioni Digitali* (Trapani, Italy: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2018), 58-59.

3 Quoted in Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers: The Art of Meditation and Prayer* (New York: Paulist, 1973), 124.

our own day, we are to do “holy reading” in the traditional sense of that phrase, nothing but conscious choice and the development of conscious habits of attention will be likely to cure us of a dissipation of mind that so much that we see and hear is designed to foster.⁴ *Conscious habits of attention!* That phrase on its own could be the basis for a healthy examination of conscience. Or, for that matter, for a healthy consciousness examen. What measures am I taking to overcome my superficiality?

We live in a period of cultural upheaval and flux, and while we cannot reasonably expect to keep up with every development in every spiritually and pastorally relevant area, we will do well to recognize that our personal experience alone will not leave us adequately kitted out for the challenges of the day.⁵ Ongoing formation in general, and good reading in particular, open up more avenues than concrete pastoral experience alone. We need to be stretched; we need elements of an intellectual, spiritual and cultural ‘workout.’ Otherwise, we are liable to flow uncritically with the currents of our time. Social media, for example, can be a useful pastoral resource, but we should cultivate a critical – and self-critical – spirit regarding their use. Defaulting regularly into a social media and newsfeed-generated echo chamber is unlikely to advance the Kingdom. This is an area crying out for pastoral reflection and leadership, and these need not be left entirely to specialists. As a small wake-up call, we could ponder the tart words of one commentator: ‘One can spread the Gospel by Twitter, in mouthfuls of 160 characters, but that is to reduce it to slogans. Worse still: it’s to act as if the Gospel were a notification about something, rather than an encounter with someone.’⁶

The proliferation of social media invites us to grow in our sensitivity to the ‘signs of the times.’ Signs of the times demand to be *read and understood*: ‘At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.’⁷ Solid spiritual reading will make us better able to engage in such reading and interpretation. We read in order to read the signs of the times! What is at issue here is not some frenetic pursuit of ‘relevance’ by keeping up to date with all that is happening in our world. Rather, a commitment to sound reading can help us to be sensitive to cultural factors that favour, and cultural factors that impede, the reception and living out of the

4 Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, 125.

5 Cf. Ruggeri, *Prete in Clergyphone*, 59.

6 Fabrice Hadjadj, *l’Aubaine d’Être Né en ce Temps* (Paris: Éditions Emmanuel, 2021), 41. In recent papal teaching, the groundwork is being laid for a thoughtful critique of digital culture and our digital habits – cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 42-50, 205; *Christus Vivit*, 86-90.

7 *Gaudium et Spes*, 4. Cf. Mt 16:3.

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Good News of Jesus. A word of caution is in order. It does not – or should not – follow from what we have been saying that all our spiritual reading needs to be immediately practical and purposeful. There is room for beauty, for poetry, for excellent literature of various kinds: ‘a poem or a novel will often be more likely to lead us back to the world of the Bible than many consciously “spiritual” books, for the Scriptures themselves are poems and songs and warcries and never desiccated theology.’⁸ We can at times simply ‘read for beauty,’ in much the way that we ‘read’ an icon (which is, itself, ‘written’ rather than simply ‘painted’).

Spiritual reading is not only a means of acquiring *information*: crucially, it is a vehicle for *transformation*. As noted earlier, when we read, we spend time in the company of others. The old adage, ‘show me your friends and I’ll tell you what you are’ may be applied here. As philosopher of literature Martha Nussbaum puts it:

‘People care for the books they read; and they are changed by what they care for – both during the time of reading and in countless later ways more difficult to discern. But if this is so, and if the reader is a reflective person who wishes to ask (on behalf of herself and/or her community) what might be good ways to live, then it becomes not only reasonable, but also urgent to ask: What is the character of these literary friendships in which I and others find ourselves? What are they doing to me? To others? To my society? In whose company are we choosing to spend our time?’⁹

Here, Nussbaum’s primary concern is with the reading of fiction, but her remarks apply more generally, and when it comes to spiritual reading, our ‘literary friendships’ are formative – formative of our outlook, our spirituality, our pastoral approach, our evangelisation and catechesis.

A good question to ask of one’s spiritual reading is: ‘What is it inviting me to love?’¹⁰ Good reading can refine our desires and draw us into a closer relationship with God and his people.

8 Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, 126.

9 Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 231.

10 Nussbaum notes that in general, philosophical texts ‘do not invite the reader to fall in love.’ *Ibid.*, 237. However, even an arid book of philosophy or of cultural criticism may equip us to defend or safeguard what we love, and this points to the fact that spiritual reading can have an apologetic function, giving us the tools to address objections to faith. Defending and commending the faith is the task of apologetics. It is, to be sure, an intellectual business, but it is also both profoundly pastoral and profoundly spiritual.

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Not all that poses as spiritual literature is worthwhile, but sound material will enthuse us – for God and his Kingdom, for the person of Christ, for the flourishing of the people entrusted to us, for the good and the healing of our culture. This is one of the reasons why we need not always press the distinction between spiritual reading and study: there are many books that do not have the word ‘spirituality’ on the cover, but that can enkindle our spirits, our enthusiasm for the things of God, every bit as effectively as more obviously spiritual writing.

We do not have to do graduate studies in order to deepen a particular area of interest, and our choice of reading material can be guided by the question, ‘in what area would I like to gain a deeper understanding?’ It might be the Apostolic Fathers, pastoral psychology, human sexuality, the challenges of atheism, iconography, religious poetry, faith and culture ... Whatever the details, it is a good thing to cultivate a particular interest. In addition to the satisfaction it can bring, it can also help to give an overall shape to our spiritual reading; it can help us to be intentional, rather than haphazard, in our choice of reading material.

A prominent scholar of spirituality laments that ‘much contemporary spiritual writing is open to the accusation that it amounts to little more than uncritical devotion quite detached from the major themes of Christian faith.’¹¹ He does not explicitly mention the analogy of faith, but it is very much in the background of his comments. The analogy of faith refers to ‘the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of revelation.’¹² This suggests a further useful question that we might bring to our spiritual reading: ‘How does what I am reading relate to the major themes of Christian faith?’ A question like this offers a criterion for coherence; it encourages us to ponder whether the content of our spiritual reading is casual, hit-and-miss, ‘whatever-I-stumble-upon,’ or whether it is widening and deepening our grasp of the bigger picture – the vast picture! – that is the wisdom and beauty of our faith.

Finally, a few more words on what does or doesn’t constitute material for spiritual reading, and why. I have heard it remarked that when a person is experiencing a period of particular blessing in prayer, a time when the ground is irrigated and praying comes easily, one could give her the telephone directory and she would find it stimulating spiritual reading. Hyperbole, but it makes the point that the suitability of material for spiritual reading is gauged not merely by considering the material in itself, but by considering

11 Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: DLT, 1998), xi.

12 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 114.

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how it suits the individual reader – how it coheres with his or her interests, temperament, situation, commitments, etc. While one might struggle to understand how an engineering textbook could ‘work’ as spiritual reading, someone with the requisite background might, for example, find a book on astronomy very conducive to praise and contemplation. Conversely, while the ‘Spiritual Canticle’ of St John of the Cross would appear to be suitable spiritual reading material in an unqualified sense, this might not be the case for a person facing an examination on St John of the Cross the following day! Context can, at times, be just as important as content. An underlying question might be: ‘Does this text lead me beyond itself? As I read, do I find myself tapering off into reflection, meditation, intercession, praise and thanksgiving?’ More paradoxically, we might ask whether a given text is able, as we read it, to *distract* us from the reading of it. Good spiritual reading material, whether it is a mystical poem or a sympathetic critique of social media, will point beyond itself; it will tend to ‘commission’ the reader; it will have a centrifugal effect.

The ‘spiritual life’ does not reduce to the ‘interior life.’¹³ It follows that spiritual reading need not be confined to texts that deal explicitly with matters of prayer and spirituality. Let each reader judge for him- or herself where the boundaries lie, and let the fundamental criterion for that judgment be whether and how our reading helps us in our Christian living and commitments, and helps us to help others in theirs.

13 ‘Contemporary spiritual writers are unanimous in their rejection of the idea that spirituality is simply concerned with “interiority.” Such a disjunction fails to integrate in the Christian way of life crucial elements of sane living: friendship, sexuality, health, family ties, and so on.’ Lawrence Cunningham and Keith Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1996), 18.

Ardent Longing Fulfilled in the Liturgy

Neil Xavier O'Donoghue

As a priest I do not consider myself to have been particularly coddled. I left Ireland when I was 18 and went to New Jersey to receive my priestly formation. But there, as a seminarian, I did a lot of pastoral work in the South Bronx. I lived for a year in Southeast Washington D.C. when it was the murder capital of the United States and I frequented lots of difficult places, working mainly in the Spanish-speaking communities within the Catholic Church in the United States. Two years after ordination, I was asked to return to the seminary to work in formation. But I continued to travel to the South Bronx twice a week to help in a parish there and often ministered in less-than-ideal circumstances.

When I returned to Ireland to help in seminary work here, I was asked to also take a parish appointment which I happily agreed to. I thought that if I hadn't seen it all, that I had at least seen a lot. Yet I must admit that I was surprised the first time that we had First Communion in the parish. The main concern in the organization of the liturgy was that there be no bloodshed. Apparently there had been a knife fight between members of a family the year previous and the main concern, pastoral, catechetical or otherwise, was that there be no repeat at that year's First Communion Mass.

I know that this is not a regular occurrence, and most Irish parishes are much calmer. But I do think that most will agree that people are often distracted during the First Communion liturgies and that not everyone appreciates what the Church teaches to be the centre of what is celebrated. I would suggest that Confirmation is even more in crisis than First Communion. In many parishes it has become a sort of graduation ceremony from the local parochial school. In the old days children often went to Confirmation afraid for their lives. They were expected to know all the questions of the Catechism by heart. There are 443 questions in the 1951 edition of the *Maynooth Catechism*. This was too big an expectation placed

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on the children and the punishment of having to wait until next year to make your Confirmation if you got an answer wrong was manifestly unjust. However, today many Confirmation class groups would be unable to come up with a list of the Ten Commandments or the Seven Sacraments from memory, even if they were given all the time in the world and allowed to work as a group.

In no way do I wish to blame our Catholic schools and others who prepare young candidates for the Sacraments. Many people are working to the best of their ability in challenging circumstances. But the modern Ireland in which our young people are being formed could in no way be described as an Isle of Saints and Scholars. Obviously, things were a little better, 10, 20 and 30 years ago. But, no matter their age, many practicing Catholics today do not have any appreciation for what is happening in the liturgy. Some older people might remember something of their Catechism, but the majority have little knowledge and at most have a simple appreciation that Mass and some of the Sacraments are important. Most Irish Catholics today receive little catechetical formation after the age of 18 and many don't even study their Faith in secondary school.

The August 2022 Irish *Synthesis Document* for the national consultation for the Universal Synod confirms this worrying diagnosis. Perhaps the most worrying line for me in the document is the statement that “there was also a sense that in the future, people may not be reached through liturgy, so a prior step is required in relation to encountering Jesus on a personal level.” Given the renewed Eucharistic Ecclesiology of the twentieth century and the appreciation that “the Eucharist makes the Church,” I must stress that a Church without a Eucharist is simply not a Church.¹

I do appreciate that not all readers will immediately agree with me that a renewed attention to liturgical formation will be the key to parish renewal today. But *Sacrosanctum Concilium* did state that active participation in the liturgy “is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work” (14).

With this in mind, I think we can appreciate the significance of *Desiderio Desideravi*, the Apostolic Letter on the Liturgical Formation of the People of God that Pope Francis published last June. Personally, I think that it offers great help to the Irish Church in this present moment. About a year earlier, the Pope had

¹ For more on this see, Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* 2nd Ed.(Fairfax, VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2006), as well as John Paul II's 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.

written *Traditionis Custodes* a letter addressed just to bishops that regulated celebrations of the Mass according to the 1962 version of the Roman Missal (often called the Latin Mass). Many thought that letter to be overly negative, but this new letter is addressed to the whole Church and helps provide a way forward for the Church that goes beyond secondary issues.

The letter's Latin title, *Desiderio Desideravi*, is a something of a tongue-twister. But it is taken from the Last Supper account in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus tells his apostles, "I have ardently longed to eat this Passover with you" (Lk 22:15). There are two main themes to the letter. The *first* of these, which I consider to be the least important of the two, is to reaffirm the validity of the liturgical renewal that has taken place after the Second Vatican Council. As Francis explains, "I have felt it my duty to affirm [in *Traditionis Custodes*] that 'the liturgical books promulgated by Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, in conformity with the decrees of Vatican Council II, are the unique expression of the *lex orandi* [law of prayer] of the Roman Rite.'" He continues in the same paragraph, explaining "I do not see how it is possible to say that one recognizes the validity of the Council – though it amazes me that a Catholic might presume not to do so – and at the same time not accept the liturgical reform born out of [the Second Vatican Council's] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*." In the blogosphere this affirmation of the current liturgy is what has provoked most reaction.²

However, I think that the main importance of the letter is its emphasis on liturgical formation. Francis knows that there is a much more fundamental issue at stake here than whether we use a version of the Missal promulgated in 1962 or 2002. The vital problem is whether or not we have a personal relationship with Jesus. Pope Francis puts it bluntly, "Christian faith is either an encounter with Him alive, or it does not exist" (*Desiderio* 10). The Pope continues explaining that "the Liturgy guarantees for us the possibility of such an encounter. For us a vague memory of the Last Supper would do no good. We need to be present at that Supper, to be able to hear his voice, to eat his Body and to drink his Blood. We need Him. In the Eucharist and in all the sacraments we are guaranteed the possibility of encountering the Lord Jesus and of having the power of his Paschal Mystery reach us. The salvific power of the sacrifice of Jesus, his every word, his every

2 For more reflection on this topic, I would refer those interested to a series of articles cowritten by John Cavadini, Mary Healy, Thomas Weinandy and available at the *Church Life Journal: A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life of the University of Notre Dame*. The series is available online here: <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/authors/john-cavadini-mary-healy-thomas-weinandy/>

gesture, glance, and feeling reaches us through the celebration of the sacraments. I am Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man possessed by demons at Capernaum, the paralytic in the house of Peter, the sinful woman pardoned, the woman afflicted by haemorrhages, the daughter of Jairus, the blind man of Jericho, Zacchaeus, Lazarus, the thief and Peter both pardoned. The Lord Jesus who dies no more, who lives forever with the signs of his Passion continues to pardon us, to heal us, to save us with the power of the sacraments.” Indeed, meeting Christ in the liturgy “is the concrete way, by means of his incarnation, that he loves us. It is the way in which he satisfies his own thirst for us that he had declared from the cross” (*Desiderio* 11). This *living* encounter with Jesus Christ is what we need to foster in our liturgies and parishes.

Francis is inspired by the German-Italian theologian, Romano Guardini (1885-1968). As a young priest, Francis had decided to write his (unfinished) doctoral thesis on Guardini. He quotes Guardini four times in the Letter and he is the only modern author to be quoted (other than Church documents). In 1964 Guardini had famously questioned whether the regular person was still capable of participating in “the liturgical act.” He felt that after World War II the world had become too technical and religion had become an individual matter for most people.³ Francis explains how, “with this letter I simply want to invite the whole church to rediscover, to safeguard and to live the truth and power of the Christian celebration. I want the beauty of the Christian celebration and its necessary consequences for the life of the church not to be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision, no matter what the hue. The priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper that all may be one judges every one of our divisions around the Bread broken, around the sacrament of mercy, the sign of unity, the bond of charity” (*Desiderio* 16).

Clearly echoing Guardini, Francis explains that “the fundamental question is this: how do we recover the capacity to live completely the liturgical action? This was the objective of the Council’s reform. The challenge is extremely demanding because modern people – not in all cultures to the same degree – have lost the capacity to engage with symbolic action, which is an essential trait of the liturgical act” (*Desiderio* 27).

With this grave situation in mind, we cannot be complacent, but rather “we must learn anew how to relate religiously as fully

3 Romano Guardini, “An Open Letter,” in Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh, eds., *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 3–8. For an introduction to Guardini’s thought see Robert Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997)

human beings” (*Desiderio* 34, quoting Guardini). Francis has an interesting proposal as to how we do this. He proposes *beauty*. We need to be “careful: for the antidote of the Liturgy to be effective, we are required every day to rediscover the beauty of the truth of the Christian celebration ... so that the Spirit, plunging us into the paschal mystery, might transform every dimension of our life, conforming us more and more to Christ” (*Desiderio* 21).

Interestingly, for Francis, this beauty is not simply about providing aesthetically pleasing music, art or architecture in our churches. He explains that “the continual rediscovery of the beauty of the Liturgy is not the search for a ritual aesthetic which is content by only a careful exterior observance of a rite or is satisfied by a scrupulous observance of the rubrics. Obviously, what I am saying here does not wish in any way to approve the opposite attitude, which confuses simplicity with a careless banality, or what is essential with an ignorant superficiality, or the concreteness of ritual action with an exasperating practical functionalism. Let us be clear here: every aspect of the celebration must be carefully tended to (space, time, gestures, words, objects, vestments, song, music...) and every rubric must be observed. Such attention would be enough to prevent robbing from the assembly what is owed to it; namely, the paschal mystery celebrated according to the ritual that the Church sets down. But even if the quality and the proper action of the celebration were guaranteed, that would not be enough to make our participation full” (*Desiderio* 22-23).

In this sense what is required from us? How can we implement this Letter in Ireland? First of all, I would suggest that our liturgy be celebrated well. Particularly in these post-lockdown days, we need to realize that the liturgy is not just the work of the priest. “Let us always remember that it is the Church, the Body of Christ, that is the celebrating subject and not just the priest” (*Desiderio* 36). Francis proposes that all Christians, but priests especially work diligently at their *ars celebrandi* and that priests pay a lot of care to how they preside. “We could say,” he writes, “that there are different ‘models’ of presiding. Here is a possible list of approaches, which even though opposed to each other, characterize a way of presiding that is certainly inadequate: rigid austerity or an exasperating creativity, a spiritualizing mysticism or a practical functionalism, a rushed briskness or an overemphasized slowness, a sloppy carelessness or an excessive finickiness, a superabundant friendliness or priestly impassibility. Granted the wide range of these examples, I think that the inadequacy of these models of presiding have a common root: a heightened personalism of the celebrating style which at times expresses a poorly concealed mania to be the center of attention. Often this becomes more

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evident when our celebrations are transmitted over the air or online, something not always opportune and that needs further reflection” (*Desiderio* 54).

Then he leaves a lot of room to each to discern how best to foster liturgical formation. But I think that the most important encouragement that Francis gives us is to challenge us to place the liturgy at the centre of our pastoral work. The years after Vatican II saw a lot of excitement about the liturgy. But today, sometimes we take the liturgy for granted. We are constantly looking for new programmes and activities to revitalize our parishes. But this can lead us to neglect the liturgy that is always there, but sometimes forgotten. I challenge readers to actually read the full text of *Desiderio Desideravi* and to reflect on Francis’ suggestions. Everyone ought to strive to become better formed in the liturgy and to improve the liturgy in their parish or community.

Finally, we ought to heed Francis’ call to unity in the Church. The Eucharist is the “source and summit” of Christian life (*Lumen Gentium* 11), yet in our days it sometimes becomes a place where disunity is manifest. Francis concludes the letter with this encouragement: “Let us abandon our polemics to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Let us safeguard our communion. Let us continue to be astonished at the beauty of the Liturgy. The Paschal Mystery has been given to us. Let us allow ourselves to be embraced by the desire that the Lord continues to have to eat His Passover with us” (*Desiderio* 65).

Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble,
and let the heavens exult
when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar
in the hands of a priest!
O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!
O sublime humility! O humble sublimity!
The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God,
so humbles Himself that for our salvation
He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread!
Brothers, look at the humility of God,
and pour out your hearts before Him!
Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him!
Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,
that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!

Saint Francis of Assisi

A Letter to the Entire Order II, 26-29, Quoted at the conclusion of
Desiderio Desideravi.

Looking Back and Going Forward

Pádraig Corkery

The church worldwide has been engaged with the process of synodality over the past few years. It is a major moment in the life of the Church. ‘Journeying together’ to discern the call of the Gospel for today is a joyful, challenging, exciting and uncertain journey. Maybe, even a little daunting. The Church has embarked on this journey with hope and with the conviction that it is a necessary journey if the Church is to be renewed and strengthened in its mission to proclaim and live the ‘good news’. Like all major moments in life it raises very important questions. How do we discern together? What is the methodology that best engages with the experiences of men and women of faith in different contexts and circumstances? What is the ‘*sensus fidei*’ and how can its richness be mined for the good of the whole faith family?

The level of engagement with and enthusiasm for the process has varied from community to community. We have witnessed communities united in prayerful reflection and discussion. We have witnessed too occasions of disagreement amongst church leaders as to who should be included in the process of listening. We have also witnessed discussion on whether some moral and pastoral issues are up for discussion. Red line issues have been clearly identified in the vast volume of commentary generated in the popular press and in religious and theological journals.¹ These include, but are not limited to, the ordination of women to the priesthood, the full acceptance of LGBTQ+ relationships and families, the admission of those in second unions to the Eucharist. All this has resulted in real polarization in some faith communities and frosty relationships between some church leaders, including Bishops.

Some have argued that Catholic teaching on the issues named is clear, settled and not open for revision or development. Others, have taken a different approach. This approach values human experience as a font of moral wisdom and proposes that some

¹ See, for example, the September 2022 issue of *The Furrow* [Synodality in a Theological Key] for a range of articles and perspectives on the synodal journey.

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teachings of the church are open to further development and maturing. The history of the Church would support this claim. Teaching on usury, slavery, the nature of marriage, the role of women, the death penalty and, more recently, the adequacy of the just war theory [JWT] have all undergone dramatic development over the centuries. One can argue, credibly I think, that the full implications of the Gospel are only grasped over time and in light of human experience. The dignity of the human person, for example, has always been affirmed in the Christian family but the implications of that truth is only being fully appreciated now. Today we have a greater appreciation of the intrinsic dignity of each person, the importance of human freedom and the sacredness of conscience, than we had in earlier centuries.

VATICAN II AND TODAY

Vatican II too can be described as a major moment in the life of the Church.² Indeed it has been described as ‘the most significant event in the history of Catholicism since the Protestant Reformation.’³ The Council debates and documents ushered in significant changes that inspired and sustained renewal in the life of the Church. The developments that come most readily to mind are a new appreciation of the centrality of the Scriptures, a renewed liturgy and a lively sense of the Church as ‘the people of God’. The major moment that was Vatican II generated tensions and disagreements not unlike those we are witnessing now with regard to synodality. These tensions were, of course, evident in the theological discussions prior to the Council as well as during the Council. Some of the [bad] fruits of the clash of world views were; polarization, the exclusion of some voices and experiences, the silencing of theologians and efforts to shut down debate in the name of fidelity to the past. The debates about development, change, continuity and discontinuity that we are witnessing today were very evident during the Second Vatican Council. There is nothing new under the sun! What can we learn from this *past* experience that will enable us to more fruitfully engage with the synodal path *today*?

2 For a thorough and readable account of Vatican II see John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008. See also Gerald O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014 and Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

3 Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, , UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020, xv.

LOOKING BACK AND GOING FORWARD

Then, as now, some saw change as a threat to the living tradition of the Church – a rupture with the past. Others, viewed change in church teaching in terms of development or a fuller grasp of the truth, while maintaining the unity and continuity of the church in its living of the Good News of Jesus Christ. These debates were particularly lively during the writing and eventual approval of the Council documents on the liturgy and religious freedom. These debates are instructive, I think, as we grapple with the tensions and disagreements that have accompanied the shared faith and commitment that lies at the heart of the synodal journey. Is change possible in some areas of Church moral and pastoral teaching? Can such change be welcomed and celebrated while still maintaining unity and continuity with our two thousand year old living faith?

The theological discussion surrounding the issue of the nature and scope of religious freedom preceded the Council by two decades. Contributors like Cardinal Ottaviani were opposed to a right to religious freedom on several grounds. He maintained that everyone had an obligation [including the State] to promote truth and to prohibit or, if that was not possible without disturbing the peace of society, to limit error. This was known as the ‘rights of truth’ approach [error has no rights]. This framework or canvas lend itself to the very obvious question; What is truth? The answer – the Catholic Church and its teachings. Looking at the question through this lens had very obvious implications for the relationship between Church and State. Furthermore, Cardinal Ottaviani and others, believed that the denial of religious freedom as a human right was a consistent and non-negotiable aspect of church teaching. It was part ‘of the patrimony’ of the church as evidenced in the condemnation of religious freedom in the Syllabus of Errors [Pius IX] of 1864.⁴ There the following propositions were *condemned*;

#15. Every person is free to embrace and to profess the religion he/she has judged by the light of reason to be true.

#77. In our day, it is no longer advisable that the Catholic religion should be considered the only religion of the state, to the exclusion of all other forms of worship.

If the Church changed its mind on this issue, it was argued, then it could change its mind on anything and everything. Cardinal Ottaviani’s episcopal motto ‘semper idem’ well summed up this approach.

Those who promoted religious freedom as a human right and the implications of this right for religious freedom in society and for the relationship between church and state did not deny

4 See for example Cardinal Ottaviani, ‘Church and State: Some present problems in light of the teaching of Pius XI’, *American Ecclesiastical Review* 128 [1953]: 321-334.

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the church's claim to be the true church. Nor did they deny the duty and right of all to seek and serve God. Rather, they argued that the right and duty to find religious truth is a fundamental demand of human dignity. The search for truth must however be carried out in a manner that accords with human dignity i.e. in freedom. People cannot be coerced into truth. It must be freely embraced. Furthermore, they highlighted that the tradition, from the earliest of times, understood that the act of faith is always a free response to God's invitation. Another dimension of their approach was to propose that the modern state differs fundamentally from the Church in terms of its origin, purpose and competence. The Church today asks nothing from the state other than the freedom to proclaim its message and mission.

One of the principal architects of the theological conversation prior to Vatican II was the American Jesuit John Courtney Murray⁵. His scholarly reflections of religious freedom and on the relationship between Church and State appeared over many years in *Theological Studies* and elsewhere. His critique of the existing corpus of Church teaching on these issues generated passionate theological debate and resulted in him being silenced by his Jesuit superiors at the behest of the Holy Office. Like most of the scholars whose works contributed to the rich theological and pastoral documents of Vatican II, Murray returned to the Scriptural and Patristic sources to expose the nature and importance of freedom in the search for and embracing of religious truth. He furthermore examined in detail the magisterial documents dealing with religious freedom and the church-state relationship. Here the insights of his fellow Jesuit Bernard Lonergan on historical consciousness were creatively engaged.

As a result of the work of Murray and others before the Council the Church's stance on religious freedom as outlined in *Dignitatis Humanae*⁶ differs dramatically from the stance proclaimed in earlier church documents. It boldly proclaims that religious freedom is a fundamental right that flows from the very dignity of the human person. And that this can be established through reason and Revelation;

'The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself.'⁷

5 For a concise account of John Courtney Murray's theological journey see; Barry Hudock, *Struggle, Condemnation, Vindication: John Courtney Murray's Journey towards Vatican II*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015.

6 For an informative look at the 5 schemas [drafts] of the document see David L. Schindler & Nicholas J Healy, *Freedom, Truth and Human Dignity: The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom*, Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015.

7 Declaration on Religious Freedom, #2.

LOOKING BACK AND GOING FORWARD

Since Vatican II the Church's stance on religious freedom has become even richer and deeper. It is now proclaimed as the most important of rights since it facilitates our search for and relationship with God.

So change/development can and does happen! We can grow in our appreciation of the demands of the Gospel. We can move from a partial understanding of the implications of the Gospel and discover a 'depth dimension' that opens up new horizons. This has been achieved with regard to the dignity of the human person – though it is still a journey to be completed. An essential dimension in achieving this growth in understanding was listening to the voices and experiences of people regarding their understanding of human dignity and its implications for religious freedom.

SYNODALITY

Can similar progress be achieved with regard to some of the disputed teachings of the Church – particularly in the area of human relationships and human sexuality – which have featured prominently in many of the synodal submissions at local and national level?

Do we need a paradigm shift in terms of understanding the nature and richness of human relationships whether heterosexual or LGBTQ+? The same kind of paradigm shift evident in the move from a 'rights of truth' approach to a 'rights of the person' approach? This must include an engagement with the *lived experience* of couples in order to uncover the true meaning and purpose of human love and sexuality. Does the traditional lens of magisterial teaching on sexuality adequately honour the richness and variety of authentic expressions of human love, companionship and family?⁸

Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* engaged with some of these red line or controversial issues. He identified several dimensions of the human condition that need further reflection and discernment; a greater appreciation of the reality of the law of *graduality* and the need for ongoing discernment; a greater appreciation of the *complexity* of people's lives – 'a need to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situation' [# 296] – and the implications of this for thinking that everything is 'black and white' [# 305]; a greater appreciation of the sacredness of *conscience* and the pastoral responsibility 'to form consciences,

8 For a creative and person centered approach to some of these issue see Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, New York: Continuum, 2006 and Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *Sexual Ethics: A Theological Introduction*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012.

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not to replace them' [#37] and, finally, but most centrally a keener appreciation of God's *mercy* – 'mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God's truth. For this reason, we should always consider inadequate any theological conception which in the end puts in doubt the omnipotence of God and, especially, his mercy [# 311]'.

CONCLUSION

Though slow and cumbersome the synodal path is a courageous step that strives to engage with the *sensus fidei* and the need for ongoing community discernment. It takes seriously human experience and the activity of the Holy Spirit in all the faithful. The disagreements and clashes it has generated need not be feared. They are indications of a *living* community grappling with the call of the Gospel in a complex and imperfect world and in complex and imperfect people. Past experience, especially Vatican II, should encourage us to be courageous and to remain committed to the synodal journey. It should also encourage us to return to the sources – especially Scripture, prayer, discernment and human experience – in the process of discerning the call of the Gospel.

Going inwards to work outwards. Often when people think of meditation and prayer they think of it as an escape from the world and responsibilities. For Ignatius the inner journey of confronting his demons and finding God led eventually to a great compassion for the poor and the suffering. There is a value in becoming aware and conscious of your 'inner world' of feelings and desires. It helps you to navigate the complexity of the objective 'outer world'. Your actions have significance; it is important what you do, and there is meaning and truth to be found. All is not relative or subjective. God normally is inviting us to take some concrete step of action to help others. The world needs you to be a responsible, active agent for change and justice.

– BRENDAN MC MANUS, *Channelling the Inner Fire*, Dublin, Messenger Publications, 2022. p. 34.

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

Thomas R. Whelan

PART FOUR: MINISTRY AND LITURGY

When we examine our human and ecclesial reality in the context mission, the local needs of ministry can be more easily identified. This final part will begin by offering a fleeting impression of the manner in which the lived experience of ministry throughout the world expressed how various churches responded to mission. Developments in ministry will be read in the light of the ‘mission of God’, filtered through living tradition and the current needs of the churches. This will inform our theology more than some official writings. One insight will be that Church always ends up doing the correct thing, but for the wrong reasons!

MINISTRY IN PRACTICE SINCE 1972

The development of a variety of ministries did not emerge in a painless way in the aftermath of Vatican Two. Even today, permanent diaconate (restored by *Lumen gentium* [=LG] 29) has been taken up enthusiastically by many churches, but not by churches in Asia and Africa where this ministry is thought to add an undesirable layer of ‘clericalism’ to what they already have. ¹

¹ According to figures given on 23 October 2022 by the Vatican office, *Agenzia fides* (fides.org), 97% of a worldwide total of 43,635 permanent deacons are found between the North and South American continents (with some 17,000 in the USA alone); and 15,267 in all of Europe. Just 1,279 permanent deacons are registered for the continents of Africa and Asia; and 519 for Oceania. This ministry was not introduced into Ireland until 2000, almost 30 years after the new norms were issued by Pau VI in *Ad pascendum* (1972).

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The establishment of lay ministries by Paul VI in 1972 (*Ministeria quaedam* [= MQ]) suffered from its rather muddled beginnings. Commentators at the time pointed to the many inconsistencies which originated due to the divergent views of some Vatican dicasteries. Lector and acolyte were to be ‘instituted’ as lay ministries but were mandatory for candidates entering the ‘clerical’ state for which reason they were to be conferred on (lay) men only. In 1973, the Vatican issued *Immensae caritatis* permitting men and women to be ‘commissioned’, if required, to distribute communion as ‘*extraordinary ministers*’ of the eucharist. The French bishops (who had already created such a ministry in 1969) observed that there is no essential difference between the ‘*extraordinary ministers of the eucharist*’ (1973 document) and the ‘*acolytes*’ established by MQ except that the former may include women. The first is ‘instituted’; the second may be ‘commissioned’. This created yet another conundrum: we now have two ‘categories’ of persons ‘authorized’ to distribute communion! Roman concern for canonical matters and lack of theological clarity has characterised all that has happened with ministry over the past 50 years.

It has been praxis relating to the ‘explosion’ in new ministries in different parts of the world over the next 50 years that created the templates for a developing theology of ministry rather than Roman-led thinking.² Ministries emerged in response to local needs while simultaneously reflecting changing concepts in different places of what it means to be ‘church’. The delights of new Spirit-led paths were explored and weaknesses in existing theologies of ministry emerged.

The younger churches tended to be creative in how they expanded ministry. They have always lived with the reality of a chronic shortage of priests, but their concern was not primarily ‘vocations’ but facilitating the growth of churches as living embodiments of the Kingdom under the local leadership of lay people. Churches on the Latin American continent placed to the fore of its mission issues emerging from marginalisation and justice. Working from the roots (the people themselves), rather than episcopal initiative, the Base Ecclesial Communities facilitated communities to allow their daily experiences encounter and be interpreted by the Gospel.³

2 A brief account of ministries in various parts of the world, up to approximately 1998, can be found in my ‘Clergy and Laity: Fragmentation or Fellowship?’ in *Ministry: Clerics and the Rest of Us*, ed. Seán MacRéamoinn (Columba, 1998), 26-53. David N Power has offered a more recent survey with some theological reflections in his *Mission, Ministry, Order: Reading the Tradition in the Present Context* (Continuum, 2008), esp. 11-65.

3 Félix-Alejandro Pastor offers an impression in his ‘Ministerios laicales y Comunidades de Base: La renovación pastoral de la Iglesia en América Latina’ *Gregorianum* 68 (1987): 267-305.

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They trained their own lay leaders who coordinated the life of the community and presided at their weekly assembly on Sundays. (It remains normal for many communities to celebrate Eucharist only every six months or so when a priest visits.) In 1974 Brazil received a rescript from Rome to permit lay people preside at celebrations of the sacrament of marriage.⁴ Lay ministries have been part of the landscape on the African continent since at least the 1880s when catechists, teachers, and community leaders worked tirelessly with missionaries for the establishment of churches. Reaction to their colonial background and a recovery of culture has helped shape how ministries work in various parts of the continent more so than Roman initiatives. (However, dependence on Roman funding has often influenced developments.) Some contemporary African theologians fear that styles of secular government are now to be found in church and these are autocratic and male dominated. 'Inculturation' of ministry for both lay ministers and ordained priests requires, according to theologians, a de-clericalization of seminary formation and a discouragement to having them trained outside the African continent.

The most significant characteristic element in new ministries in Asia was the centrality of Small Christian Communities (an episcopal initiative), and new ministries related to inter-religious dialogue, justice, and pastoral community leadership as well as those helping communities face the inherent challenges posed by changing economic, social, political and cultural realities. Collegiality and co-responsibility are important, and justice must be to the fore alongside the eradication of discrimination on the ground of gender, creed, class and colour.

The older churches in the northern hemisphere responded to the Roman initiatives by trying to implement them to the letter: they were cautious, conservative, hierarchical, and clerical in their approach. In the West it was supplementing the shortage of clergy, rather than good theology or a desire to encourage lay persons to take 'ownership' of their church, that prevailed as a driver.

Some of the issues seen in France some 60 years ago, for instance, are relevant to Ireland today. Sunday celebrations in the absence of Eucharist became the norm, increasingly, since the mid-1960s. Today France continues to forge a presence in a dechristianised society which espouses *laïcité*. Other expressions of ministry, unapologetically 'missionary', work to witness to Christ in the midst of religious pluralism and migration from other continents. Their sense of ministry flowing from mission was expressed in a strong and visionary statement (for its time) from the bishops'

4 See document in *Doctrine and Life* 25 (1975) 670-2.

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conference examining the role of presbyteral ministry in a church is ministerial at its core.⁵ The expansion of ministry in the United States of America was quick and many forms of service in the community have emerged. What has emerged is more structured than what can be found, for example, in the more fluid situation of Brazil, but the USA tends towards a maximalist reading of documents on ministry, more so than most European churches.

MINISTRY IN IRELAND

The number of clergy in Ireland peaked in the early 1960s after decades of growth. Such was the wealth in clerical numbers that Irish dioceses gave clergy ‘on loan’ to other English-speaking churches. It is against these artificially high numbers that Irish bishops and clergy measure today’s low figures. Some bishops even refer to Ireland being ‘missionary’ territory and that those younger churches formerly served by Irish missionaries must now come to assist us at its time of need (‘reverse-mission’). If, as I believe, the diagnosis is wrong then the proposed remedy is also wrong! Two issues come up here.

Firstly, we need to ask if there really is a shortage of ordained personnel in Ireland relative to other churches? Compared to churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia, western and central parts of the USA, much of Canada and significant parts of Europe, Ireland still has plenty of clergy. The shortage is felt principally because we have not adapted our structures and expectations to address our current situation. Warnings were given by many at least 30 years ago that this ‘train’ had left the station. Nothing was done. Importing priests only masks the problem. *Secondly*, importing clergy from other parts of the world (mostly Nigeria and India) without due regard for their ecclesial situations is a most selfish act. Why does the church in Ireland feel the right to invite clergy (even on short-term contracts) from elsewhere – places which themselves have chronic clergy shortages – when the needs for proclaiming the Gospel are so urgent, especially in Asia (containing 60% of the world population) and Africa (next in size, with 18% of the global population)? The needs for priests in Europe (third largest continent with a paltry 9.4% of world population) fades in comparison.⁶ We have lost a sense of theology of church ‘catholic’.

5 *Tous responsables dans l'Église? Le ministère presbytéral dans l'Église tout entière 'ministérielle'* (Lourdes, 1973).

6 Latin America constitutes just over 8% of global population; and the North American continent (USA and Canada) represents 4.7%. Statistics are estimates of distribution of global population by continent and are taken from [statistica.com](https://www.statista.com) (for 2022).

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Ireland needs to welcome and experience a clergy that is multi-cultural. This is already beginning to happen – slowly – with the ordination of people who are now resident and part of the Irish ecclesial landscape. They endow a cultural richness on local churches and their contribution is immense, badly needed and permanent. Most Religious Congregations counter-witness to racism in Ireland thanks to their diverse membership and capacity to live interculturally in community. This has the effect of broadening the outlook of an otherwise insular church. An intercultural exchange is already happening in society and church can only be enriched by it.

Ireland is now reaching a crisis point regarding the shortage of ordained priests that was reached in other European countries decades ago. We panic and strive to hold onto whatever we can of our ecclesial structures, many of which no longer serve. We still hunger for a form of liturgiolatry (making liturgy the principal purpose of christian existence) that is theologically questionable. We need to relearn that the driver of christian living is the Kingdom and not ‘bums on seats’. We become burdened with administrative tasks, expending energy seeking financial support. We need to be a poorer church – not because of changed economic circumstances but rather out of evangelical desire. Let us not reinvent wheels. We should learn from others (not least our neighbours in France, the Germanic speaking countries, The Netherlands – and with caution, in the USA and Canada).⁷

With faith and an imaginative approach, the Church in Ireland can seek new ways of moving forward. We need to resist the temptation to advance short-term solutions to a situation which has been created by our tardy response to the decreased number of ordained personnel. A medium- and long-term vision is required. Our solutions must neither further clericalize the church nor reduce ministry to mere ‘functionality’. Good examples of Irish initiatives include the over 300 ministries in Mount-Merrion parish in Dublin, and the initiatives found in the Diocese of Limerick and at the Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies, Thurles.⁸ We need to acknowledge the nature of the dilemma in which the church currently finds itself and examine it with pastoral as well as theological rigour – thinking, at all times, outside of the box. All churches in the western hemisphere, to different degrees, suffer from irrelevance

7 Sharing the English language with the North American continent can hide the huge cultural differences which exist between those churches and that in Ireland. Despite language differences, we might have more in common with many of our European neighbours and the UK. In a spirit of ‘receptive ecumenism’ we would do well to discuss issues relating to various forms of ministry with our Anglican colleagues.

8 Many other examples could be added.

and fatigue. They no longer seem credible as bearers of the kingdom-message of Jesus. Other churches have benefitted from imaginative visioning of their reality and take it for granted that lay people minister with excellence and grace as leaders of worship and prayer, and pastoral leaders of parishes. Why can't we?⁹

We have been gifted with a *kairos* moment. Everything needs to be reimagined for the sake of the Kingdom. Opening church life to all baptised can serve a renewed vision of church rather than an expansion of the institution. Unfortunately, lay ministry is often considered a way to assist the clergy. (Many still view permanent deacons as 'mini' priests or substitutes for a priest rather than representing a more complete expression of a diversity of ministry.) If we create new forms of ministry to serve the church, then we must *value these in their own right*. Ministries must respond to the dictates of the *missio Dei* in this place and at this time. They exist to evangelise and witness to God's Reign in the wider social, political, and economic environments. Ministries of adult faith development and others are needed which will assist with the building up the church so that it might better fulfil its mission in the world.¹⁰

Ministry needs to be structured to avoid anarchy, but in a way that would create the space necessary for the exercise of its charismatic and prophetic elements. One thinks of the axiom (from architecture and literary criticism, for instance) that 'form follows function': we cannot manipulate functions to squeeze them into pre-determined forms.

A balance is required between the necessary collaborative work (teams) and the 'specialisation' that is required in ministries. At all levels in church structures the nature of collaboration should be such that ministers are at ease working with other ministers, irrespective of their designated functions. No one ministry is superior to another. The bishops could lead by example on this with regard to team ministry.¹¹ All ministry must be posited

9 There is a sense in some quarters, which I share, that the excitement generated around the restoration of the ancient ministry of catechist in the West (suggested by Paul VI some 50 years ago) might be misplaced and will not resolve our issues. To date, missionaries (lay and ordained) who worked on various continents – all with varied and rich experiences of diverse forms of ministry – have never been invited to share their experience when discussions of ministries are taking place.

10 Most are unaware that the official liturgical books now supply rites for the baptism of children by lay ministers (outside of an emergency), for presiding at the sacramental marriage of couples, and funeral liturgies. Should the ministry of preaching be confined to those ordained?

11 Why does Armagh always have to hold the Presidency of the Conference and Dublin the Vice-presidency? Surely there must be a formula that can allow any bishop be elected to either role (as happens in many other Conferences) for a fixed term of office (say, 3-5 years) while ensuring appropriate representation of the Armagh Province?

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firmly in community. Clericalism can be avoided when the entire community is conscientised, and the holding of workshops and seminars at local level is open to all who might wish to attend (minister or not). Anciently, all ministry was discerned by, designated by, and answerable to, the community in Christ. Official designation of ministry cannot be seen as an exercise of authority but as a formal and public *recognition* of the gifts of the Spirit and of the appointment by the *community*: this exercise is appropriately presided over by the bishop or other community leader.

If it reflects the Reign of God, then ministers will do as Jesus did – invert social ranking in the church and in society; be unambiguous about the place of those on the margins; and see radical *service* on behalf of others as forming the root of all church action and mission. Ministry is not to serve the church as *institution*, but to serve the Reign of God which supplies its criteria and grounds ministry in the faith-reality that states that the Cross is salvation. These criteria continue the inversion that sees leaders to be servants, that the last are first, the foolish are wise and the weak are strong.

THEOLOGICAL POINTERS

The non-programmed expansion of ministry over the past 50 years raised new theological questions and placed old ones in a new light. The Conciliar Decree on the Laity, 3, implies that baptism is the fundamental sacrament of ministry: ordained priesthood is no longer the starting place for a theology of ministry; lay ministry is not secondary to this. There are several theological principles relating to ministry which go back to biblical and patristic times but which remain ever valid.

- (1) Ministry flows *from* the *ecclesial assembly*, but its reference point is service of the mission of God (*missio Dei*), not ‘church’.
- (2) All ministry is predicated on church. It follows that Church designates ministry *according to its needs*, ever changing as these might be. Without exception, all ministry relates to the ‘building up of the church’ (in the service of the Kingdom) and does not exist for its own sake. The gifts of ministry are never for the glory of the one who receives it, nor as a reward, nor on the basis of entitlement. How ministry is organised is a *pastoral* and not primarily a theological question.
- (3) The basic criterion relates directly to God’s Reign. *Discernment* for all forms of ministry (ordained or not) is not a democratic process but is a working of the Spirit in and through the community and entails a prayerful process.

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- (4) The model for ministry (episcopal, presbyteral, diaconal, and lay) is that of Jesus, who came *to serve* and not be served (see Mark 10:45) and is exercised in his name.
- (5) Contemporary political models, where leaders ‘lords it over’ others, employing authoritarianism and dictatorial forms of governance, are never appropriate (see Luke 24-27). This biblical standard remains theologically normative for today, but only in the sense that the *diakon-* family of words require.

The idea of ministry as service (*diakonia*) has been deepened and modified over the past 30 years or so and has invited a reconsideration of theology of ministry.¹² The biblical and patristic understanding of ‘*diakonia*-service’ is understood as something lowly and humble but in the sense that such service is undertaken by means of an ecclesial mandate and with authority. Different to charism, all ‘service’ in the local church refers to ministry that functions on behalf of Christ but is carried out through the ecclesial community by whose authority it exists. It is often claimed that all christians are ‘servants’ and this is misleading unless this servanthood is recognised and ratified by the community.¹³

The idea that church embraces ‘two types of christian’ is echoed in some Conciliar passages (see LG 32 and *Presbyterorum ordinis* 2). It should be noted that this duality is not found in LG 33 or, for instance, in *Gaudium et spes* 40.¹⁴ It is important to affirm this because a Roman Instruction, curiously issued jointly, by no less than seven dicasteries in 1997, tried to assert an almost qualitative difference between the roles of the ‘common’ (the ‘non-ordained faithful’) and the ‘ministerial’ priesthood (‘those ordained to the sacred ministry’).¹⁵

12 This follows the ground-breaking research by the Australian Catholic biblical scholar, John N. Collins, on the idea of *diakonia*. His thesis of the mid-70s was published as *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (OUP, 1990). The same conclusion was reached, independently, by Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen, 2007).

13 Collins has published a number of books on this and on the ministry of permanent deacon. His latest is *Dismantling the Servant Paradigm and Recovering the Forgotten Heritage of Early Christian Ministry* (Generis, 2020).

14 The Conciliar working group stated that LG 31 intended merely a typological description of laity rather than any form of ontological definition. Schillebeeckx referred to this as being more a descriptive demarcation rather than an essential distinction. The fundamental equality of the baptised in dignity and action is reflected also in CIC 208.

15 Congregation for the Clergy, et al, *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest* (15 August 1997), in *Origins* 27/24 (Nov 27, 1997), 397-410. It carries the weight of papal authority. For a commentary on the canonical issues relating to this Instruction, see John Huels, ‘Interpreting an Instruction Approved in *forma specifica*,’ *Studia Canonica* 32 (1998): 5-46. Also helpful is Richard R. Gaillardetz, ‘Shifting Meanings in the Lay-Clergy Distinctions,’ *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999): 115-139.

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Unless corrected, this mistaken idea of ‘two types of christian’ plays into clericalism. Often lurking under the surface, clericalism refers to an attitude of superiority and privilege that is imbedded in how ordained ministry is understood and practiced. It prizes rank, power and the ‘sacred’. It robs laity of a quality they possess (‘baptised in the Lord’) and reduces them to being ‘in the world’. Clericalism is intrinsically *sinful* because it corrupts the essence of the ministry of Christ and the message of the Reign of God which he revealed.¹⁶

Seeking a single theology which might embrace *all* ministry is and has been the goal of a significant number of major theologians.¹⁷ Collins proposes that the desire for two theologies (clerical and lay) relates more to a concern with ‘power’ rather than ‘service’. It does not appreciate that *all* ministry is ‘something for which the church as a whole is responsible and is a calling which falls upon each Christian in baptism’.¹⁸

FOCUSED ON KINGDOM/WORLD, NOT SACRISTY

All ministry – explicitly liturgical or not – is centred on world and Kingdom rather than sacristy. It relates to the assembly that actualises the Mystery so as to become an agent of the transformative Reign of God.

Ministry, both inside and outside the worshipful gathering, serves the Kingdom and is directed to the marginalised in society and to the promotion of justice. An expression of this fundamental reality of the seamless link between liturgy and christian life – each identifying Christ’s real presence in people and the events of life – finds explicit expression for the first time in Paul VI’s MQ of 1972. Here some of the responsibilities which overflow the liturgical assembly for those instituted to ministry of lector and acolyte are suggested (in sections V and VI).¹⁹ In their 1973 document (see note 5, above), the French bishops stated that, without serious evangelisation and building of a community of faith, there can be no witness (mission) and no genuine worship (liturgy). Celebrating

16 On this, see my ‘Culture of Clericalism: Towards a Theological Deconstruction’, *Broken Faith: Why Hope Matters*, eds. Patrick Claffey, Joe Egan and Marie Keenan, Studies in Theology, Society and Culture 10 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 175-212.

17 Among the principal writers exploring a fundamental theology of ministry (with publications from 1980 to recently) are Edward Schillebeeckx, Paul Bernier, Thomas F. O’Meara, Kenan Osborne, Yves Congar, Edward P. Hahnenberg, David N. Power, and Susan K. Wood.

18 John N Collins, ‘Fitting Lay Ministries into a Theology of Ministry’, *Worship* 79 (2005): 152-167; 209-222, at 153.

19 The Pope continued this line in thinking in his 1975 Encyclical on mission, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 73ff.

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sacraments does not in itself build community. Around 1974, the Italian bishops observed that unless the liturgy can be seen to reflect a communion in faith and charity, its progress is of little worth.

From the earliest centuries, the principal task of the deacon was *not* liturgy but representing the bishop to the margins of society and to those who were weakest, concerned for their material as well as spiritual welfare. There was nothing 'sacred' about his ordained ministry. He proclaimed the Gospel because the gospels spoke of Christ's ministry to the *anawim* and the disenfranchised. Likewise, he was deemed to be best placed to pronounce the prayers of the faithful because he was the voice of the voiceless in the assembly. The deacon's ministry was considered to be a 'sacrament' or 'incarnation' of the community's desire to be with the poor and the sick, and for this reason he stood with the bishop at the Table of the Banquet. Likewise, he who presided over the *life* of the assembly was the most appropriate person to preside over the *Eucharist* of the assembly. This came to be inverted in the second millennium: the presbyter presided over the Eucharist because he was ordained; from this arose the 'power' to preside over the life of the assembly.²⁰

Church comes into being only in and through its active response to mission. To think of ministry as in some way being responsible for mission is to put the cart before the horse. It is unworkable and unproductive as an exercise. Liturgy is spoken of as being the 'summit (*culmen*)' towards which the activity of the church is directed and is also the 'source (*fons*)' from which all the church's power flows in the Liturgy Constitution, 10. What happens in liturgy can be not only a living source of grace (*fons*) for christian life in the daily workings of society, but also express this ministry of the celebrating community (what the Greeks call the 'liturgy after the liturgy') back to the weekly gathering (*culmen*). All forms of liturgical ministry must represent the wider reality and activities of the community. There is little point in reforming liturgical rites unless the same liturgy can be seen to reflect a communion of faith and charity.

At a fundamental level, the very act of celebrating 'liturgy' is itself a ministry: the Greek work means service / ministry.²¹ Liturgy is an activity carried out by the living Body of Christ *for the salvation of the world*. The corollary is also true: all ministry

20 See, Hervé-Marie Legrand, 'The Presidency of the Eucharist According to the Ancient Tradition', *Worship* 53 (1979): 413-438. This is an exposition of an idea expressed *twice* by Vatican II's Central Theological Commission in its *relatio* on LG 28.

21 The Greek term *leitourgia* does not mean 'work OF the people' but rather, 'work ON BEHALF of the people = service', and among the Latin terms used to translate it is *ministerium*.

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relates back to the gathered assembly who do their worshipful and ministerial thing, *in the service of the Kingdom* – and therefore forms a liturgical act.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

The article in *Worship* which prompted this stream of consciousness over the past four months sought to mark the centenary of Alexander Schmemmann's birth in 2021.²² While Schmemmann did not have any formal systematic liturgical theology, the triad of cosmology (world as sacrament), eschatology (God's Reign in Christ) and ecclesiology (witness to and embodiment of Christ's presence) permeated and brought a sense of unity to his many writings and connected, in his unique Orthodox way, worship, mission and ministry. He spoke of the 'organic ... self-evident connection and interdependence of the Lord's Day, the Eucharist and the Ecclesia (coming together of the faithful as "church")'.²³ This, he claimed, shaped the liturgical tradition of the church and helped him frame an understanding of both mission as well as liturgical theology. Liturgy's transformative potential for the Church and Christians in society lies therein. The *mission* (from which ministry flows) of the Triune God is articulated through cosmology, eschatology and ecclesiology, which, as a single reality, describes the life of Christians as participants in Divine life, using the metaphor of worship.

When the underlying unity of the various aspects of liturgical studies is not respected, people get to pick and choose whatever suits their perspective. They lack any centre 'holding ground'. The pastoral consequences are unhelpful. Those involved with liturgical theology need to be trained in pastoral, sacramental and liturgical theology, be familiar with history of worship as well as ritual studies and textual questions, while never reducing the academic study of worship to any one of these. The focus of investigation and activity must be to facilitate the pastoral needs of *today* in the light of God's Reign, which in turn sets out the agenda of the

22 Nicholas Denysenko, 'Liturgical Theology in Crisis – Twenty-First Century Version', *Worship* 95 (2021): 292-298.

23 See Schmemmann, 'Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform', in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 38-47, here 41. As applied to theology of Sunday, this triad is central and is reflected in the practices of early centuries and some contemporary writing. Anciently the triad referred to one single reality, later refracted in western thinking. It is no accident that this triad is revisited by Gordon W. Lathrop with his trilogy: *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (1993); *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (1999); and *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (2003).

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mission of God. The problem is that higher education is market driven.²⁴ Serving the diminishing numbers of students enrolling for theology with few employment possibilities outside of second-level teaching, requires creative approaches to how hard decisions are made. Priorities need to be established. When standards are compromised to accommodate greater numbers, the quality of delivery and content is sacrificed.

The work of the National Centre for Liturgy needs to continue – maybe not in its current location and maybe under a different name. Localised initiatives might better serve new needs, given the demands made on liturgy (and church-life) post-covid, in the context of the Irish synodal process, the expressed desires for renewed church structures, and deeper spirituality. The absence of in-person outreach and the lack of a unified programmatic approach of recent times in liturgy invites action.

There is a dearth of suitably qualified people in the fields of liturgical studies. Bishops must seriously consider investing in order to create the possibilities for suitable lay people and priests to study liturgy comprehensively up to licence and even doctorate levels. Previously, the college-level training of trainers has successfully taken place at Maynooth, Limerick and Dublin. Such are our needs at present that it would be harmful and offensive to the Gospel not to *collaborate* with each other rather than *compete*. Directing programmes in liturgical studies will require people with pastoral experience who have a deep sense of the Irish local church as well as a profound appreciation of how best to address the current needs in the field of liturgy. How we worship needs to be rooted in the cultural, social and religious reality of contemporary Ireland rather than get caught up with the reification of the ‘sacred’ that has, ironically, made liturgy (and Church) irrelevant to so many.

Liturgy can create the space wherein an assembly is immersed in Kingdom preaching and dining on Christ, engaging, as it must, with current issues – social, economic, cultural – that form the world in which it lives. The *theological* role of liturgy mitigates against such a vision being reduced to a study of ceremonial, or its study being thought of as being little more than an optional extra. However, for an assembly to be experienced as ‘Kingdom’, the marginalised must be invited to the top table.

Mission and ministry – properly understood – is at the heart of the church’s pastoral existence. For their part, liturgy and ministry are nothing more than a ‘sacramentalisation’, an efficacious ‘making present’ and enactment in the midst of others, of what the christian community is, because this is what Christ-in-the-Spirit

24 See Denysenko, ‘Liturgical Theology in Crisis’, 293-4.

is. Worship *precedes* these, *encompasses* them and *proceeds from* them, and the Book of Revelation considered it to be the most appropriate metaphor to describe fulness of life with God, Father, Son and Spirit as we assemble for the Banquet.

Becoming Holy. Blessed Columba Marmion didn't found a new religious order like St Francis of Assisi, or give a new devotion to the Church like St Faustina, nor was he martyred. Aside from some very courageous moments during the First World War, his life was not so dramatic. But he was beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II in the year 2000. So what was so holy about him? What is holiness? Before he became a Benedictine monk he ministered for a while as chaplain to a mental hospital for the criminally insane in Dundrum, Co. Dublin and remarked in one of his letters that among the residents were people of great holiness. What did he *mean* by holiness? This question, fundamental to Columba's thinking, prompted him to begin his foundational book *Christ, the Life of the Soul* by outlining the plan of our holiness and explaining how it comes about.

- COLUMBA McCANN, OSB, *Becoming Human, Becoming Divine: The Christian Life according to Blessed Columba Marmion*, Dublin, Veritas, 2022. p. 17.

Homilies for February (A)

Mary T Brien

Fifth Sunday of the year

February 5

Is 58:7-10. 1 Cor 2:1-5. Mt 5: 13-16.

Today's gospel is a sequel to that of last Sunday, where Jesus announces nine beatitudes, nine recipes for living a blessed and happy life. That message may have puzzled at least some among Jesus' audience. It was counter-cultural in many ways and went far beyond some of the demands of righteous living according to the Jewish Scriptures. To be humble, meek, poor in spirit, mourning, self-effacing, even persecuted, may have sounded like exaggeration and a step too far, even to those who counted themselves among 'the poor of Yahweh'.

But Jesus, in today's gospel, springs a surprise. True disciples are meant to sparkle - to shed light all around. They are meant to be like salt transforming tasteless food. Addressing the disciples gathered around him on the mountain, Jesus says: "*You are* the salt of the earth...*You are* the light of the world". Drawing on familiar images from daily life (salt and light), Jesus invites his followers to see themselves as influential even on a world scale. Just as a tiny grain of salt can transform insipid fare into appetizing food, or as a tiny flicker of light can illuminate a vast space, so does a life lived according to the gospel create ripples across time and space. Goodness always 'shines'. It attracts. It makes a difference.

The prophet Isaiah, in today's first reading, reminds his audience that ordinary acts of generosity towards a neighbour can cast light all around. Kind deeds like giving food to the hungry (parents do it every day!) are acts that are radiant reflections of divine goodness. They announce the presence of God in the world. They light up the surroundings. Today's psalm offers a summary of that same message: "The good man is a light in the darkness ...". St Paul, writing to the community in Corinth, reminds them that he is not setting out to impress with "a show of oratory or philosophy",

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but with the good news of Jesus, crucified for us. Paul does not need the grandiose or the ostentatious. The way of Jesus is the way of humility. Today's readings offer a perspective on ordinary Christian living that will be encouraging for many people. Jesus reminds his disciples that in him they *are* the light. The Christian way, lived faithfully day by day, without fanfare, is light for the world, constantly making a difference. When tempted to give up the struggle, today's gospel gives solid reason for holding nerve!

Sixth Sunday of the year

February 12

Eccles(Sir) 15:15-20. 1 Cor 2:6-10. Mt 5 :17-37.

Today's readings may be taken as answers to some implied questions like the following: Is it possible for human beings, frail and fragile as they are, to live according to the Ten Commandments? Are they meant to do so in all circumstances, whatever the obstacles? And is it humanly possible to live according to the higher standards as given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount? Answers to these and similar questions are given to us in today's readings.

The Book of Sirach, otherwise known as Ecclesiasticus, belongs to Old Testament Wisdom literature. The writer, Ben Sirach, confronted with questions regarding the Law and human liability, gives an unequivocal answer: God does not demand the impossible. People have choices to make, but God's guidance is guaranteed as choices are made between The Two Ways - the Way of Life and the Way of Death. To observe the Commandments is to choose the Way of Life.

St Paul, addressing the Church in Corinth, draws attention to two kinds of wisdom – the “hidden wisdom of God” and worldly wisdom. Paul preaches the hidden wisdom of God which has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. It reaches the depths of everything. It is beyond human reckoning. It is the gift of God “prepared for those who love him”.

In today's gospel, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks with authority greater than that of Moses. In six teachings, known as the six antitheses, better described as *hypertheses*, Jesus makes it clear that he has not come to abolish the Law as given by Moses but to fulfil it. As divine Messiah and Son of God, he upholds the Law but raises the bar beyond expected norms. A disciple's response to the invitation of Jesus must go beyond external observance. It will also pay attention to the inner disposition, the motivation which inspires and dictates the action. In a series of six '*hypertheses*', with the formula, “You

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have heard...but I say to you” Jesus proclaims the importance of observing the commandments but adds that disciples are called to a radical observance which goes *deeper*. Murder is forbidden by the Law of Moses. Anger, resentment, and hatred are forbidden by Jesus. Adultery is forbidden by the Law of Moses. Lust and sinful desire are forbidden by Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount constitutes what St Augustine calls ‘the perfect standard of the Christian life’. As such, it can never be an optional extra for followers of Jesus.

Seventh Sunday of the year

February 19

Lev 19:1-2, 17-18. 1Cor 3: 16-23. Mt 5 : 38-48.

Saint Paul, in today’s second reading, offers a lens through which the fifth and sixth *hypertheses* announced by Jesus in today’s gospel may be considered. Paul’s message to the Corinthian Church could well be a helpful starting point for a homily on any section of the Sermon on the Mount, even though Paul’s context differs in many ways from that of the Matthean Jesus.

The community in Corinth is fractured. It seems that Paul’s authority is being challenged. This has implications for the success of his preaching and for the Good News that he proclaims. His message to those who are locked in arguments about whose preaching is best – that of Paul himself, or Cephas or Apollos – lifts the topic to a higher plane, reminding the recipients of their common identity as Jesus-followers. In recalling the image of temple, he is drawing on a rich Jewish tradition. The temple in Jerusalem, sacred dwelling place of God, place of sacrifice and place of pilgrimage, home of the Ark of the Covenant and sanctuary of the Holy of Holies is ‘House of God and Gate of heaven’. Nothing holier could be imagined. Paul reminds the fragile and struggling people of Corinth that they, together, constitute the temple of the Holy Spirit, sacred tabernacle where God lives. This is their source of strength as they deal with factions among them. The power of God’s Spirit is living in them.

How does this connect with the teaching of Jesus in today’s gospel, and with its implications? The fifth and sixth *hypertheses* deal with treatment of enemies. The teaching of Jesus goes far beyond the Old Testament prescription of ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. Instead of retaliation, Jesus asks for generosity, non-violence, reconciliation. Instead of resisting evil with evil, the disciples of Jesus are to resist evil with good. They are to love their enemies with a genuine love which reflects the perfect love of the

Father. One may ask how such teaching may be put into practice. In situations of hostility, is it realistic to turn the other cheek or walk the extra mile? Jesus' teaching, like that of Paul in today's second reading, presupposes that resisting evil does not overcome evil. Only sheer goodness, like that exemplified in the perfect love of the Father, can rob evil of its power. The Sermon on the Mount, with these climactic *hypertheses*, provides remedies for evil in all its guises.

First Sunday of Lent

February 26

Gn 2:7-9, 3: 1-7. Rm 5:12-19. Mt 4: 1-11.

Lent is wake-up time. Nature is waking up after the sleepy days of Winter. Signs of new life are all around in budding plants, in birdsong, in the greening of trees and landscape. The word 'Lent' comes from an old English word 'lencten', meaning Springtime or season of new life. In many cultures the term *quadragesima* (forty days) is used to designate this season of Lent. That term places the emphasis on the forty days which Jesus spent in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan. This is where today's gospel takes us. It invites each of us to a re-awakening.

Jesus, after his baptism in the Jordan, was led (literally 'thrust') by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. In recording the three temptations of Jesus, Matthew is concerned with asserting the divine authority of Jesus in modes reminiscent of the Exodus narrative. Jesus is tempted three times and at three different locations, all associated with Moses and the Exodus story – the wilderness, the temple and the mountain. The forty days of Jesus' trials in the wilderness echo the forty years of Israel's hunger and thirst in the wilderness on the journey to the promised land. And so, the first temptation of Jesus takes place in the wilderness. Jesus is hungry. Satan tempts him to change stones into bread. Quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus resists: "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God". The second temptation is set in the temple, sacred place of worship for every Jew. Jesus is enticed to make a spectacular, suicidal jump from the temple parapets. He answers the devil's ruse with a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:16. In the third temptation, the devil takes Jesus on an imaginary journey to the mountain top, where he offers him all the kingdoms of the world in a show of power. Jesus answers with a strong repulse, 'Get away Satan!', followed by a citation from Deuteronomy 6:13.

Satan is wily. He uses sacred scripture and sacred places for his

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purpose. He presents evil as good and desirable. As we begin our Lenten journey with prayer, fasting and almsgiving as our aid, we awaken to the attractive forces that can take us off course and to the God-given means of resisting them. Resisting evil was not easy for Jesus. It cannot be so for us.

A closer look at Christian faith. If faith is so important, what is it? Columba said that faith in another human being ‘is the adhesion of our intellect to the word of another’. If someone is trustworthy and reliable we have faith in their word; we believe them and trust what they say. Faith in God ‘is the adherence of our intelligence, not to the word of a man, but to the word of God. God and neither deceive nor be deceived’.

– COLUMBA MCCANN, OSB, *Becoming Human, Becoming Divine: The Christian Life according to Blessed Columba Marmion*, Dublin, Veritas, 2022. p. 57.

New Books

In the School of Saint Benedict: Benedictine Spirituality for Every Christian. Dom Xavier Perrin OSB. Gracewing Publications, 2022. ISBN 9780852449851

The spirituality of Saint Benedict of Nursia is one that has undoubtedly stood the test of time, for over 1500 years, and perhaps a key reason for this is its applicability and relevance to people from all walks of life; it offers a balanced, practical and human approach to growing in holiness and virtue. This latest publication from Dom Xavier Perrin OSB is a worthy and welcome addition to the canon of Benedictine spiritual literature. The author, drawing on over forty years of experience in monastic life, presents a concise portrait of Saint Benedict and his Rule that is marked by clarity and readability, while also giving the reader ample depth and substance in terms of spiritual content.

Dom Perrin begins by introducing Saint Benedict and the key events that shaped his eventual vision for monastic life. Although it was written with monks in mind, as a way of regulating their life of work, study and prayer, the Rule contains ample spiritual wisdom that has stood the test of time. As Dom Perrin explains, “The Rule’s flexibility and openness have made it possible for Saint Benedict’s spirit to be lived out in many and various ways across the centuries” (p.41).

The second section of the book invites the reader to a series of meditations on excerpts from the writings of saints associated with the Benedictine family throughout the centuries. This is given, according to the author, to enable the reader to “explore the immense riches of Saint Benedict’s heritage” (p.42). In this regard, he includes a wide variety of holy men and women, such as the more well-known St. Bede the Venerable and St. Bernard of Clairvaux; some lesser-known figures such as St. Gertrude of Helfta and Dame Gertrude More, and also those from more recent times, such as Blessed Columba Marmion and Thomas Merton. Also included in this section is a short but striking account of the monks of Tibhirine, Algeria, who were martyred in 1996, reminding us that the call to follow Jesus Christ, as Saint Benedict understood it, may involve the laying down of one’s life for others at the cost of one’s blood. As Dom Perrin expresses it, “Presence to the point of the supreme gift of self: can there exist a more perfect imitation of Christ?”

Drawing upon both of these sections, the author then proceeds in the final section to apply the richness of Benedictine wisdom for believers of today, and how it is eminently possible to live this spirituality in the

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modern world, with all its demands. From themes such as the liturgy, living in the presence of God and loving humbly to working for the glory of God, developing an integral ecology and putting oneself at the service of neighbour, this section is perhaps one that the general reader will most appreciate. The author has a gift for presenting profound and insightful spiritual truths in a clear and accessible way. He shows in a convincing way how rich and meaningful a life informed by the spirituality of Saint Benedict can be, and how this wisdom will continue to guide and inspire people of faith for many generations to come.

St Patrick's College, Maynooth

SHANE O'NEILL

Jesus: Answer to Evangelising the Irish Church. Seán Smith. (Knock, Co Mayo, 2022). 232 pp. ISBN 978-1-3999-0698-2. Available from Knock Shrine Bookshop

From the beginning of his book, Fr Seán Smith makes clear his desire to avoid any technical theology. His approach, he writes, is 'primarily relational; not academic,' and he eschews a theology of God as 'highly academic, complicated, non-relational and speculative.' What he is signalling, however, is accessibility rather than an absence of theology. In fact, the book has substance, but it is accessible substance.

'The Irish Church is in a free-fall.' 'The Irish Church is in the ICU gasping for air.' This is not exactly good news, yet it is heartening to hear the reality being named rather than glossed with a coat of Official Optimism. The author determines from the outset to grasp the nettle, not because he is a pessimist – which he is certainly not – but because it is clear to him that effective treatment calls for accurate diagnosis.

'My proposal,' Fr Smith writes, 'is deliberately pastoral and practical. I point to the numerous ways that we can evangelise without creating more programmes. We are over programmed!' Fr Smith's key to evangelisation without creating more programmes is to work with what we are already doing, and to draw out the Christological depths in what can otherwise be routine pastoral activity.

The heart of the book is a series of chapters giving practical suggestions for making the sacramental life of our parishes an occasion for a renewed encounter with Christ – which is precisely the task of evangelisation. A long chapter is dedicated to the Sunday liturgy, in which the author sets out 'to open up the infinite potential of the liturgy for adult catechesis and evangelisation.' Chapters on baptism and marriage follow, with concluding chapters entitled 'From School to Home,' and 'From Home to Church.'

For anyone seeking to harness the evangelical and catechetical potential of parish sacramental life, this book will provide much food for thought.

St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

CHRIS HAYDEN

Leaves from the Cotton Tree. Dunsany, Co Meath: Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership, 2022. ISBN 978 1 3999 2903 5.

The Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership is celebrating thirty years of its existence this year. This publication is a splendid testimony to the vision, energy and creativity of the partnership. With over thirty short and readable chapters the volume invites the reader to journey with the partnership through the joys and sorrows, triumphs and difficulties of the last three decades when Sierra Leone journeyed from its independence from Britain [1961] through a long and destructive civil war to a more stable and hope filled reality today. The book, with a Foreword by the current Irish Ambassador to Sierra Leone, tells this story through the experiences of an eclectic range of people and contexts. The contribution of Irish missionaries to life and communities in Sierra Leone, which begin over 150 years ago, is narrated through the very personal testimonies of several religious women and men. The founding, development and achievements of the SLIP over thirty years are told through the lens of members from a broad canvas of Irish society. Students from Sierra Leone who are or have studied in Ireland tell their stories as do Sierra Leonian families living in Ireland and Irish families who lived in Sierra Leone. The contributions, in all their diversity, reveal a very vibrant community of people dedicated to the promotion of Sierra Leone and its people and to the strengthening of the bond between Ireland and Sierra Leone. This book celebrates well the past and the present with a keen commitment to the next thirty years.

Cork

P.J. McAULIFFE

Vatican Council Memories. Bishop Michael Smith. Dublin: Veritas, 2022. ISBN 9781800970113

This year marks sixty years since the opening of the Second Vatican Council. While many who lived through it have vivid memories of the time, most of those formally involved are no longer with us. For this reason alone, many who had heard Bishop Michael Smith speak of his involvement in the proceedings will be glad to see his first-hand account of the council hall brought to life in book form. While a seminarian in the Irish College in Rome, the young Michael Smith was invited to be part of a group of (mainly) theology students charged with the responsibility of compiling the *Acta* of the Council – that is, every word spoken in the council hall. The group was drawn from the various colleges in Rome as had happened at the First Vatican Council. Starting out as a group of forty-two, the author was one of only twelve who stayed the course of this “fascinating, if demanding journey” (p. 14).

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A mainly procedural account of each of the four sessions of the Council and the preparatory phase, one senses the author's words are those of a young priest who was deeply influenced by the enormity of the whole Conciliar event. For those who have come long after the event itself, there are nuggets of information in this book that may not be so well known from the more customary retellings of the Council story such as that both Pius XI and Pius XII had considered reconvening the First Vatican Council with its large file of unfinished business; or that Cathal B. Daly (later Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh) was a *peritus* at the third and fourth sessions of the Council. Indeed, there is an interesting retelling of how a pamphlet authored by the then Fr. Daly caused a media storm during the fourth session in 1965.

This collection of memories is partly the result of documentation which the author collected at the time of the Council amidst a desire to recount it with particular emphasis on the Irish involvement. There is no point dressing up what the author says about the contribution of bishops of Irish dioceses which he describes as "limited and weak" (p. 25), although inroads on the "silence" (p. 39) of the Irish bishops during the preparatory phase did give way to some respected contributions on the floor of the council hall as time went by.

This book would have benefited from a closer final editing to sift out unnecessarily repetitive background contexts and explanations. But overall, the author's procedural approach in retelling his experience of the Council provides some fascinating first-hand insight into the day-to-day operations of the twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church. The book helpfully includes an appendix comprised of the texts of the papal addresses at the opening and closing of the Council; the end of Council statement from the Irish Bishops; and an address by Pope Benedict XVI on the Council which was delivered with no prepared script on 14 February 2013. At the conclusion of the book, Bishop Smith says that "anyone wishing to understand the Council should read [Benedict XVI's] talk" (p.165). The book provides an opportunity to do so, and it is well worth it.

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

SÉAN CORKERY

Recognising Customary Marriage in Africa and Civil Marriage Everywhere. Michael McGuckian SJ. Xlibris: 2021. 257 pages.

Canon Law does not recognise as valid the civil marriages between Catholics anywhere or customary marriages between baptised Catholics or between a baptised Catholic and a baptised non-Catholic in Africa, unlike the customary marriages between non-baptised couples. The Code fails to take account of the fact that, unlike in the developed world, marriage in Africa involves two families, not just the couple. Baptised Catholics are also often obliged to marry according to cultural rites and not according

to the requirements of canon law. As a result, such couples are deprived of the sacraments because the Church recognises these marriages as non-sacramental and invalid.

The author, Michael McGuckian SJ, contends that when the Church's problematic claim to sole jurisdiction of sacramental marriage, the origins of the Pauline Privilege and the canonical form are examined closely, it is possible to argue that such marriages are sacramental and valid. In his view, all of these juridical developments were founded on theological errors and emerged from accidental or contentious historical factors. The author reasons that when the theological and canonical doctrine that papal judgements relied on to uphold these juridical developments are critically assessed, they are discovered to be unsound and therefore should be discontinued.

In the case of the Church's claim to sole jurisdiction of marriage, for example, marriage is a natural reality and that the Church itself recognised it also as a civil contract until the Council of Trent. The increasing identification of contract and sacrament in medieval theological and canonical doctrine on marriage became the foundation of the Church's relatively late claim to sole jurisdiction over marriage. This was further reinforced by the reformers' denial of the sacramentality of marriage. Later secularist European governments followed the Protestant reformers' rejection of the Church's sole jurisdiction as a recent development and the usurpation of the rightful and long-held role of the state.

The author argues that the sacramentality of marriage is not of the kind that demands exclusive Church jurisdiction and he also challenges the presupposition that only Christian marriages are sacraments and other marriages are not. Marriage was instituted as a sacrament 'from the beginning' by the Creator; Jesus only revealed marriage as a sacrament in the New Covenant. For this reason, marriage is not like the other sacraments over which the Church has exclusive jurisdiction. The author holds that post-Tridentine Catholic theology underplayed the full reality of the natural institution of marriage. In relation to marriage, therefore, the Church should only regulate what is appropriate to it and respect the role of the civil authorities in areas proper to it.

While there is documentary evidence to support the sacramental nature of marriage of the non-baptised in the broadest sense, there is no formal recognition in any papal document that recognises the marriages of the non-baptised as sacraments in the strict sense. The author relies heavily on Ambrosius Catharinus to argue his case for the sacramentality of all marriages to state that 'every marriage is indeed a sacrament in the full sense.'

According to Church doctrine, baptism is the gateway to the sacraments. Undoubtedly, the marriages of non-baptised couples who sincerely intend what the Creator intended in the institution of marriage 'from the beginning', co-operate with the grace of God without formally acknowledging or recognising that they do so. God's grace is universal, even in the marriages of the non-baptised, however, it cannot be concluded

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that marriages of the non-baptised are sacraments in the strict sense. The author relates the later denial of the sacrament of the marriages of the non-baptised as a consequence of the denial of their indissolubility in the Pauline Privilege. The author contends that the case for the Pauline Privilege relies heavily on an isolated and incorrect fourth century text, the 'Ambrosiaster'. This text interpreted 1 Cor 7:5 to allow for the possibility of a second marriage for a newly baptised spouse as non-Christian marriages were dissoluble. Although not in line with Augustine, this interpretation was adopted by Gratian who influenced Pope Innocent III when he laid down the principles underlying the Pauline Privilege. Since then, according to the author, the judgements of subsequent popes have been built on a false premise and therefore the whole canonical tradition on the Pauline Privilege is flawed. For this reason, the Pauline Privilege should be discontinued. The proposal that only marriages between the baptised have been raised to the dignity of a sacrament emerged late in Church doctrine and, the author believes, was based on a narrow, sectarian, vision which considered the marriages of those outside the Christian community to be less worthy.

Related to the question of sole jurisdiction of the Church over marriage, is the development of the canonical form of marriage. Only with the decree *Tametsi* during the Council of Trent was canonical form required for the validity of marriage. The decree was introduced to resolve the issue of clandestine marriages. The author maintains that the bishops at the Council of Trent were performing a task which properly belonged to the civil authorities and that this confusion of roles explains the difficulties surrounding the implementation of the decree *Tametsi* at the time and since. Furthermore, the imposition of formalities for the validity of marriage was contrary to the long-held position that consent alone made marriage. In doing so, the bishops at the Council of Trent had usurped a function that did not belong to them and the results, according to the author, have been 'deleterious'.

The author concludes by proposing that civil marriages should be recognised as valid sacraments. When a couple exchange consent, however and wherever it is done, the marriage – both sacrament and contract – is made. The fact that the state requires Catholics to exchange consent during civil ceremonies does not make it non-sacramental, as consent alone makes marriage. Indeed, for so many centuries the Church itself required no canonical form. In the past, the Pope had no choice but to condemn civil marriage as an expression of the excessive claims of the secularists. This reasons for this mutual hostility and suspicion no longer exist, allowing for a more conciliatory approach from the Church with regard to civil marriage.

All marriages are sacred and sacramental by their very nature and require no sacred rites to make it so. The author concludes that in order to proclaim to the world the sacred and sacramental character of every marriage, it is necessary to withdraw the requirement of canonical form and to recognise marriages celebrated according to civil and customary forms.

After wading through the evidence to address the three mistakes made in canon law over the centuries, there is no persuasive conclusion resolving the question of customary and civil marriages between two Catholics or a Catholic and non-Catholic who marry without a dispensation from canonical form. There is no doubting, however, the author's command of his subject and the research behind the work.

The marriages of the non-baptised may be 'sacramental' in the broad meaning of the word, yet it is hard to overlook the doctrine of the Church that baptism is the 'gateway' to the sacraments. Furthermore, the doctrine of the Church maintains that the sacraments were 'instituted by Christ' and entrusted to the Church. In this divine institution resides the fundamental reason why they are governed and subject to the regulations of the Church whose right and duty is to ensure that these actions are carried out in a way that conforms to their nature.

For this reason, the Apostolic See has exclusive competence in determining what is required for the valid and lawful celebration of the sacraments. This not only concerns the recognition and protection of the substantial elements in the celebration and administration of the sacraments, but also the possibility of establishing conditions believed necessary to guarantee their valid celebration, such as, the establishment of 'canonical form' in the sacrament of marriage for validity.

This book is a useful resource for canonists and researchers studying the historical evolution of the canonical doctrine of marriage.

Maynooth

MICHAEL MULLANEY

Remember and Give Thanks: Reflections on Eucharist. Patrick McGoldrick. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2021.

In his apostolic letter *Desiderio Desideravi*, on the liturgical formation of the people of God, Pope Francis speaks of the desire to "help us to rekindle our wonder for the beauty of the truth of the Christian celebration, to remind us of the necessity of an authentic liturgical formation, and to recognize the importance of an art of celebrating that is at the service of the truth of the Paschal Mystery and of the participation of all of the baptized in it, each one according to his or her vocation" (n.62). This quote aptly should be considered a summary of the recently published book *Remember and Give Thanks*, a compilation of the theological and liturgical reflections of the revered Fr Patrick McGoldrick, priest of the Diocese of Derry and former professor of Liturgy at the Pontifical University, Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth.

Respected and acclaimed in the academic world of liturgy and theology for more than fifty years, living among the people of the Parish of Moville for twenty-two years as their cherished curate, and a central part of his family, known to some as Fr Patrick, to others as Fr Paddy, and again to others as Fr McGoldrick, all these relationships demonstrate the vocation

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of the Christian in the synopsis offered in the priest's own words: "Here in this world and in death too, the state of all creation and the state of God's children are intimately intertwined. By God's design they belong together" (p.33). This view of life and, more importantly, the author's hope of faith are the foundations on which his reflections are built, echoing the words of Saint Peter: "as you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). The first and last chapters signify the goal of Fr Paddy's life of service and ministry as a priest – whether in the lecture hall among seminarians or with fellow academics at conferences, amid the people of the parish or at family gatherings – to *always and everywhere give thanks [to God] through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

These reflections, numbering nineteen chapters, were written during the recent pandemic and lockdowns, restrictions and challenges, reflecting on the celebration of the Eucharist, with consideration of the key themes promoted by the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, focussing on the liturgy as "the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (SC n.14). The book gives essay form to the living sounds of faith, rooted in Sacred Scripture, founded in the reflections of theologians through the centuries, with rich theological vocabulary and technical language. The reflections are directed towards a practical, realistic and hope-filled experience of God in the reality of everyday Christian life which is sustained and nourished in the Eucharist as its source and summit. The author does not shrink from the magnitude of theological vocabulary and imagery despite the challenges brought in the midst of debate and division. He identifies central terms associated with the Eucharist which need to be understood by both the person who is in ministry or the person in the pew. Although the author acknowledges that in past debates responses to questions "tended to be contrived and unconvincing" (p.40), he suggests a renewed yet grounded understanding of theological terms such as *sacrifice, presence and transubstantiation*. This discussion of theological vocabulary, the explanation of the structure of the Mass, and his echoing of the call to full, active and conscious participation are always grounded in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the power of the Cross and the glory of the Resurrection.

This book would be of benefit to priests in parish ministry at this moment where the pastoral landscape of the Church is rapidly changing, offering a renewal in their theological understanding of the Eucharist and its practical implications in Sunday and daily celebrations. It is also a fitting resource for pastoral councils and liturgical commissions at Diocesan and Parish levels since it presents a firm Eucharistic theology that paves the way for a renewal of how communities celebrate and live the Eucharist as the eternal gift of God's love. As Professor Liam Tracey writes in the *Afterword*, "the renewal of the liturgy is not just an

archaeological exercise as it has often been accused of being, but an ever-deeper immersion in the best of the Christian tradition. Part of coming to a knowledge of that tradition is an ever-greater appreciation of the role of the history and theology of the liturgy itself" (169-170). Because then our renewal directs us beyond this book to the greater immortal promise, the Word of Life who is carved on our hearts.

Derry

PETER O'KANE

Nature Praising God. Towards a Theology of the Natural World.

Dermot A. Lane. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022. ISBN 9781788125734

For readers of this book there may be many lightbulb moments, as we are brought up to date on the literature of the past decade or more on the place of nature in the grand scheme of things that is God's creation, and hear of the response of all creatures in instinctive praise and in our formal worship. For too long many of us have failed to see that 'The heavens proclaim the glory of God' (Ps 19;1) is not superficially symbolic language, but instead the expression of a profound truth, which Dermot Lane proceeds to expound in his latest book. He goes on from there to elaborate a theology of nature in gradually progressed and clear steps. As a very skilled teacher, he explains each stage of the way - avoiding each possible interesting but unhelpful diversion. His aim is clearly to extend his reflections on *Laudato 'Si* of his earlier publications with new theological insights, which he modestly describes in the subtitle as *Towards a Theology of the Natural World*.

There are then two parts to the book, as the main title and subtitle indicate. *Nature Praising God* begins with a chapter summarising commentaries in recent decades by biblical scholars on the texts of scripture that highlight a fact easily ignored or explained away: nature is far from mute in singing the praises of its Creator. Texts such as 'Praise him sun and moon; praise him, shining stars', are not indicative of mere 'rhetorical flourish' (17). The idea that emerges from the study of biblical passages is that nature and humans form a community called to praise God. 'Everything that has breath is called to praise the Lord' (Ps 150:6). (19)

Theological commentaries on nature praising God constitute the next chapter – the veteran ecologist, Thomas Berry, is quoted, as is the Encyclical, *Laudato 'Si*, with its assertion that all of creation is a gift evoking the praise of God as a response. In summing up these chapters, Lane returns to the issue of the exploitation and harming of the integrity of creation by industrialisation, limiting its capacity to be seen as orientated towards God. He points to the eschatological import of the scriptural texts. Nature has been groaning for its redemption (Cf. Rom 8:2); that it is called to be part of the new creation, heralded by the Resurrection, may be seen in 'the rhythm of life and death and rebirth that seems to be at the centre of the natural world'. (42)

Having acknowledged with the Scripture scholars that the interpretation of the biblical narrative has in the past been distorted by an anthropocentric theology of creation, Lane seeks to establish a new theology of nature through a series of preliminary steps. To do so, he considers aspects of nature: it is a living community, grace-filled, a book to be read and interpreted, and consequently sacramental. The foundation for this understanding of nature he establishes in two chapters, 'a nature-based pneumatology' and 'a nature-based Christology'. Both of these he sees as preparatory stages towards the development of a theology of the natural world, the first because it enables a dialogue with the progressively spiritualised understanding of nature to which meta-science is tending, the second because of Neils Gregerson's vision of what he described as Deep Incarnation. For him, 'the Incarnation of God in Christ is an Incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence and systems of nature'. (80) Gregersen had drawn on Athanasius of Alexandria's pioneering study of the Incarnation with its famous statement that the Word was not 'hedged in' by Christ's body, nor that his presence in the body prevented him from being present elsewhere as well. Gregersen extended this principle, and as Lane points out, united the strict sense of the Incarnation to one in which Christ co-suffers with and for all suffering creatures. (81)

In a world where so many cannot see the need for salvation for themselves, but are increasingly moved by what they see as the suffering inflicted on animals and the unjust exploitation of nature, causing 'creation to cry out for redemption', a soteriological perspective surely has huge potential. Humans cannot be bystanders but must be participants as the drama of the redemption of creation unfolds. If an extreme anthropocentric outlook makes humanity blind to the full reality of the redemptive process, a true theology of nature will give rise to a new and inclusive theological anthropology. Dermot Lane is greatly to be applauded for leading us in that direction.

Glenstal Abbey

FINTAN LYONS OSB

Shorter Notice

The Ignatian Guide to Forgiveness. Marina Berzins McCoy. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2020. ISBN 9781788125192.

Subtitled *Ten steps to healing* this book begins with a *Prologue* which puts the focus on forgiveness as ‘part of how we make our way deeper into the celebration of community and communion, with God and with one another’. The *Ten steps* are presented as a road map with Jesus as guide through the texts of scripture that touch on forgiveness with the resources of Ignatian spirituality acting as a form of satnav for the soul which takes into account the itinerary of the individual person ‘so that we can be freed to forgive’. Ten chapters deal with the different steps under creative titles such as *Embrace Being a Creature and Name Your Inner Pharisee*, *Honor Anger but Deepen Compassion*, *Leave behind the Locked Room (Forgive Yourself)*, *Embrace the Child but Become the Parent*, *Cultivate Habits of Mercy*. Imagining the journey to forgiveness through the metaphors of dance and feast the biblical banquet hall is the destination which the grace of God draws ourselves and others to. Each step/chapter ends with a prayer/ritual for contemplation and celebration of forgiveness that help us ‘live into new life/as green shoots sprout up from spring ground’, letting us ‘see but not stay/peer[ing] into the empty tomb’. Supplying some *Endnotes* and *Bibliography*, this application of Ignatian spirituality is a timely reminder of the need for reconciliation in relations at many levels of life today (and tomorrow) with the vital role that Christian faith plays in forming people for the freedom that both enables and celebrates forgiveness in the first place.

Setting God Free in Minds & Hearts. Paul Robbins. Dublin: Columba Books, 2022. ISBN 978-1-78218-391-4

Subtitled *The Need for Reform in the Catholic Church* this book begins with an *Introduction* to its theme which includes the assertion that ‘reform within the Church should include changes to those aspects of its teachings and practices that currently restrict the freedom of the Holy Spirit to give life to the Church’. Identifying ‘a clerical mindset found within canon law and elsewhere [which] can frustrate the work of God in both the individual and the Church community’, this insists that ‘the Church needs to release control into the hands of the Holy Spirit and so revert to the model founded by Christ’. Twelve chapters set out an approach

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to this agenda for reform starting with *Being a Catholic* and *Church as a Community of Priests* and covering areas ranging from *The Institution and its Teachings*, *Role of Law/Power and Authority in the Church*, *Parishes*, to *Liturgy and Worship*, *Canon Law and the Sacraments*. After surveying the approach of the Church towards marriage and stating that ‘Church teaching regarding marriage has developed over time and it is possible that it needs to develop further’, it covers the reality of marriage and its breakdown in the context of the Nullity Process and the Orthodox Church’s practise of *economia*. The penultimate chapter considers *Potential Reforming Changes* in relation to marriage and its form, the role of conscience and governance within the church, safeguarding, ordination and celibacy, concluding with the need ‘to develop a spirituality that does not depend upon mere obedience to laws’. Chapter 12, *Reverting to Christ’s Mandate*, brings the discussion full circle with Vatican II’s ‘image of the Church’, proposing a six point agenda to enable ‘the institution of the church [to] fulfil its missionary purpose by setting God free’, adding that ‘without this conversion of heart the institution of the Church will become an irrelevance to more of the Christian faithful’. Endowed with extensive *Endnotes* this book brings both extensive ecclesial experience and enquiry to engage with the ongoing debate, dialogue and discernment of the Church’s synodal journey.

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