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A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

+ *Brendan Leahy*
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Christ, Church Reform
and Tradition: A glance at
Some Aspects of Pope
Benedict's Writings.

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The Theological Legacy
of Pope Benedict XVI

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Our Care of God's
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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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The Gospel of Jesus Christ, Church Reform and Tradition: A glance at Some Aspects of Pope Benedict's Writings

+ Brendan Leahy

It is reported that the last words of the dying Pope Emeritus Benedict were: "Lord, I love you". Whether this is true or not, the short prayer is certainly in tune with the focus of his theological work as a theologian and bishop, cardinal and Pope – to elaborate on the primacy of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. His writings, sometimes described as a symphony, return repeatedly to the theme of the gift God has made in giving himself to us in Jesus Christ through the Spirit of truth, freedom and love. In this brief article, written shortly after his death, I want to highlight just a few points that struck me from the theological and magisterial writings of Ratzinger/Benedict. I do so gratefully calling to mind his gracious demeanour, clarity of thought and humour that I experienced during annual seminar days with him in the late '90s and early 2000s.

SEEKING THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST

The Italian theologian Piero Coda has written that for Ratzinger/Benedict, renewal in the Church happens in direct contact with the living nucleus of the Gospel of Jesus and in the context of the ecclesial Tradition. He also suggests the underlining of this perspective will be Pope Benedict's most important and long-term contribution to the Church. If the Church wants to serve humanity in new ways, it must interpret with creative fidelity its identity transmitted in Tradition. This conviction grounded his method of approaching issues and it was the key to his engagement with other churches and ecclesial communities.

Ratzinger considered the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, with its focus on God and how

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

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we come to know God, to be the Council's fundamental text (even if he also suggested that in the long run the document on religious freedom, *Dignitatis humanae* and that on dialogue with other religions *Nostra Aetate* would be very significant). As a theologian and man of God, Ratzinger/Benedict wanted to communicate how Jesus Christ is not an event to be relegated to two thousand years ago. The Crucified-Risen Jesus, the Lord of History, is always at the heart of the Church on her pilgrim way through history. Our primary task is to seek the face of Christ, get to the heart of him who is Truth in person, and let his face and message radiate in ever new ways. With Jesus Christ's paschal mystery as the key to liturgy, a theme greatly loved by him, Ratzinger/Benedict underlined how the Vatican II document, *Sacramentum Concilium* viewed liturgy as the world of God entering our world and our world entering the heart of God.

Viewing his personal, theological and ecclesial mission as centred on faith in Jesus Christ, it's no surprise that even with his gruelling schedule as Pope, Pope Benedict dedicated himself to completing and publishing the three-volume series, *Jesus of Nazareth*, that received acclamation across the spectrum of the Christian traditions. It's a mature fruit of Benedict/Ratzinger's life work of research, writings and prayer. As he put it in the foreword, this series is an expression 'of my personal search "for the face of the Lord' (cf. Ps 27:8) and "to help foster the growth of a living relationship with him"'.

He wrote four encyclicals (technically he only wrote three as Pope but Pope Francis published an encyclical that had been begun by Pope Benedict). It is noteworthy that they were dedicated to the three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity that ground our following of Jesus Christ on a personal and social level. While the relationship of faith and reason is a theme repeatedly found in Ratzinger/Benedict's writings, nevertheless he recognises the Gospel primacy of charity (*agape*). The very name of God revealed in Jesus Christ is love, and it is charity poured into our hearts by the Spirit, a theme central in Augustine's writings that so greatly influenced Ratzinger, that brings to blossom the universal human *eros* in its drive towards the true, good and beautiful.

For Ratzinger, what we see and experience in Jesus Christ is that God is an *event* of love. Addressing young people in Cologne in 2005 he asked: "what could ever save us apart from love?" In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, we hear the often-quoted sentence: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (n.1) *The event of love, revealed in Jesus Christ, is the Trinity. So many of the*

building blocks of Ratzinger/Benedict's theology, themes such as relatedness, communion, fraternity, dialogue, giftedness as well as his approach to social and cultural themes, flow from his conviction that Trinitarian doctrine marks our faith in ways we have yet much to realise. In discovering who God is, we discover who we are. Indeed, we discover "a new understanding of reality". To be is to relate, to receive and to give. The recognition of the Triune God brings a spiritual newness and opens up avenues of thought and action.

In Christianity, the profession of faith in the oneness of God is just as radical as in any other monotheistic religion; indeed only in Christianity does it reach its full stature. But it is the nature of Christian existence to receive and to live life as relatedness and, thus, to enter into that unity which is the ground of all and sustains it [T]he doctrine of the Trinity, when properly understood, can become the reference point of theology that anchors all other lines of Christian thought (188).

His social teaching encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* took up some of the themes mentioned above and, on these bases, reflected on contemporary social issues, market dynamics and practices in business and enterprise, underlining particularly the category of fraternity. He noted that while the explosion of worldwide interdependence certainly brings great opportunities, it also contains risks in terms of new social political, economic and cultural divisions. True to his ever-present reflection on faith and reason, in this encyclical he issued an invitation to broaden our concept of reason, precisely in terms of relatedness, and its application in order to provide deeper cultural, political and economic foundations for a civilisation of justice, peace and fraternity. The opening line of the encyclical again focuses on the charity in Jesus Christ who is Truth in Person:

Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity. Love – *caritas* – is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth.

In short, for Ratzinger/Benedict, faith in Jesus Christ, Messiah and Lord, the Son of God, makes us children of God, sisters and brothers of one another, through the gift of his Spirit and communion. Faith

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brings us into a new realm of life and action. And all of this is directed towards universal sister- and brotherhood. The Church's mission centred on faith in Jesus Christ is to respond to Christ and generously share its divine-human life of communion.

REFORM IN CONTINUITY

Ratzinger/Benedict understood only too well that faith in Jesus Christ involves a journey that is not only personal to each believer, but, also social and cultural. He recognised that each continent has its journey of faith in welcoming and receiving the Incarnation of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. In other words, the Christ event becomes culture in ever-new ways in successive generations and contexts. Given his great knowledge of the Patristic and Medieval eras, he was keen also to underline the dimension of continuity.

In a key address to the Roman Curia in December, 2005, marking the fortieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict reflected on the interpretation of the Council and underlined the dynamics both of Reform and of continuity. The Second Vatican Council was, he explained, an experience of launching a Reform in the Church but one that is in continuity with the Church's two thousand year life-giving sources. He realised this is not easy task. Recalling Pope John XXIII's famous address at the opening of the Council with his call for *aggiornamento* and presenting the faith in new ways, Pope Benedict commented:

It is clear that this commitment to expressing a specific truth in a new way demands new thinking on this truth and a new and vital relationship with it; it is also clear that new words can only develop if they come from an informed understanding of the truth expressed, and on the other hand, that a reflection on faith also requires that this faith be lived. In this regard, the programme that Pope John XXIII proposed was extremely demanding, indeed, just as the synthesis of fidelity and dynamic is demanding.

As a young theologian Ratzinger felt a call to present the Truth of faith in a way that was new and attractive. That also meant reading and interpreting the hope and joys, griefs and sorrows of our, at times, bewildering world. He was convinced that in order to respond to contemporary challenges, we need to draw from the patrimony of the Faith. Nothing solid or long-lasting will be developed without remembering the rock from which we are hewn, the heritage of wisdom, truth and experience that has been transmitted throughout the centuries. This conviction can be seen

in his interventions as the Cardinal Prefect of the Doctrine for the Faith in the areas of liberation theology, the ecclesiology of communion, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.

While advocating fidelity to Tradition, Ratzinger/Benedict never understood it as a collection of assertions simply to be transmitted without any newness. Fidelity to our heritage should never mean that faith be reduced to a question of static repetition (initially he was somewhat reluctant to tackle the project of developing what turned out to be an incredible achievement, the elaboration of the Catechism of the Catholic Church). Theology is not archeology, as he put it. He understood Tradition as a dynamic process involving a progressive assimilation through the faith of the Church of the event witnessed in Scripture. He recognised that in order to remain identical the Church's faith has to be thought and expressed in ways that are new.¹In a recent publication, Pope Francis has noted that a central theme in Pope Benedict is that God is always new: "Yes, God is always news because He is the source and reason of beauty, grace and truth. God is never repetitive, God surprises us. God brings newness".²

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In terms of how Ratzinger/Benedict viewed the future of the Church, there are two aspects worth highlighting also because they resonate today in our own contemporary ecclesial experience in Ireland. The first is the often-quoted remarks he made in a 1969 German radio broadcast. They are worth reading in full.³ While recognising the limits of any prognostication of the future, Ratzinger spoke of how he saw the future directions of the Church.

The future of the Church can and will issue from those whose roots are deep and who live from the pure fullness of their faith....From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge – a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so it will lose many of her social privileges. In contrast to an earlier age, it will be seen much more as a voluntary society, entered only by free decision. As a small society, it will make much bigger demands on the initiative of her individual members.

- 1 See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- 2 Pope Francis, Preface to a book edited by Luca Caruso, *Dio è sempre nuovo*. Vatican Editors, 2023.
- 3 Joseph Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009.

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In his view the future of the Church will be made up of smaller faith communities. She will no longer be the dominant social power she was in the past. Nevertheless, in all of the changes, of course, “the Church will find her essence afresh and with full conviction in that which was always at her centre: faith in the triune God, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, in the presence of the Spirit until the end of the world”. Ratzinger proposes that there will be a fresh blossoming and the Church will come again to be seen as “home”, where people will find life and hope beyond death.

The Church will be a more spiritual Church ... It will be hard going for the Church, for the process of crystallization and clarification will cost her much valuable energy. It will make her poor and cause her to become the Church of the meek. The process will be all the more arduous, for sectarian narrow-mindedness as well as pompous self-will will have to be shed ... But when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church. People in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely ... Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.

One particular way he understood the Church was being renewed was in terms of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit through creative communities, little flocks, rooted in Gospel life. Pope Francis has called Benedict the “Pope of creative minorities”. His vision was very much linked to the theological significance of “charism” in the life of the Church. He shared his vision in a key note address at a symposium held in Rome in 1998 on movements and ecclesial communities, Ratzinger offered a reflection on the “theological locus” of these movements.⁴ He noted that the Church has a permanent basic episcopal/sacramental structure that provides organizational continuity, but “ever renewed irruptions of the Holy Spirit” revitalize and renew this structure:

If we now look at the history of the Church as a whole, we see that the local church, as that ecclesial form whose defining mark is the episcopal office, cannot but be the supporting structure that permanently upholds the edifice of the Church through all ages. On the other hand, the Church is also crisscrossed by successive waves of new movements, which reinvigorate the universalistic

4 “The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements”, *Communio* 25 (Fall 1998): 480-504.

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aspect of its apostolic mission and precisely in so doing also serve the spiritual vitality and truth of the local churches.

In describing five waves of renewal through the Church's history, he referred to the Irish monks, in particular, Columbanus as well as the great movements of renewal around figures such as Francis and Dominic, Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila, and then too the great female congregations of the nineteenth century. In synergy with the apostolic structure of the Church, charisms renew the evangelising energy of the Church, the Spouse of Christ.

IRELAND, EUROPE AND THE WORLD

Ratzinger/Benedict had a high regard for the Irish Church. While his 2011 letter to the Catholics of Ireland regarding sexual abuse was strong in its reproach of the Irish Bishops, we can also read in that letter his esteem for the contribution of the Irish to the Church worldwide. Aware of "the rapid transformation and secularization of Irish society", nevertheless he wrote, 'As you take up the challenges of this hour, I ask you to remember "the rock from which you were hewn" (Is 51:1). Reflect upon the generous, often heroic, contributions made by past generations of Irish men and women to the Church and to humanity as a whole...'

He referred again to Celtic monks like Saint Columbanus who spread the Gospel in Western Europe and laid the foundations of medieval monastic culture found expression in the building of churches and monasteries and the establishment of schools, libraries and hospitals "all of which helped to consolidate the spiritual identity of Europe." He was well aware of the era of persecutions in the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland, but he also pointed to the new missionary zeal that arose after those persecutions:

[G]enerations of missionary priests, sisters and brothers left their homeland to serve in every continent, especially in the English-speaking world. They were remarkable not only for their great numbers, but for the strength of their faith and the steadfastness of their pastoral commitment. Many dioceses, especially in Africa, America and Australia, benefited from the presence of Irish clergy and religious who preached the Gospel and established parishes, schools and universities, clinics and hospitals that served both Catholics and the community at large, with particular attention to the needs of the poor.

Pope Benedict underlined the Irish link with Europe. In a weekly catechesis on June 11, 2008, he dedicated his talk to Columbanus,

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“the best known Irish man of the Middle Ages and a great European”. Indeed, he pointed out, “With the Irish of his time, he had a sense of Europe’s cultural unity”. Paying tribute to how the Irish nurtured the Christian roots of Europe, he noted how the expression “*totius Europae* - of all Europe”, with reference to the Church’s presence on the Continent, is found for the first time in one of Columbanus’ letters, written around the year 600, and addressed to Pope Gregory the Great.

CONCLUSION

Pope Benedict’s resignation in February 2013 came as a shock. But in many ways it sealed his pontificate and expressed his central conviction that the Church belongs to Jesus Christ. In his final General Audience before retirement on 27 February, 2013, he reaffirmed his faith in the presence of Christ:

I have felt like Saint Peter with the Apostles in the boat on the Sea of Galilee: the Lord has given us so many days of sun and of light winds, days when the catch was abundant; there were also moments when the waters were rough and the winds against us... and the Lord seemed to be sleeping. But I have always known that the Lord is in that boat, and I have always known that the barque of the Church is not mine but his. Nor does the Lord let it sink; it is he who guides it, surely also through those whom he has chosen, because he so wished. This has been, and is, a certainty which nothing can shake.

He went on then to witness to his faith in the charism of Peter present in his successor when he wrote in a collection of interviews with the journalist Peter Seewald, published in 2016 as *Last Testament in his own Words*: “Yes, there is suddenly a new freshness in the Church, a new joy, a new charism that addresses the people, which is something beautiful. Many are thankful that the new pope now approaches them in a new style”. He continued to accompany the Pope with prayer and offering his life right to the end.

The end of time, death and eternal life were also themes profoundly developed in his theological works.⁵ He underlined how the dialogical nature of our humanity and our cosmos will blossom ultimately, in God’s mercy, in heaven, in our participation in the Triune God. For Ratzinger/Benedict, communion will be the last word of history.

5 Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, Washington: CUA, 2007.

The Theological Legacy of Pope Benedict XVI¹

D. Vincent Twomey

As his doctoral student in Regensburg from 1971 to 1978, it was my privilege to study under Joseph Ratzinger, who is recognized as one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century. He kept in touch with his former students down through the years, thanks mainly to his Schülerkreis (the circle of doctoral and post-doctoral students), which, from 1978-2013, met annually until he retired as Pope. He was, and remained all through his life as Professor, Archbishop, Cardinal Prefect and Pope, a simple, humble man. He valued human friendship. He had a brilliant mind, a phenomenal memory, and a warm heart. He loved Jesus Christ and His Body the Church. His knowledge of the main currents of thought in theology, philosophy, the human sciences, and culture generally, was wide ranging and perceptive. He sought to proclaim to the world the Truth that alone sets us free – and suffered for speaking that truth to a world that had largely turned its back on God. Humility and courage are, perhaps, his most distinctive characteristics. He was, in my opinion, the conscience of our age.² He has been vilified in the media with reference to the clerical abuse scandals, and yet no one in the Vatican did more to tackle the crisis and eliminate its causes once, early on as Cardinal Prefect, he came aware of the extent of what he called in 2005 “the filth of the Church”.³

His output was prodigious. Many of his *Collected Works* (16 massive Volumes in German) have been translated into several languages, while the annotated bibliography of his publications (including reviews of same) covers 446 pages.⁴ His early classic,

1 An earlier version of this article was published in *The Irish Catholic* (January 5, 2022).

2 D. Vincent Twomey, Pope Benedict XVI: *The Conscience of our Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

3 See the account given by Markus Graulich in *Die Tagespost* (February 18, 2021).

4 Joseph Ratzinger/Papst Benedikt XVI. *Das Werk: Veröffentlichungen bis zur Papstwahl*, edited by Vincent Pfnur on behalf of the Schülerkreis (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2009).

D. Vincent Twomey SVD is Emeritus Professor of Moral Theology at the Pontifical University, St Patrick’s College, Maynooth.

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Introduction to Christianity (1968) alone has been translated into over twenty-two languages. His writings on a vast spectrum of theological and philosophical topics have a clarity and a depth that make his theology inspiring, indeed, for many liberating. He never founded a school of his own. All he could ever do, given his other responsibilities, was to sketch the contours of theological answers, based on Revelation, to the existential questions of the day. As a result, his theological fragments provoke further scholarly reflection. Like Picasso, he paints in broad strokes and writes in superb prose - at times almost poetic. What he said of St Paul, can also be applied to him, *mutatis mutandis*: "Paul does not seek for himself, he does not want to make a fan club for himself, he does not wish to go down in history as the head of a school of great knowledge, he is not self-seeking; rather, Saint Paul proclaims Christ and wants to gain people for the true and real God."⁵ For, as Ratzinger himself says about his theological position, "the aim is not an isolated theology that I draw out of myself but one that opens as widely as possible into the common intellectual pathways of the faith."⁶

His election as Archbishop and later as Cardinal Prefect put an end to the plans he had, when, in 1969, he decided to transfer from the old and famous University of Tübingen to the little-known, quiet backwater that was the new University of Regensburg. Kevin McNamara got to know the young promising theologian at the Maynooth Summer School in 1969, who had told him that he had accepted a "call" to the new University of Regensburg to get away from the tension and turmoil of Tübingen's theology faculty. In the fledgling Faculty of Theology in quiet Regensburg, he hoped to find the calm and the needed academic conditions to pursue his research, stimulated by his doctoral and postdoctoral students. There he planned to write his multi-volume *Dogmatics* (i.e., a full systematic treatment of the doctrine of the Church).⁷ His election as Archbishop in 1977, and later as Cardinal Prefect, put an end to such a scholarly project. But he did not cease being a theologian, writing books and articles on a wide spectrum of topics, giving various public lectures in different countries, delivering homilies and book-length interviews, which became best-sellers. Wherever he went, he managed to capture the attention of his audience, thanks

5 Benedict XVI, "How to Speak about God," in *The Transforming Power of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 44.

6 Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 66

7 His brother, Georg, was already in Regensburg as Director of the over 1,000-year-old Cathedral Choir School (*Domspatzen*). His elder sister, Maria, acted as his private secretary and housekeeper. He built a house for himself in Pentling on the outskirts of the city, and had his parents remains re-interred in the cemetery around the parish church, as is the custom in Bavaria.

THE THEOLOGICAL LEGACY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

to the clarity and depth of his thought as well as his courage in facing up to the almost intractable problems posed by contemporary culture, and, indeed, by contemporary theology.

For example, as Cardinal Prefect, Ratzinger was invited to give a public lecture in Cambridge in 1988. The event was hosted jointly by the Catholic Chaplaincy to the University and the University's Faculty of Divinity. The topic was the threat of contemporary nihilism to the humanum (a topic he covered in different contexts, each with his typical originality). He received a standing ovation both on his entrance to the hall and when he left. Some people said afterwards they joined in at the beginning as an acknowledgement of his courage in coming to Cambridge. At the end, the ovation was in recognition of the brilliance of his lecture and the answers he gave to questions posed - in fluent, if at times halting, English with a distinctive German accent.

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The most pressing problem in theology today, he held, is the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ. It is at the root of the Church's present crisis. One of the main causes of this situation, he claims, is an interpretation of Scripture based on an exclusive use of the historical-critical and form-critical methods. His own interpretation would not only consider the historical-critical methodology, which he valued, but which need to be augmented by the other methods of interpretation used down through the centuries by the great thinkers of the Church, in particular, those used by the Fathers of the Church. To this end, he used every minute of his spare time as Pope to write his three-volume *Jesus of Nazareth* (2006-2013). It is the fruit of over 60 years of theological reflection. That trilogy will, perhaps, be his most enduring legacy in the discipline of theology.

His many writings on contemporary cultural issues and political life— as well as his original contributions to the moral issues of the day – remain to be discovered by students of politics and philosophers alike. His historic addresses as Pope to politicians in New York (the UN), London, Paris, and Berlin, probed the most fundamental issues facing modern democracy, above all the threat posed by the denial of God. If people are convinced that all there is to life is what we experience here and now, he once wrote, discontentment and boredom can only increase, with the result that more and more people will look for some kind of escape in their search for “real life” elsewhere. Escapism and various forms of “dropping out” become endemic. “The loss of transcendence evokes the flight into utopia. I am convinced that the destruction of transcendence is the actual amputation of man from which all other

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sicknesses spring. Robbed of his real greatness, he can only resort to illusory hopes.”⁸ One such illusory hope is the construction of a perfect society in the future, which Marx claimed could only come about if people first abandoned God. Another is the myth of the progress based on scientism, functionalism and technology that underlines liberal capitalism’s attempt to create a perfect society.

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A large part of this legacy must be his homilies and his pastoral writings as priest, Archbishop, Cardinal Prefect and Pope, which will continue to provide inspiration for people from all walks of life. This likewise applied to his Wednesday Addresses on the Saints. He chose the Saints as his main topic because he was convinced that the canonized Saints, together with Christian art, are the most convincing apology for the Faith that the Church can offer. They also play a central role in inspiring the faithful of every generation to seek the path of holiness. On the death of his mother, he wrote: “I know of no more convincing proof for the faith than precisely the pure and unalloyed humanity that the faith allowed to mature in my parents and in so many other persons I have had the privilege to encounter.”⁹ His encyclicals on Love, Hope and Faith (the latter published under the name of Pope Francis) must rank among the most outstanding ever to come from the pen of a Pope. *Caritas in Veritate*, his encyclical on integral human development in love and truth, will have a lasting influence on Catholic social teaching. His book-length interviews covering all aspects of the Christian life in the modern world have invariably stimulated the wider, non-academic readership.

Significantly, his writings have led to not a few conversions.

Perhaps his unique contribution to the renewal of the Liturgy is his greatest legacy of all. All his life he promoted a reform of Liturgy according to the spirit and the letter of Vatican II. How pivotal Benedict XVI saw the reform of the Liturgy for the life and mission of the Church can be seen from his decision to publish as the first Volume of his *Collected Works* that on the *Theology of the Liturgy*, which is Volume 10 in the series. At the core of that volume (634 pages in the English translation) is his *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (2000), written while on holidays as Cardinal Prefect. By allowing a greater use of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite (the so-called Traditional Latin Mass). Pope Benedict XVI fostered a more reverent and sacral approach to celebrating the sacraments

8 Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, transl. by Michael J. Miller et al. (San Francisco, 2008), 199.

9 Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, transl. by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 131.

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in the vernacular (the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite). Despite certain recent restrictions, that initiative will profoundly transform the way the sacraments are celebrated in future. Another of his initiatives with long-term consequences was the creation of the Anglican Ordinariate. Introduced to enable Anglicans to come into union with Rome while preserving the richness of their own liturgical tradition, in time it will enrich the Roman Rite.

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His original theological contribution to interreligious dialogue will also bear fruit in time. For example, in his address to representatives of the World Religions in Assisi in 2011, he drew attention to the need of adherents of all Religions to heed to listen to the voice of sincere agnostics.¹⁰ Their search for truth can purify the Religions and help them overcome the pathologies to which the Religions are prone (such as fundamentalism). In his dialogue with Jurgen Habermas, Europe's leading secular philosopher, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger had pointed out how much philosophy needed to pay attention to the voice of the Religions to overcome the pathologies of reason (such as the atom-bomb and IVF). Though initially it caused outrage on account of a quotation taken out of context, his Regensburg lecture on the role of theology in the university led to a new and more intense dialogue with moderate Islam

His controversial lecture (on the absence of God as a result of Western rationalism and the threat it poses), though widely misquoted, had a positive influence on Christian-Muslim relations, once the dust had settled. One bishop in an Islamic country said that at last we can discuss issues with our Muslim partners in dialogue, which previously had been avoided. His courageous trip to Turkey – in particular his visit to, and his respectful behaviour (and prayer) in, the Blue Mosque – definitively defused the tension. That trip, as it so happened, also ushered in new relations with the Greek Orthodox Church. In his Regensburg Address, he stressed the intrinsic relationship between faith and reason -- the leitmotiv of his life and writings – if humanity is to become more fully human. In all his writings, his ultimate concern was to highlight the primacy of God.

10 An old acquaintance of mine wrote to me after his death: "Many years ago I read comments His Holiness addressed to agnostics who are seeking the truth, he admired their questioning and struggle and urged the faithful to respond so that God is not hidden by the way Religions are often practiced. After reading that, I always felt there is a place for me in the Church, knowing I would be welcome should I return, that my half-formed thoughts and poorly constructed arguments were not summarily dismissed, giving me hope, a sense of belonging when I might otherwise feel adrift. It is a good feeling to have, and I will always be grateful."

What Should I have in my Spiritual Library?¹

Chris Hayden

What books should I have in my spiritual library? One's personal 'acquisitions policy' is, to a great extent, a matter of interest and taste, but some guidance can be useful, particularly for those who are near the beginning of this journey. In what follows, I will recommend twenty-one books. The number twenty-one is, of course, simply a trope, a convention, a springboard into a world of reading that is entirely open-ended (full disclosure: I struggled to keep the list to twenty-one!). Furthermore, the books I suggest are merely *examples of twenty-one types of material that one would do well to read*. If the list is to be given a title, it is not '21 books you should have,' but 'examples of 21 kinds of book you should have.' In any given area on the list, a better example might well be found, and if you find it, get it. I can hardly emphasize enough that the list below is limited and partial.

As for the selection of topics, there is an inevitable element of subjectivity, but it is not entirely subjective.² We should all read good material that will help us to understand, pray and proclaim the Scriptures. We should all seek to deepen our understanding of the nature of prayer and of spirituality. We should all seek to grow in our ability to catechize and teach the faith, including its moral and liturgical aspects. We should all seek to love our Christian commitments (baptism, ordination, etc.) and understand them more deeply. We should all seek to grow in our ability and desire to evangelize. We should all seek to engage with the culture we inhabit, becoming better equipped to proclaim, in and to this

- 1 This article was originally prepared as a talk for seminarians. With a view to publication, I considered changing references to priesthood in order to make the text more inclusive. But I have opted to retain any such references, mindful that as it stands, the article may give readers some insight into an aspect of priestly formation.
- 2 I considered the distinction between spiritual reading and study/ongoing formation/personal development in my article, 'On the Nature of Spiritual Reading' (*The Furrow*, January 2023). For reasons explained there, I have not been scrupulous regarding that distinction in the compilation of the list here.

Chris Hayden is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns and Spiritual Director in the National Seminary, St Patrick's College, Maynooth

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culture, our Christian faith as the beautiful, timely, timeless truth it is. In addition to fundamentals like these, we may feel drawn to deepen our knowledge of particular areas. And so, the list will lengthen and the personal library will grow!

A couple of further observations on the list to follow. It does not include the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the documents of Vatican II, or key papal encyclicals. I omit these in order to make the point that they should be taken for granted. It would seem odd to recommend the Bible as ‘spiritual reading.’ Who could possibly be qualified to make such a recommendation, and on what basis would it be made?³ Coherence with biblical truth and the biblical worldview is the fundamental principle on which recommendations for spiritual reading are to be made. There is no higher authority than scripture, on the basis of which scripture itself could be recommended. The same point applies, in a lesser way, to the *Catechism* (itself an interpretation – for Catholics, *the authoritative interpretation* – of biblical faith), and to other key Church documents.

Our Church loves to teach, and her output is dizzying. Nobody can be expected to keep up with every papal pronouncement, but it is reasonable to expect that a priest will keep an eye on papal encyclicals. For the most part, they concern the Church as a whole, and reflect the engagement of the Church with today’s culture. The following list could consist of nothing other than papal writings from the past fifty years! To include none seemed a better option than to pick and choose.⁴

EXAMPLES OF TWENTY-ONE KINDS OF BOOK YOU SHOULD HAVE IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIBRARY

1. Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

Every priest should have at least one general, non-technical introduction to the NT, that will help him to teach and catechize. This is one such book. It is clear, accessible and very interestingly written. Take note: in biblical scholarship, the term ‘introduction’ can be deceptive. Many ‘introductions’ are highly technical, and ‘introductory questions’ are often matters of higher criticism (date,

3 I am reminded of a Bible that had an imprimatur inside its cover, with the explanation: ‘The *imprimatur* does not indicate that the ecclesiastical authority agrees with all the opinions expressed in this work.’

4 That said, if I had to include three papal documents on the list, they would probably be Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, John Paul II’s *Evangelium Vitae*, and Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*.

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occasion, integrity, authenticity – and various other matters that hardly belong in either a homily or a parish catechesis). Likewise, the term ‘theological’ can mislead. When it comes to biblical resources, ‘theological’ often means ‘as distinct from *exegetical*,’ which means that a *theological* work is more likely to be of use for preaching, reflection and catechesis. Most busy priests will not wish to pursue obscure questions of exegesis any more than they will wish to engage with issues of higher criticism. For this reason, an introduction that is theological rather than exegetical will often be of more practical and pastoral use.

2. Xavier Léon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1970).

As distinct from a general biblical dictionary, a theological work will reflect on key themes. In any useful dictionary of biblical theology, we can expect to find articles on such themes as God, grace, prayer, faith, covenant, creation, prophecy, etc. Relatively short, accessible articles on such themes can be invaluable for personal prayer and reflection, and for preaching and catechesis. Léon-Dufour’s dictionary, first published in 1962, is a classic that has stood the test of time.

3. Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History of Spirituality* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2020).

Familiarity with the history of spirituality is more than just historical knowledge: it gives us a sense of what spirituality *is*, and of how it has adapted to meet the requirements of new times and contexts. A good overview of this development – from the Bible, to the desert, to the monasteries, to the cities, to the movements, and right up to the present day – will help us to appreciate the treasure we have inherited. Such a review is also a rich statement of the necessity and possibility of faithful change, growth and adaptation. Sheldrake’s history is a model of clarity, and it includes not just historical description, but ongoing reflection on the significance of developments in spirituality.

4. Thomas Dubay, *Prayer Primer: Igniting a Fire Within* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002).

The very best writing on prayer is found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which, for reasons mentioned above, I am not including on this list. Every pastor should be familiar with it, but should also get a solid, catechetically-useful book on prayer.

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Dubay's book is brief, accessible and practical. It ranges from the fundamentals (the nature of prayer), through different kinds of prayer, to problems, difficulties and questions that arise for those seeking to nurture a committed prayer life for themselves or others.

5. Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (London: New City, 2002).

A general introduction to prayer (like Dubay's *Prayer Primer*) is invaluable, but it is good to pursue greater depth in our understanding. A particular value of Clément's book is that it provides a springboard to the very early Christian writers, including some of the desert fathers and mothers. In some ways, this book is an early history of spirituality, but with a greater focus on personal prayer than one would find in a general history. Clément gives a lot of attention to prayer as a struggle (as 'spiritual warfare'); he is excellent on the nature of Christian asceticism. The book is full of interesting quotations and Clément's commentaries are very well worthwhile.

6. R. Paul Stevens and Michael Green, *Living the Story: Biblical Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

A good book on biblical spirituality is a great treasure. Not merely a book about 'prayer in the Bible' (which can also be valuable), but a book that reflects the fact that biblical spirituality is fundamentally a narrative spirituality; a book that makes it clear that the spirituality taught by the Bible is deeply woven into the story – and the stories – the Bible recounts. Biblical spirituality is not the distillation of concepts found in the Bible; rather, it *unfolds* as the story of God's people unfolds, and it invites us to read our lives and our times as a part of that unfolding. A good book of biblical spirituality will help us (and help us to help others) to *inhabit* the biblical story. This book goes a long way towards that; it is also delightfully written and suitable for personal reflection as well as catechesis.

7. Joseph Ratzinger and Christoph Schönborn, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994).

The *Catechism* is a marvellous resource, but it is extremely comprehensive and wide-ranging. It is good to have an introduction that helps us to approach the *Catechism* as a whole, and to appreciate the unity in the diversity. This brief, readable

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introduction examines the origins and aims of the *Catechism*, in addition to offering a superb apologetic for the idea of a catechism. There is also a brief introduction each of the four parts of the *Catechism*. This book will help its readers to explain and teach the catechism. It will also help them to rejoice in the beauty and coherence of our faith.

8. Austrian Bishops' Conference, *Docat: What to Do?* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2016).

This catechism is in the excellent *Youcat* series, which is officially approved by the Church. The original *Youcat* (also well worth having) has a foreword by Pope Benedict XVI; *Docat* has a foreword by Pope Francis. *Docat* is a catechism of Catholic social teaching, and it is a great resource for personal reflection, teaching and catechesis. A particularly useful feature of *Docat* is its section on the Church's teaching on environmental concern. It also presents the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of the human person, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity.

9. Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2011).

Priests are called to form and guide the people of God, and people of God are called to transform society. The Lord – who most assuredly wants to save our souls! – did not teach us to pray, 'save our souls,' but 'thy kingdom come.' There is a public aspect to faith; to be a follower of Christ is to be concerned for the common good. We ought to reflect on this aspect of our faith and our pastoral ministry, and to acquire some good reading on it. Volf's book is a really excellent start. It encourages us to ponder how our faith promotes human flourishing, and a careful reading of it can help us to grow in the confidence that, however misunderstood our faith may be, we have a valuable contribution to make to the common good and the welfare of society.

10. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989).

What are the challenges we face as Christians in today's pluralist, secular world? There is an abundance of thoughtful literature on this topic, but it would be hard to beat Lesslie Newbigin's classic (it's safe to call it a classic by now: it is very widely cited in a range

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of scholarly and mid-level literature). This is not a light read, but it is an unusually rewarding one. Newbigin looks at such topics as dogma and doubt, authority and tradition, reason and revelation, Christ and history, the nature of secularism and pluralism, the nature of mission. This is a bracing, stirring read, which insists that we can and we must place Christ at the centre of all we are and do as believers. It will more than reward the effort it certainly calls for.

11. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2008).

The ‘new atheism’ of Richard Dawkins *et al.* is now old and decrepit, but the challenge of unbelief is perennial. Although this book was written at the height of the new atheism, it remains relevant and fresh. It is an exceptionally clear, cogent and accessible defence of the reasonableness and goodness of Christian faith. It addresses standard arguments against faith; it engages with a broad range of thinkers – yes, including Dawkins *et al.* Every priest should try to become able to offer a fundamental apologetic for faith (mindful that defending the reasonableness of faith is not the same thing as proving the existence of God. Happily, we can do the former without having to do the latter). This book can serve as a fine, thoughtful introduction to this pastorally and spiritually important topic.

12. Alister E. McGrath, *Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2012).

‘Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is within you.’ (1Pet 3:15). This readiness is the task of apologetics; it is readiness both to *defend* and to *commend* our faith, and it is both an intellectual and a spiritual task. After all, if we feel incapable of accounting for our deepest beliefs and commitments, this can be morale-sapping and spiritually debilitating. Yet committed reflection and study are required before we gain an overall capacity to defend the reasonableness of our faith, and to show that it is not only reasonable, but also beautiful. McGrath’s short and readable book is an excellent introduction to apologetics. It grounds the task in contemporary culture and suggests practical ways in which we can hone our apologetic skills, and do so precisely as an expression of our faith (and, one might add, of our spirituality).

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13. Jeremy Driscoll, *Awesome Glory: Resurrection in Scripture, Liturgy, and Theology* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2019).

It is important to be familiar with some writing that helps us to pray the liturgy; not merely to understand it theologically, but to enter into it (and to draw our parishioners into it). *Awesome Glory* is an outstanding example of such writing. It reflects in depth on the Easter liturgy, from Holy Thursday right through till Pentecost. While it is not a systematic commentary on the liturgical and biblical texts, it offers a rich and deep understanding of both. It is full of striking observations on the liturgical celebrations, including some arresting comments on the rubrics, which, as Driscoll shows, ‘embody very condensed pieces of theology’ – and, one might add, of spirituality. It would be hard to find a better companion for the Easter Triduum than this book.

14. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Transformation in Christ: On the Christian Attitude* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

I hesitated before including this book. It is a long and demanding read. But for two reasons, I decided to include it. First, because it is simply excellent. It is full of valuable insights regarding the life of discipleship, prayer, the Christian attitude, the virtues. The book exudes a calm, steady, serene wisdom, and it is fascinating to reflect that it was written, not during a time of peace and leisure in the author’s life, but while von Hildebrand was fighting against Nazism in his native Germany. It is a book from the coalface. The second reason I decided to include this book is precisely that fact that it is demanding! It is a good thing to acquire, from time to time, reading that challenges us, that draws us beyond what we are comfortable with. At times, it is good to think of our reading as a ‘reading project.’ This book could be just that: a reading project to challenge and to illuminate in equal measure. Though perhaps not exactly equal, as the illumination will remain long after the challenge has been overcome.

15. Bert Ghezzi, *The Times Book of Saints* (London: Harper Collins, 2000).

As far as its structure goes, this is a slightly unconventional book of Saints. The genre usually lists saints according to where their feast day falls on the calendar, but Ghezzi lists 365 saints in alphabetical order, from Aelred of Rievaulx to Willibrord of Northumbria. While the alphabetical listing makes it easy to find a given saint,

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it might seem to make the book less practical for liturgical use. However, that problem is entirely solved by the inclusion, at the end of the book, of a calendar including all the saints listed. Also, at the end of each entry there is a reference which includes the date of the feast, the date of the beatification or canonization, and reference to related saints. As for the content, under each saint there are some biographical notes, followed by an extract from the writings of the saint. Each entry concludes with a brief prayer or reflection. Every sacristy should contain an accessible book of saints. This one is quite excellent.

16. Benedict XVI, *Priests of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Family Publications, 2009).

Our ‘job description’ as seminarians and priests is spelled out in detail in many Church documents, above all in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and in the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. In addition to familiarity with such basic sources, it is good to acquire reading on priesthood that will help us to reflect prayerfully on our identity and work. This book contains writings of the late Pope Benedict XVI, from the time of his election in April 2005 until the end of 2008. Before becoming Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Josef Ratzinger had published a small book on priesthood, entitled *Servants of Your Joy*, which has been widely and gratefully received. A notable feature of his writing – and these reflections are no exception – is that it inspires joy and hope. Given the challenges of our day, we can do with both of these in abundance! Benedict’s reflections are, at one and the same time, both accessible and profound. In this, they are a model of good theology and good teaching. In addition to the notes of joy and hope, these reflections can also purify, guide and enlighten.

17. Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

How should diocesan clergy *do* evangelization? How can we lead people to a deliberate, purposeful, *intentional* discipleship? Must the project be hit-and-miss, always somewhat blurred around the edges, or is there a clear approach that we can follow? Happily, there is an increasing number of excellent publications that help us to address questions like these. Weddell’s book is one such. It is a model of clarity and coherence; it presents a thoroughly pastoral theology of evangelization. Weddell makes the point that catechesis alone is no longer sufficient: ‘The situation in the West

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today is far beyond a failure of catechesis.’ She does not, however, indulge in lamenting this failure, but offers tools for engaging in a more fundamental proclamation of Christ and the Gospel. At the heart of the book is a detailed description of ‘the five thresholds of conversion’: initial trust; spiritual curiosity; spiritual openness; spiritual seeking and intentional discipleship. Pope Saint Paul VI summed up the spirit of evangelization as follows: ‘There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed’ (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22). Weddell’s book can help us to make this a concrete reality in our ministry.

18. Christopher Hayden, *A Better Vision: Understanding, Living and Sharing the Catholic Vision for Human Sexuality* (Dublin/London: St Paul’s, 2022).

Another book that I hesitated to include, this time because I’d rather not appear to be engaging in self-promotion! However, I think it will be a useful addition to any spiritual library. One of the main features of the book is that it roots the Catholic sexual ethic in a consistent understanding of the human person – i.e. in an anthropology. It is not enough simply to proclaim *what* the Church teaches about human sexuality: we need to be able to explain *why*. After that, we need to be able to *defend* and *commend* the teaching, in and to a culture that rejects it. Hence the structure of the book in three sections: ‘What our faith teaches us about ourselves’ (anthropology); ‘How our faith asks us to live’ (ethics); ‘Defending and commending our understanding of sexuality’ (apologetics). My intention in this book has been to equip priests, teachers, catechists and parents to share the wisdom of our faith. On the basis of feedback received so far, I’m happy to recommend it.

19. Erica Bachiochi, ed., *Women, Sex, and the Church: A Case for Catholic Teaching* (Boston: Pauline, 2010).

No, it’s not that you need two books in a row on the Church’s sexual teaching! But this book is much more far-reaching than the title suggests. It contains – *rara avis!* – a contentedly Catholic feminism. All the authors in the collection (bar one co-writer) are women. Their arguments in favour of Church teaching are clear and cogent; their arguments against those who reject that teaching are charitable and formidable. The book is extremely well resourced, by means of detailed endnotes. Before the treatments of individual aspects of moral teaching, there is a long introductory

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chapter (entitled ‘Authentic Freedom and Equality in Difference’) on Catholic feminism as such. Other topics include infertility treatment, women and the priesthood, women and work/public life, and the relationship between Catholic sexual and social teaching. For priests, this book is a gift. It equips us to make the point that Catholic teaching is pro-woman and authentically feminist. A word on why this particular book might be considered ‘spiritual reading’: it is a work of tremendous *encouragement*, in that it assures us that we are on solid ground in our proclamation of Church teaching.

20. Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

The vast majority of clergy are not clinicians. That is not our role and while we should be confident of our distinctive contribution to those in difficulty, we should also be mindful of the limits of our expertise. It is good to have some sense of the interplay between psychology and pastoral care. We can be confident of the healing potential of sound spirituality; and we should, in turn, be open to learning from the insights of sound psychology. May’s book is a useful example of the kind of literature that can help us to appreciate the link between psychology and theology, counselling and pastoral practice. The focus of the book is much wider than the negative behaviours we commonly refer to as addictions. For the author, addictive processes are at the root of negative and sinful behaviour in general. He examines the psychological, neurological and theological nature of addiction in this general sense, and insists that humility and reserve are a better guarantee of health than any elusive solution or cure. ‘Willpower and resolutions come and go,’ he notes, ‘but the addictive process never sleeps.’ An informative book, but more than just informative: a book that invites us to ponder and review our attitudes to human brokenness.

21. Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Alban Institute, 2002).

Most priests spend most of their lives serving parish communities; yet we do not give much time to pondering community as such – with all its rich and complex human dynamics. What makes communities tick? How can we minister contentedly and productively within the context of ordinary human brokenness, limitations, crises and contrariness? Are there any particular interpersonal dynamics we should bear in mind? This short and

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readable book alerts us – always in a gentle and sympathetic way – to human factors that are present in every community, in every individual, in every pastoral conversation, at every meeting. It offers excellent insights into the nature of pastoral leadership (which includes the ability not to panic when others are panicking, to be imaginative in times of difficulty, and to hold one’s ground rather than reacting to stresses). The core insight of the book is that a congregation is not a set of isolated individuals, but a *system*, in which people relate to each other and think of each other in some fairly predictable ways. Read Steinke’s book, and you will at times be entertained. More importantly, you will gain some really helpful insights into how to maintain composure and poise in a range of delicate pastoral situations. It is not hard to see why this book can be regarded as spiritual reading: it can help us to become more clued-in and compassionate ministers of the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

So much for a ‘tasting menu’ of books for one’s spiritual library! The inevitable subjectivity I mentioned earlier may, in the view of some readers, have given rise to glaring omissions. What about a decent commentary on each of the four Gospels? Surely an essential part of any priest’s library? What about the art and craft and spirituality of preaching? These and other *mea culpas* notwithstanding, I think that the 21 representative volumes we’ve considered offer a pretty comprehensive range of reading material. Again, I have not been unduly concerned to define spiritual reading material and how it might be distinguished from ‘non-spiritual’ texts. In this regard, I think it is no harm to err on the side of inclusiveness. The old maxim, ‘if the shoe fits, wear it,’ is apt: anything that helps us to live the life of discipleship is fair game for spiritual reading. To quote Saint Paul, with just one change of verb, which I leave it to the reader to spot: ‘Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, read about these things’ (Phil 4:8).

Personnel Files, Confidentiality And The Right To Privacy [1]¹

Clyde Muropa

INTRODUCTION

Church records are created for various purposes and, in many cases, contain confidential information that must be safeguarded to protect the privacy and reputation of the Christian faithful. The handling of personal information obliges those responsible for such information to observe confidentiality to protect the privacy of the persons concerned. Privacy is a natural right that the Church safeguards in respect of the dignity each person possesses. From her foundation, the Church has been concerned with the protection of the right to privacy and the dignity of the person, and it contributed indirectly to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the Code, canon 220 imposes the obligation to protect the fundamental right to privacy and a good reputation.²

In the court of public opinion, the mention of secrecy or privacy relating to the Church provokes thoughts of the Church “covering up” criminal activity. However, the Church, like every organization, maintains personnel files that contain confidential information.

- 1 Part 2 will be published in the March issue of *The Furrow*. This paper was presented at the 56th Annual Convention of the Canadian Canon Law Society, Ottawa, on 18 October 2022.
- 2 Canon 220: “No one is permitted to harm illegitimately the good reputation which a person possesses or to injure the right to any person to protect his or her own privacy.” (Cf. CCEO c. 23.) The right to privacy in civil law and American jurisprudence is a fairly recent invention. The term “civil law” refers to all secular law systems, including common law, whereas “common law” is reserved to the laws of jurisprudence following the Anglo-American legal system.

Clyde Muropa is a priest of the Jesuit Province of Southern Africa. He obtained a JCL degree from St. Paul University in Ottawa in 2018. He successfully defended his doctoral thesis in December 2022 entitled “The Account of Conscience and the Right to Privacy in the Governance of the Society of Jesus.” He is a member of the Canon Law Society of America. He previously worked as university chaplain in Zimbabwe and as vocations director for the former Jesuit Province of Zimbabwe-Mozambique.

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Proper handling of these records is one way of protecting the privacy of staff, which can be easily violated when information is revealed by the mishandling of personnel files. Such violations can lead to the unlawful harm of a person's good name or an injury to the individual's right to protect his or her right to privacy.

This paper will analyze the concepts of confidentiality, privacy, and the right to privacy as applicable in Church documents, archives, and access to records. Further, we will offer insights into the general principles of collecting personal information, the composition of records, and the management of church personnel files. Of significance to this study is the obligation of competent authorities to observe confidentiality and protect the right of each person to privacy, as well as the obligation to protect the common good. Fundamentally, there are limitations and excesses that result from the relationship between transparency and secrecy in the Church.³ We shed light on these issues while focusing on the church's fundamental mission of evangelization.

1 – THE CONCEPT OF PRIVACY

The concept of the right to privacy dates back to a law review article published in December 1890 by Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis, two Boston lawyers. They described the right to privacy as the “right to be let alone” and expressed the common law understanding of it as securing to each individual the right to determine ordinarily to what extent his thoughts, sentiments, and emotions would be communicated to others.⁴ Even though this definition is not universally accepted, it offers a foundation for discussion.

[P]rivacy is difficult to define because it is exasperatingly vague and evanescent, often meaning strikingly different things to different people. In part this is because privacy is a notion that is emotional in its appeal and embraces a multitude of different ‘rights’, some of which are intertwined, others often seemingly unrelated or inconsistent. Of late, however, lawyers and social scientists have been reaching the conclusion that the basic attribute of an effective right of privacy is the individual's ability to control the circulation of information relating to him –

3 See J.P. Soler and R. De Oca Montes, *Transparency and Secrecy within the Catholic Church*, Chicago, Midwest Theological Forum, 2022, 2.

4 See S.D. Warren and L.D. Brandeis, “The Right to Privacy,” in *The Harvard Law Review*, vol. 4, no. 5 (1890), 197. By 1890, a vast literature of law had developed to protect privacy as confidentiality. Therefore, it is incorrect to portray Warren and Brandeis as the originators of the right to privacy. Instead, they shifted from the concept of confidentiality to what they termed “inviolable personality.”

power that often is essential to maintaining social relationships and personal freedom.⁵

The right to privacy is understood by theologian Richard McBrien as “[...] the right to the protection of one’s secrets, of one’s confidences, of one’s psychic self. Thus, my privacy is violated, if someone reads my mail without permission, or photographs my medical records surreptitiously, or tape records my conversations without my knowledge, or tells other persons something communicated in the strictest confidence or wiretaps my telephone without legal warrant or probes into my credit records without my consent.”⁶

Meanwhile, confidentiality focuses on relationships. “Confidentiality focuses on trusting others to refrain from revealing personal information to unauthorized individuals. Rather than protecting the information we hide away in secrecy, confidentiality protects the information we share with others based upon our expectations of trust and reliance in relationships.”⁷ In other words, the individual entrusts his personal information to the Church guaranteed by confidential relations,⁸ the law of which protects relationships in which an individual entrusts his interests to another.

The law of confidential relations protects a variety of relationships in which one party entrusts his or her interests to another. One of the most important aspects of maintaining all ecclesiastical records is observing and maintaining confidentiality. There is a reasonable expectation that the collected information will not be revealed to an unauthorized person without the consent of the individual concerned or the appropriate ordinary.

- 5 A. Miller, “The New Technology’s Threat to Personal Privacy,” in *Assault on Privacy*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1971, 25.
- 6 R. McBrien, “The Believer’s Right to Privacy,” in William C. Bier, *Privacy: A Vanishing Value*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1980, 124. Black’s Law Dictionary defines privacy as “the legally protected right of an individual to be free from unwarranted publicity and to be protected from any wrongful intrusion into his private life which would outrage or cause mental suffering, shame, or humiliation to a person of ordinary sensibilities” (H.C. Black, *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 5th ed., St. Paul, MN, West Publishing Company, 1979, 1075).
- 7 See N.M. Richards and D.J. Solove, “Privacy’s Other Path: Recovering the Law of Confidentiality,” in *The George Washington University Law Review*, 96 (2007), 125.
- 8 Confidential relations are defined as “relations formed by convention or by acquiescence, in which one party trusts his pecuniary or other interests to the fidelity and integrity of another, by whom, either alone or in conjunction with himself, he expects them to be guarded and protected.” (See T.M. Cooley, *A Treatise on the Law of Torts or the Wrongs Which Arise Independent of Contract*, Chicago, Callaghan and Company, 1879, 508. See N.M. Richards and D.J. Solove, “Privacy’s Other Path: Recovering the Law of Confidentiality,” in *George Washington University Law School*, 96 (2007), 135.

The management of records is a sensitive issue because of the confidential nature of the information contained.⁹ The Code obliges those appointed to curial offices to promise to fulfill their function faithfully and observe secrecy, according to the manner determined by law or the bishop (c. 471). Good management of the acts of the curia establishes who owns the file, what goes into it, who has access to it, and the retention period. Where there is good management of records, decisions are documented, records are kept current according to the norm of the law, and records are secured (see c. 486 § 1). In other words, good record management ensures accountability on the part of the chancellor and the archivist.

The bishop appoints the chancellor and vice chancellor, who are notaries of the curia (c. 482). The chancellor must be of unimpaired reputation and above all suspicion, because the primary duty of the chancellor is to ensure that acts of the curia are gathered, arranged, and safeguarded in the archive of the curia (c. 482 § 1). The chancellor is to keep an inventory of the documents in the archive (c. 486 § 3). In practice, this involves collecting various documents and arranging them so they are easily accessible for the proper governance of the diocese.

Negligence in handling records may result in the disclosure of information that is otherwise confidential and a violation of privacy, causing harm to a person's good name. The duty of the chancellor to care for documents includes authenticating them when needed (c. 483 § 1). The new title of Book VI, "Delicts against Good Reputation and Delict of Falsehood," indicates that the offence of falsehood is a violation of the dignity of the person.¹⁰

The newly revised canon 1391 specifies that authenticating a false document or composing a false document is a delict against good reputation. Although the canon does not address privacy, reputation and privacy can hardly be separated where a falsehood against an individual has been perpetrated: "A person who composes a false public ecclesiastical document, or who changes, destroys or conceals a genuine one, or uses a false or altered one" (c. 1391, 3^o) asserts a falsehood and is subject to punishment according to the gravity of the offense (c. 1336 §§ 2-4). Falsifying documents in a personnel file or negligently disclosing those documents harms the

9 "Records management is the systematic control of all records from creation or receipt through processing, distribution, maintenance, and retrieval to their ultimate disposition" (J.J. Teanor, "Records Management," in *The Catholic Lawyer*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2002), 51.

10 J.I. Arrieta, "A Presentation of the New Penal System of Canon Law," in *J*, 77 (2021), 260.

reputation of the concerned person and is a violation of privacy. This is not permitted according to canon 220.¹¹

2.1 – ECCLESIASTICAL DOCUMENTS AND PRIVATE DOCUMENTS

Records are categorized according to their nature. Canon 1540 distinguishes between public ecclesiastical documents, public civil documents, and private documents.

2.1.1 – PUBLIC ECCLESIASTICAL DOCUMENTS (C. 1540 § 1)

Sacramental records are public ecclesiastical documents, retained by parishes or the chancery. They pertain to the status of a person in the Church, and access to them is generally restricted because they contain certain information beyond the fact of the administration of the sacrament. For instance, in the case of baptism, adoptive and biological parents may be identified, depending on the particular law of the conference of bishops. This policy may state that sacramental records are not open to the public, any research is performed by archive staff only, or that access may be granted by the bishop or the chancellor. A legitimate reason must be given for genealogical research, along with a relevant connection to the person being researched.¹²

There is no specific mention of personnel files in the Code. In practice, every diocese and religious institute maintains them. Records of priests and religious usually contain public ecclesiastical documents (e.g., records of ordination and/or religious profession).

A personnel file should be maintained for each lay employee and volunteer with the following contents, as applicable: employment application, résumé, employment contract, salary and benefits information, performance review, disciplinary information, safe environment training, and records. If medical information is provided, it should be maintained in a separate file for confidentiality. The archivist must be familiar with the requirements of civil law.

It is important to recognize that people have a right, both canonically and civilly, to know that the information about them in the archives is correct. They also have a right of access to the

11 See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2477. The CCC defines calumny as “[...] a false statement which harms the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them.” Detraction is that action through which one, without an objectively valid reason, discloses another’s faults and failings to another or to others who did not have legitimate reason to know it. See c. 1391.

12 “Sacramental and Genealogy Requests,” <https://www.catholicahawaii.org/diocesan-offices/office-of-the-chancellor/sacramental-and-genealogy-requests>.

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information in their own personnel file and to make or obtain copies of documents which are of a public nature and pertain to their own status as persons (c. 487 § 2). They do not have the right to remove documents from their files, so access might be granted on the condition that a staff member is present.

2.1.2 – PRIVATE DOCUMENTS (C. 1540 § 3)

Any other documents, apart from those stated in canon 1540 §§ 1 and 2, are private. Confidential information should be kept no longer than is necessary or required by law. It is important to retain a summary of relevant information when documents are being destroyed. For example, personnel files may contain records of a sensitive nature, such as dispensations from impediments. These are not public ecclesiastical documents and do not become so by being placed in an official file of an ecclesiastical institution. They are private documents and the sole property of the ecclesiastical authority in whose possession they are retained.

3 – MANAGEMENT OF ARCHIVES (CC. 482 - 491)

The Council of Trent promulgated regulations on the preservation of important documents. Even prior to that, several popes had initiated legislation on management of records and archival reforms. On 14 June 1727, Pope Benedict XIII issued the Constitution *Maxima vigilantia*: “A Constitution on archives [is] to be erected in Italy for the preservation of legal papers and documents pertaining to cathedral churches both collegiate and noncollegiate, to seminaries, monasteries of both men and women, guilds, confraternities, hospitals and to all other pious institutions legally instituted.”¹³ This Constitution regulated the information to be kept in archives and the norms governing access to the archives.

The norms on archives are found in canons 486-491 of the 1983 Code and *CCEO* canons 256-261. There are no canons that apply specifically to archives in religious institutes or societies of apostolic life. However, by analogy, the canons on diocesan archives can be applied. The law gives indications of what type of material ought to be preserved, e.g., sacramental records, and documents regarding church property ownership and rights (c. 1284 § 2, 9^o; *CCEO* c. 1028 § 2, 8^o).

The diocesan chancellor is the legal custodian of the archives (c. 482 § 1; *CCEO* c. 252 § 1). Canons 486-491 and *CCEO* canons 252-261 address the chancellor of the diocesan curia and his or

¹³ Benedict XIII, Constitution *Maxima vigilantia*, 14 June 1727, in *Bullarium Romanum* 12, Rome, 1736, 221-225.

her role in maintaining the diocesan archives. Together with the diocesan bishop, the chancellor determines what is of its nature private and what is public. In turn, this determines what should be kept in the secret archive and what can be kept in the general archive.

The law places emphasis on the confidential nature of the archive and archive material. Therefore, access is restricted (c. 487 § 1). There are three sections in the archives, that is, general, historical, and secret archives (489 § 1). All three must be securely locked (c. 486 § 2). Only the diocesan bishop keeps the key to the secret archive, and the same norm can apply by analogy to the major superior of a religious institute. The chancellor and the diocesan administrator can access the secret archive when necessary.

3.1 – GENERAL ARCHIVE (CC. 486-488)

The records of the general administration of the diocese are kept in the general archive. The diocesan bishop, vicar general, moderator of the curia, chancellor, archivist, and chancery notaries have access to the general archive. Access by other persons in the diocesan curia may be granted as needed, with the permission of the diocesan bishop or the chancellor.

The obligation of some practical, orderly arrangement of the archives is the subject of canon 486 (*CCEO* c. 256). Active documents or files that are not strictly confidential are kept in the general archive; otherwise, they belong in the secret archives. Included in the general archives are common documents (active files) like records of ordinations (c. 1053 and *CCEO* c. 774) and authentic documents regarding church property ownership and rights (c. 1284 § 2, 9° and *CCEO* c. 1028 § 2, 8°).

Records are to be maintained according to the guidelines established in particular law for archives, including a retention schedule. Records older than the retention period should be destroyed in accordance with the law and the directive in the retention policy. The exception is if records are relevant to current civil or canonical litigation, in which case the records must be preserved until the chancellor (in consultation with canonical and civil counsel) determines that the records are no longer needed.

3.2 – THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE (C. 491)

The historical archive contains records of historical significance to the diocese or other ecclesiastical institution.¹⁴ The diocesan

14 J.M. O’Toole, “Diocesan Archives: Twenty-Five Years of Preserving American Catholic History,” in *U.S. Catholic Historian*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1998), 1-2.

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bishop, the vicar general, the moderator of the curia, the chancellor, the archivist, and chancery notaries have access to the historical archives. Others may be granted permission. The archive is to be locked, and only the bishop and the chancellor are to have the key (c. 487 § 1). The permission of either the bishop or of *both* the moderator of the curia and the chancellor is required to enter the archive (c. 487 § 1 and *CCEO* c. 257 § 1).

Canon 487 § 2 allows interested parties to access/obtain an authentic public document (or a photocopy), personally or through a proxy. The canon does not grant the right to access private documents. The removal of any document from the archives is restricted by canon 488 (*CCEO* c. 258), except with the consent of the bishop or of *both* the moderator of the curia and the chancellor, and only for a short time. Historical documents become public after seventy years, but confidential documents remain confidential indefinitely.¹⁵ Civil legislation must be consulted, and nothing from the historical archive is to be destroyed.

3.3 – THE SECRET ARCHIVE (CC. 489-490)

The protection of confidential church documents in a secret file originated with a 1741 decree by Pope Benedict XIV.¹⁶ The 1917 Code of Canon Law mandated each diocese to maintain archives which are locked and from which documents cannot be removed (see *CIC/17* c. 379 § 1). Canons 389 and 340 of the 1983 Code govern secret archives: “In the diocesan curia there is also to be a secret archive, or at least in the common archive there is to be a safe or cabinet, completely closed and locked, which cannot be removed; in it documents to be kept secret are to be protected most securely” (c. 489 § 1). Once placed in the secret archive, documents cannot be taken out, and they can only be accessed by the diocesan bishop for consultation. Confidential documents and documents of great sensitivity are kept securely there, and the diocesan bishop is the sole custodian of the key (c. 490 § 1).

A few canons specify the documents to be kept in the secret archive, including matrimonial dispensations (c. 1082), secret marriages (c. 1133), dispensations from impediments to holy orders (cc. 1047-1048), decrees of dismissal from religious life (c.700), documents relating to loss of clerical status by dismissal, and invalidity of orders or dispensations (cc. 290-293). The Code

15 F. Morrissey, “Confidentiality, Archives and Records Management,” in *The Catholic Archive*, 26 (2006), 21.

16 Benedict XIV, Encyclical letter *Satis vobis*, 17 November 1741, nos. 10-11, <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedictus-xiv/it/documents/enciclica--i-satis-vobis-compertum--i--17-novembre-1741-il-pont.html>.

also specifies that preliminary investigations (c. 1717) and “the acts of the investigation, the decrees of the ordinary which initiated and concluded the investigation, and everything which preceded the investigation are to be kept in the secret archive of the curia” (c. 1719).

Some documents in the secret archive are kept at the discretion of the diocesan bishop to prevent scandal or illegitimate damage to someone’s good name, including priest personnel files.¹⁷ It should be noted that “[...] placing personnel files in the diocesan secret archive will not suffice to shield confidential documents from court ordered disclosure in civil litigation.”¹⁸

When can records in the secret archive be destroyed? Penal or criminal case documents are to be destroyed only if there has been a canonical trial that has issued a definitive sentence. If no trial has taken place, all documents are to be kept. If the case is terminated for any other reason before a final determination of guilt or innocence, the entire file must be retained. Documents in the secret archive must be maintained until the guilty party has died, or ten years have passed from the condemnatory sentence. A summary case with the texts of the definitive sentence is to be retained permanently (c. 489 § 2 and *CCEO* c. 260 § 2).

Access to the secret archive is restricted to the diocesan bishop (c. 489) and people authorized by him (c. 490). The diocesan administrator has restricted access to the secret archive, in a case of true necessity.

On 22 October 2019 with the *motu proprio*, “For the Change of the Name of the Vatican Secret Archive to the Vatican Apostolic Archive,” Pope Francis renamed the Vatican Secret Archive the Vatican Apostolic Archive, “without prejudice to its identity, its structure and its mission.”¹⁹ It may be time to begin to use language like “restricted access archive” or “reserved archive.”

17 See N.P. Cafardi, “Discovering the Secret Archives: Evidentiary Privileges for Church Records,” in *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1993-1994), 97.

18 *Ibid.*, 99.

19 Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter m.p. *L’esperienza storica*, 22 October 2019, in AAS, 111 (2019), 1681- 1683, English translation in *Review for Religious*, (2020), 49-51.

Is the Christian story big enough to capture the modern imagination? *Only if it spreads its cosmic wings*

Hilda Geraghty

In today's Ireland we live in a culture where a child will probably grow to lose whatever Christian faith was imparted to it by older generations. Somehow the story of Jesus, and the whole biblical perspective around him, are no longer what they were for older generations: a picture of reality, a world view on which to build their lives. "It is now seen as archaic to hold Catholic values among the student body." These are the words of one teacher who voiced concern during a survey on bullying in Irish schools.¹

Archaic. The word stings. *Of the past.* Is this why it has got harder to transmit faith *per se* as the future unfolds? If it has become archaic to many, the reason, to my mind, is that *the Christian faith is in a crisis of the imagination.* (Not at all 'an imaginary crisis,' I hasten to add, – it is all too real.)

By imagination I don't mean fantasy, a power to conjure up what is unreal. I mean the vital faculty that creates images leading to our dreams, and then drives us to pursue them. Could we ever climb a mountain, become a doctor, or take to the air, if we didn't first imagine ourselves doing it? "Imagination is everything," said Einstein, "it is the preview of life's coming attractions." It is what makes things real to us, and we operate from there.

IMAGINATION AND THE FORMATION OF FAITH

However, it was St John Henry Newman who pointed out how critically important the *imagination* is to the formation of faith.

1 *The Furrow*, December 2021, *Difficult times for Catholic students in second Level Schools? The voices of RE teachers.* p 698.

Hilda Geraghty is a retired secondary school teacher, living in Dublin, with post-graduate qualifications in Spirituality, Catechetics, and Applied Youth Ministry. She is a member of the International Teresian Association, which is a Private Association of the Faithful, whose mission is to evangelise through education and culture. For more on Teilhard's thinking, google her website - Seeing whole with Teilhard de Chardin @teilharddechardinforall.com

IS THE CHRISTIAN STORY BIG ENOUGH?

Terrence Merrigan writes:

‘In the Grammar of Assent, Newman claims that “the original instrument” of conversion and the “principle of fellowship” among the first Christians was the “Thought or Image of Christ.” Moreover, this “central Image” continues to serve as the “vivifying idea both of the Christian body and of individuals in it.” The image of Christ is the principal of Christian fraternity, and the source and soul of Christian “moral life”. It “both creates faith, and then rewards it.” The whole life of the Church can be conceived as the endeavour to promote and perpetuate this image. Indeed, the whole life of the Church, its narrative tradition, its ethics, and its spirituality can be regarded as – ideally- the objectification of this image in history.’²

What, then, is the image of Christ that the official Church offers today? The low figures for religious practice would suggest that this central, all-important image needs a whole new interpretation if the Church is to inspire people once again to follow Jesus.

Merrigan continues:

‘Newman’s decision to explore religious faith in terms of the imagination was born of his conviction that “all beliefs-religious, secular and political-must first be credible to the imagination, the faculty which enables us to relate to an object as a ‘whole’, that is to say, as something with a claim on us.” Indeed, for Newman, the entire religious history of humankind might be said to have its roots in an act of the imagination that shapes both our self-understanding, and our image of the Divine. Newman went on to make the very interesting point: the Christian faith “appeals to the imagination, as a great fact, wherever it comes; it strikes the imagination.” Those who would do battle with it “must find some idea equally vivid ..., something fascinating, something capable of possessing, engrossing and overwhelming; their cause is lost, unless they can do this.”’³

But isn’t this just what has happened to faith today? – An ‘equally vivid idea,’ has taken hold of the modern imagination, not caused by any ‘who would do battle with it’ but rather by the startling increase in human scientific knowledge over the last three centuries. Teilhard de Chardin wondered, *‘Is the world not in the*

2 Terrence Merrigan & Ian.T. Ker [eds], John Newman and The Word, *Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs* 27 [2000], P.6

3 Quotations by Terrence Merrigan sourced on the internet which gave no reference, but are probably from Merrigan’s book *The Imagination in the Life and Thought of John Henry Newman*.

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process of becoming more vast, more close, more dazzling ...? Will it not burst our religion asunder? Eclipse our God?'

He was convinced that the Church was now offering 'too small a Christ' to people living in the modern/postmodern world. This is dangerous, because, as Leonard Sweet writes, 'If something doesn't capture the imagination, it doesn't survive.'⁴

KNOCKED FOR SIX

The reality is that the Christian imagination has been suffering seismic shocks one after the other since the 17th century when modernity dawned. Until that point the dramatic narrative of Genesis 1-3 at the opening of the Bible had gripped the western imagination with unparalleled power. It just explained so much! It revealed the nature of reality, the world as the creation of a good, unique, personal God, who gave the highest place in it to us humans, made in God's image and likeness; it explained the problems of life as originating in our choosing self over God, with the ensuing loss of paradise and death. Then in the New Testament Jesus, Son of God, is presented as saving the human race from this fatal predicament it finds itself in.

For sixteen centuries the *Genesis* narrative functioned to all intents and purposes not only as a faith document but also as history and science. It was the only source of information about our remote past and origins, and people accepted it literally, given its credentials as Scripture, the revealed Word of God. We knew what life was all about, and western civilisation built itself on this foundation. And we were commissioned to spread this knowledge to the whole world.

The *first* seismic shock was when Copernicus and Galileo between them proved that the sun, moon and stars did not revolve around our planet, but the other way round. This news so dismayed the Church (and everyone else) that Galileo was forced to recant and put under house arrest until his death. When he was proved correct, our self-importance as humans was dealt a blow: the sun, moon and stars didn't all revolve around us!

Human knowledge had developed the scientific method. Modernity had taken its baby steps, soon to grow into gigantic leaps. Of these, the *next* seismic shock to the religious imagination was, of course, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Was God the Creator needed any more, if life evolved and somehow created itself through continually adapting and perfecting itself? While not condemning Darwin, the Church quietly disapproved,

4 Leonard Sweet, *VIRAL :How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival*, USA: Waterbrook Press, 2014, p 81.

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and many 19th and 20th century theologians rejected the notion of evolution (though interestingly Newman thought it made sense). To this day many American theologians and churchgoers hold to the Intelligent Design theory which rejects evolution. However, the Church has since accepted it officially, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms. While not naming evolution as such, it states that

Creation ‘did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created ‘in a state of journeying’ (*in statu viae*) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it.’⁵

This is a dynamic interpretation of the universe, helpfully drawing *Genesis* closer to the evolutionary worldview. However, *it does not go on to claim any cosmic role for Christ in this*, but leaves the universe journey to God’s providence generally, as if it were a separate story from the salvation of human souls.

We can add in all that has happened since, as we explore the truly awesome macro and micro dimensions of the world, with ever more powerful instruments. So, we now know that we live on a tiny planet in a universe of billions of galaxies, while beneath us the depths of matter descend to the quantum level. If considered as a rival to faith, (however incorrectly), the world has definitely become “*something fascinating, something capable of possessing, engrossing and overwhelming.*”

HOW IS OUR FAITH TO COPE?

Who are we now? Do we matter in this vast universe? Or only to ourselves? And if we are believers, *who is Christ now* in this cosmic setting?

Since Teilhard’s time the cosmos has loomed ever larger in our culture. To imaginations brought up on dinosaurs and *Star Wars*, to humans who have walked on the moon and now peer at the earliest universe, can the Church offer a less-than-cosmic Christ? Not if the Christian faith is to seriously capture imaginations today.

So, what *is* the role and function of Christ in this evolving cosmos? This is the urgent question that Teilhard de Chardin set himself to address, throughout a lifetime of work, reflection and writing, because it was the key issue in his own personal life.

He lamented that in recent centuries the study of Christ, Christology, had not developed in tandem with human knowledge, hardly going beyond the definitions drawn up in the earliest centuries of the Church.

5 Catechism of the Catholic Church, p 71

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*“In a sense, Christ is in the Church in the same way as the sun is before our eyes. We see the same sun as our fathers saw, and yet we understand it in a much more magnificent way. I believe that the Church is still a child. Christ, by whom she lives, is immeasurably greater than she imagines. And yet, when thousands of years have gone by and Christ’s true face is a little more plainly seen, the Christians of those days will still, without any reservations, recite the Apostles’ Creed.”*⁶

In another writing he goes on to explain,

*“If we want to achieve the synthesis, so badly needed, between faith in God and faith in the world, then the best thing for us to do is to dogmatically present, in the person of Christ, the cosmic aspect and cosmic function which make him organically the principle and controlling force, the very soul of evolution.”*⁷

HAND IN GLOVE

It is a great pity that Vatican theologians were so resistant to Teilhard’s views that they forbade him to publish his writing at all. He was offering a totally renewed vision of what Christ’s incarnation means, by showing how it fits hand in glove with the magnificent universe story. The great purpose of the universe is to bring forth the fully evolved Christ as a single humanity, holy and whole, united to him, finally raised to eternal life, to the glory of God. *“The whole future of the earth, as of religion, it seems to me, depends on awakening our faith in the future.”* For this it is imperative that the Christian worldview become dynamic, interpreting reality as a journey and a process, and renew its dogmas, theology, language and imagery in that new light. Teilhard writes,

*“My compelling tendency is to universalise what I love, because otherwise I cannot love it. Now, a Christ who extended to only a part of the Universe, a Christ who did not in some way encompass the world in himself, would seem to me a Christ smaller than the Real... The God of our Faith would appear to me less grand, less dominant, than the Universe of our experience!”*⁸

6 5 January 1921, in a letter to a friend. *The Heart of Matter*, Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc. A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, San Diego, New York, London, p117-8.

7 From *Christianisme et Évolution*, 1945, p3, as quoted by N.M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, London and Harper and Row, New York, 1968, p.133.

8 *My Universe*, in *The Heart of Matter*, p 201, A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc, San Diego, New York, London

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So, without including the universe as integral to the Christ event, the image of Christ loses out, and pales in significance. But likewise, without renewed Christian thinking to guide it, the amazing universe story floats adrift in a vacuum of meaning. Its evolution has no apparent destiny or goal greater than well-being for all humans, while they live, at the very best. However, the gravitational pull on our imaginations exerted by the planet in space-time is so great that that the scientific side of the equation is proving stronger. People are abandoning the Christian story for the *new* story, whatever it might be. These are the ever-growing ranks of the ‘spiritual but not religious’.

THE BONE OF CONTENTION

While the Church has now quietly accepted the reality of evolution, it would not allow Teilhard to reinterpret the doctrine of original sin in a cosmic setting, and it was this that led to his exile in China for the greater part of his life, forbidden to publish anything.

The Catechism, compiled in 1994 almost forty years after his death, still warns, “The Church, which has the mind of Christ, knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ.”⁹

That logic works both ways, Teilhard would say: if we develop a deeper, dynamic, cosmic understanding of Christ as Saviour, we would need to correspondingly develop a deeper, cosmic and more credible understanding of sin and its origins. That issue, however, cannot be developed here.

EMPOWERING CHRISTIANS

To *conclude*, Teilhard unveils the cosmic dimensions of love, and of the Incarnation of God into matter. As such it has extraordinary new power to attract and inspire the imagination. It reveals the cosmic wings of the Christian faith, and thanks to him some people are happily flying, confident in a faith that is not afraid to come to terms with today’s culture. This is vitally important because, as Newman said, the imagination is where faith first forms in us. It makes faith real, and that is what galvanises us. A worldview based on the cosmic Christ gives Christians the happiness of *a totally meaningful reality* in which to live their lives.

If taught dogmatically by the Church, and properly communicated, this cosmic interpretation of Christ would empower and energise Christians *for their task in the world*, as Teilhard felt they needed to be. For him, it is an energy the Christian faith owes

9 Catechism of the Catholic Church, Veritas, 1994, Dublin, p 87.

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to the world, because Jesus the Christ came to transform it. To transform the world through a cosmic understanding of love, and to ‘save souls’, are two sides of the same coin.

Teilhard’s genius is to uncover *the oneness of the new cosmic reality in Christ*. In this way he lights up the cosmic dimensions of the final words at the Last Supper, where Jesus points towards the future he longed for, and for which he gave his life:

“May they all be one.

Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.”

(Jn 17:21-22)

Pope Benedict. Pope Benedict was the teaching pope, in contrast with his successor Pope Francis, who is the pastoral pope. Both men have brought differing skills and a unique style of their own to the papacy. Yet, they shared a fundamental belief in the vital witness of the Church to the truth of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospels. Pope Benedict XVI’s enduring influence and his lasting legacy lie in the intellectual realm, having spent his adult life as a Church theologian. He applied his great intelligence to fathoming the depths of the Christian faith as expressed and professed by Catholicism. His mental prowess enabled him to deepen and finely hone his own spirituality as well as increasing his knowledge of and insight into the theology of the Church. Pope Francis, speaking in June 2021 on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Benedict XVI’s priestly ordination, described the Pope Emeritus as ‘the contemplative of the Vatican’.

– BISHOP FINTAN MONAHAN, *His Homeward Journey: The Life and Works of Pope Benedict XVI*, Dublin: Veritas, 2023, p. 17.

Our Care of God's Creation: Towards an Ecological Spirituality

Bill Cosgrave

In his 2015 Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (LS) on Care for Our Common Home Pope Francis speaks of an ecological spirituality and how it can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world (LS 216). In light of this papal statement it would seem clear that our immediate task is to try to develop such an ecological spirituality. In this article an effort will be made to begin to move in that direction. We may start with a brief reflection on spirituality itself, indicating what it is and involves in and for our daily lives. Then we will turn to ecology and an exposition of what have been called the contemplative and the active dimensions or aspects of an ecological spirituality. In that context we will focus at some length on what the Pope refers to as the damage done to our Common Home and also on what he calls an ecological *conversion*. We will conclude, then, with some brief remarks on the prospects we humans have of making this ecological spirituality a reality in our world.

SPIRITUALITY TODAY

To begin, a quotation from my earlier article on spirituality will be appropriate.¹ A person's spirituality is simply how a person, as a spiritual being, as spirit in the world, believes, lives and acts in his/her personal life, in his/her relationships, in his/her communities, in God's creation and, of course, for the religious person in his/her relationship with God. How one believes, lives and acts will, naturally, be governed by the ideals, principles, values and virtues that one has adopted and committed oneself to and by means of which one seeks to develop a meaningful, productive and happy life in one's circumstances.

1 Bill Cosgrave, 'Understanding Spirituality Today', *The Furrow*, November 2017, pp 595-596. Later quoted as *Understanding*.

Bill Cosgrave is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns and the author of several books including *The Challenge of Christian Discipleship*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2012.

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We may express this in words closer to Rahner's reflections on our topic as follows.² One's spirituality, he says, will be the expression of the human spirit's effort or striving to develop oneself as a person by doing all possible to bring about authentic growth in knowledge, in freedom and in loving relationships. This will involve one in living by such values, principles and ideals as will serve to integrate one's life and make it meaningful. In other words, we can say that one's spirituality is one's way of consciously striving to integrate one's life and make it meaningful through pursuing knowledge, freedom and love in light of and governed by the highest and most important ideals, values and principles that one has discerned, chosen and endeavours to live out and realise in one's life as a person who is spirit, who is a spiritual being.³ Finally, to put it very briefly, we may quote Macquarrie (p 40), who says, 'spirituality has to do with *becoming a person in the fullest sense* [his emphasis].⁴ For us Christians, of course, this will take place in the context of our Christian faith, and within the Christian community, the Church.

With this understanding of spirituality in mind we can now move on to our main concern – spirituality and ecology.

ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY – ITS CONTEMPLATIVE DIMENSION

In his teaching on ecology Pope Francis speaks of Christian spirituality as encouraging a contemplative lifestyle (LS, 222). This is an attitude to life which enables one to have deep enjoyment in and from one's experience of living so as to cherish each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality, he says, proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little ... and which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us to be spiritually detached from what we possess (LS, 222). This contemplative outlook contrasts with the activism that is so characteristic of most Western Christian spirituality and attitudes in Western society that seek a constant flood of new consumer goods and the accumulation of pleasures (LS,222).

2 As quoted in Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*. Paulist Press, New York and Mahwah, N.J., 1997, p 32-33.

3 See John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality*. SCM Press, London 1972, chapter IV, pp 40ff.

4 Some significant implications of this understanding of spirituality are set out in my article referred to above, pp 596-602.

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A *deeper* aspect of this contemplative dimension of our spirituality is the following. Spirituality gives meaning to our lives. One of the basic and crucial desires and necessities in the life of all of us as spiritual beings is to find meaning in life, to live a meaningful life. We all search for meaning in life and, if we find it, we will experience life as worthwhile and will be happy to continue the lifestyle we thus find rewarding. If we ask – as we seldom do – what makes our life meaningful and worthwhile?, then the answer, in a word, is our spirituality. This spirituality may be religious or non-religious, it may be complex or simple, communal or just personal, but it is the ideals, principles, values and virtues that inspire and energise us to pursue knowledge, freedom and love that give meaning to our lives as spiritual beings. In other words, it is our spirituality that gives meaning to our lives.⁵

Because we are here discussing ecology and the ecological dimension of spirituality, it is necessary to reflect on what this brings to the contemplative aspect of our spirituality in addition to what has been said above. Francis invites us to develop an intimate, loving and tender relationship with the creatures and the world around us, seeing them all as *gifts* from God to be cherished and appreciated so as to enrich them and enable them to contribute to life in a way that enhances God's creation, human and non-human (LS, 200,224, 227).

What has been said here about the relationship of God's creatures, human and non-human, is expressed by the Pope in his oft-quoted statement, 'everything is connected' (LS,91, 117, etc.) We humans are 'an integral part of the web of life and of the cosmos'.⁶ We are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion (LS,220). We are here speaking of an attitude of the heart, which approaches life with serene attentiveness and which Jesus taught us, when he invited us to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air (LS, 226). This attitude tends to generate a capacity for wonder that deepens and enriches our spirituality and can result in the ability to experience God in his gifts and in all things (LS,225, 233).⁷

THE DAMAGE ALREADY DONE TO OUR COMMON HOME

The Pope highlights the sinful way we are despoiling and neglecting our world. Pollution, he tells us, takes a variety of

5 Understanding, p 597.

6 Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth – From Leo XIII to Pope Francis*. Revised Edition. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, 2016, p 420. Hereafter referred to as Dorr, *Option*.

7 Dorr, *Option*, 420, 421.

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forms, many of which are part of people's experience (LS, 20). Exposure to atmospheric pollutants produces a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and causes millions of premature deaths (LS, 20). There is also pollution that impacts everyone caused by transport, industrial fumes, substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilisers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agrottoxins in general.⁸ The Pope also highlights the 'hundreds of millions of tons of waste generated each year, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive'. This is a problem not only because of the pollution it causes but also because we are using up the precious resources of the Earth at an unsustainable rate.⁹ The Pope adds, then, in a much quoted sentence, 'The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth' (LS, 21).

Another form of waste is characterised in the Encyclical as being linked to our 'throwaway culture' (LS, 22). Approximately one third of the food produced is discarded and whenever food is thrown out, it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor (LS, 50).¹⁰ The rise in world temperatures is giving rise to further negative developments in relation to human living and the welfare of the planet. There is now a constant rise in sea levels, acidification of the oceans, melting of the glaciers at the poles and extreme weather events such as droughts and floods (LS, 23). As in other cases, it is the poor who suffer most from these problems (LS, 48), even though they are the ones who have done the least to cause the problems.¹¹ Most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases released mainly as a result of human activity. The Pope tells us also that this problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels and also such practices as deforestation for agricultural purposes (LS, 23). There is an urgent need to develop policies so that the emission of carbon dioxide and other polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, by substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy (LS, 26).

The Pope notes also that there is today a problem about water and its scarcity in some areas. Francis asserts that access to safe, drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights (LS, 30 & 185). Further, he tells us that water poverty especially affects Africa, where large sections

8 Seán McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth – A Call to a New Theology*. Bear & Company, Sante Fe, New Mexico 1986, chapters 2 & 3.

9 Dorr, *Option*, p 418.

10 Dorr, *Option*, p 418.

11 Dorr, *Option*, p 418.

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of the population have no access to drinking water or experience droughts which impede agricultural production LS, 27-31).

LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

Under the heading 'Loss of Biodiversity' the Pope reminds us that each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species. Because of this, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence (LS, 33). Often human intervention to resolve the problem further aggravates the situation (LS, 34). One example the Pope cites is the Amazon region (LS, 38). He points out that when forests are burned down or levelled for purposes of cultivation, within the space of a few years countless species are lost and the areas frequently become arid wastelands. This has a greater significance than might at first appear, since 'The equilibrium of our planet ... depends on the health of the Amazon region ... It serves as a great filter of carbon dioxide, which helps avoid the warming of the earth.'¹² He notes that '... marine life in rivers, lakes, seas and oceans ... is affected by uncontrolled fishing, leading to a drastic depletion of certain species. Selective forms of fishing which discard much of what they collect continues unabated (LS, 40)'. In relation to coral reefs Francis teaches that many of these reefs are already barren or in a state of constant decline. This phenomenon is due largely to pollution which reaches the sea as a result of deforestation, agricultural monocultures, industrial waste and destructive fishing methods, especially those using cyanide and dynamite (LS, 41).¹³

OTHER DAMAGING DEVELOPMENTS

The Pope moves on in his Encyclical to emphasise the link between environmental degradation and human and social degradation (LS, 48ff). This is to be seen in the negative aspects of city life in many places where many neighbourhoods are congested, chaotic and lacking sufficient green space (LS, 44). There are many examples of social exclusion, social breakdown, increased violence, drug use and drug trafficking and the loss of identity (LS, 46). This degradation or deterioration of the environment affects the poorest people more than others with significant negative effects (LS, 48). Here it is important to hear the cry of the poor as well as the cry of the earth (LS, 49). The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest

12 Pope Francis in Beloved Amazon *Querida Amazonia*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis, 2020, para. 48.

13 See Seán McDonagh, 'The Fate of the Oceans', *Messenger*, May 2021, pp 44-5.

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areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. Often the businesses which operate this way are multinationals, which, as they withdraw from these developing countries, leave behind great human and environmental liabilities, e.g., unemployment, the depletion of natural resources, deforestation and the impoverishment of agriculture. These forms of damage suffered by developing countries at the hands of developed countries are often referred to as ‘ecological debt’ owed to the countries of the South. At the same time developing countries are often burdened by what is called foreign debt incurred by buying policies and programmes for development from countries in the North.¹⁴

THE NEED FOR AN ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

What has been said so far makes it clear that most human beings are far from committed to undoing the damage already inflicted on the environment by human activity. The result is a crisis of no mean proportions that will not be diffused easily or soon. So it is in this context that Pope Francis declares that ‘the ecological crisis is a summons to profound interior *conversion* (LS, 217)’.

UNDERSTANDING CONVERSION

While we are familiar with the word conversion in both secular and religious contexts, it turns out, however, that coming to understand its full meaning in any adequate way is no easy task.¹⁵ It will be helpful to begin by quoting how one writer presents the issue. Mark Miller says that ‘its fundamental meaning rests in that personal transformation whereby a person lives by a profound new assessment of what is important and valuable’.¹⁶ Scholars speak of *three* aspects or kinds of conversion.¹⁷

a) *Affective Conversion*: here one is referring to how one feels about things, indeed about everything, including people, rather

14 On this foreign debt see Seán McDonagh, *The Greening of the Church*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, 1990, chapter 1, pp 9 -37. On page 15 he says: ‘The debt can only be paid by taking food out of the mouths of the poor, especially women and children, and by irreversibly damaging the environment.’

15 *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Editor Michael Downey. A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, p 230. Hereafter referred to as *Dictionary*.

16 *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. General Editor, Richard P. McBrien. HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY, 10022, p 366. Hereafter referred to as *Encyclopedia*.

17 *Dictionary*, p 234. Donal Dorr, ‘Ecological Conversion’, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, pp 10-13; *Encyclopedia*, p 366.

than how one thinks about them. And of course, we know that how you feel about someone or something can have a notable influence on how you think and indeed act in relation to that person or thing or situation. Clearly then, our feelings or lack of them can make a big difference in what we consider important or valuable in any area of life including in regard to nature and God's creation. (Some writers refer to this affective aspect of conversion as its psychic aspect.)¹⁸

So in relation to the beauty of nature and the marvels of God's creation many of us just take them for granted. In such a case it is obvious that an affective conversion is needed, if we are to appreciate the wonders of nature and God's creation and to take urgent action to work towards undoing the damage we human beings have already done. These are the efforts that we must attempt, if we are to work towards what Thomas Berry has called 'a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world' and again 'a spirituality for justice for the devastated Earth community'.¹⁹ All this makes it clear that bringing our affections or feelings to appreciate and love the beauty of God's creation will involve for all of us a significant struggle. But this will be essential if we are to be converted ecologically or to achieve in our life the ecological conversion we know to be necessary.

b) *Intellectual Conversion*: It is accepted today that our feelings or emotions don't just give rise to a state of emotionalism that has no objective reality or basis. Rather in our affective life there is an intellectual element that can point us in a direction that can enable us to arrive at a realistic understanding of the ecological area and what we are called to do to negate the harm already done to God's creation, and, positively, to take the necessary steps to realise what Pope Francis refers to as an integral ecology (LS, chapter 4).²⁰

Here, then we discern clearly the major task ahead of us in relation to ecology, viz., reversing the destruction already inflicted on our environment, a destruction that still continues today, and working towards the goal of integral ecology. In addition, this intellectual dimension of our conversion will bring a new understanding of how and why we are called to the ecological task or vocation just mentioned and also a general picture at least of what will be the practicalities required to meet the demands of

18 Encyclopedia, p 366; Neil Ormerod & Cristina Vanin, Ecological Conversion: What does it Mean? *Theological Studies*, 77 (2) 2016, pp 328-352 at pp 332, 346-349.

19 As quoted in Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, p 10.

20 See my book *The Challenge of Christian Discipleship*. The Columba Press, Dublin 2012. Chapter 1: 'The Emotions in the Moral Life'; and Chapter 2: 'Emotional Intelligence: Its Meaning and Practical Implications.' Also Michael G. Lawler & Todd A. Salzman, 'The Jesus we Believe in was Right-Brained: "Go and Do Likewise"'. *The Furrow*, March 2021, pp 168-175.

that vocation. In the process of our intellectual conversion we will become clearer on the values involved in ecological integrity and will deepen our commitment to them. Thus, as one article puts it,²¹ ‘intellectual conversion helps support moral conversion by allowing us to understand and affirm the full reality of values’. This it does especially by its openness to and its concern to consult and take on board the insights and findings of science, since ‘science is particularly significant in uncovering the causes of climate change (LS, 23).²² In particular it can and does make us aware of and heighten our understanding of the process of evolution, which has been operating in our universe from the very beginning and which is moving that universe towards ever greater interconnected complexity.²³

c) *Moral Conversion*: ‘The present environmental destruction is the end product of generations of decisions based on a failure to attend to the ecological impact of those decisions, either initially through ignorance or ... wilfully and maliciously’.²⁴

In the present context what is needed by all of us is, simply, a moral conversion. This will involve and require actions aimed at undoing the damage already done to nature and activity to enhance the welfare of the environment. To work to promote this moral conversion we will need to have made an *affective* and an *intellectual* conversion.

What is involved in this moral conversion may be spelled out in the following manner. Scholars today usually draw relevant insights and teaching from the Bible. We may summarise their findings in the words of Pope Francis’ ecological Encyclical. ‘Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognising that they tell us to ‘till and keep’ the garden of the world (cf Gen 2.15). ‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature.’ (LS, 67). The Pope then adds (LS, 82): ‘... it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination.’ He continues (LS, 116): ‘Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism An inadequate presentation

21 Ormerod & Vanin, p 344.

22 Ormerod & Vanin, p 345.

23 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, pp 11-12.

24 Ormerod & Vanin, p 336.

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of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world ... our 'dominion' over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.²⁵

Having earlier spelled out the damage already done to God's creation by human activity, it will be appropriate now in a more positive vein to highlight the *values* that must be respected, appreciated and promoted so that we can be said to be truly dedicated to realising the integral ecology that the Pope stresses so strongly.

BASIC VALUES²⁶

These values are being neglected and undermined by the damage being done to the ecosphere in recent decades. These values include especially human health and strength. These are being impacted by the negative effects on global food production and by health problems arising from contamination of water supplies by various forms of pollution. These are damaging the poor in a special way but everyone has been and is at risk. Thus, our global patterns of production and consumption impinge on us all. Individuals can take action to prevent such effects in their own lives, e.g., being careful about what they consume, having health checks, etc. but the global problems still persist and continue to inflict damage on great numbers of people.

SOCIAL VALUES (LS, 138-142)²⁷

In relation to these values in moral conversion and the common good of society Pope Francis has some very relevant and strong points to make in his Encyclical. He highlights the level of social decline as a result of our failures to attend to the environment (LS, 46). Clearly then, moral conversion as it fosters and promotes

25 On anthropocentrism see Dermot A. Lane, *Theology and Ecology – The Wisdom of Laudato Si'*. Messenger Publications, Dublin, 2020, Chapter 2. It is important to note here also that Fr Lane quotes theologians and scholars who question, not just the dominion model of creation, but also the stewardship model, which the Pope accepts (LS, 116). They assert that the stewardship model ends up promoting anthropocentrism and is dualistic and hierarchical (page 123). The new model they promote is called the Community of Creation or kinship model. It is, they say, a theocentric model that places us humans within creation, not at the centre or above nature. This involves a significant shift in our understanding of the human, so that the difference between humans and non-humans is a matter of degree and not of kind, though human uniqueness must still be affirmed (pp 124 -132).

26 Ormered & Vanin, pp 336-338.

27 Ormered & Vanin, pp 338-340.

social values must include concern for ecological values. The Pope points the finger of blame at our technological, economic and political systems, in particular at the fact that the political order is dominated by the other two. Thus technological systems and new technological developments are deployed in disregard of their environmental and human impact (LS, 54). Some companies and businesses are moving away from this approach and taking steps to protect the environment but much damage to God's creation is still being done in relation to social values. In this regard the Pope speaks about the chaos in many modern cities and how the world's poor are still mired in dreadful social conditions, while the rich live a life of hyper-consumption and luxury (LS, 44-46).²⁸ Another damaging factor here is fossil fuels. 'Current political policies globally provide massive subsidies to fossil fuel companies to continue their exploration for new sources of fuels. This goes on despite the fact that 'the production of current reserves of fossil fuels already threatens the planet with unsustainable levels of greenhouse gas emissions.'²⁹ And of course, fossil fuels tend to heat the atmosphere and so promote climate change and its usual negative impact on social values and our society and ourselves.

It will be important here to emphasise one common feature of business life in our world that is seen as contributing notably to the damage being done to the environment. Salzman & Lawler express it as follows:³⁰ "The prioritization of profit and those who benefit from profit over the vital and social values realised by promoting the common good and protecting the environment demands moral conversion. Such conversion itself demands "profound changes in 'lifestyles, models of production and consumption and the established structures of power which today govern societies'" (LS, 5, quoting John Paul II, 1991). This links closely with what Dorr says about models of development:³¹ 'There is no way we can live up effectively to these commitments [our ecological obligations], unless we challenge the model of development that has by now been adopted in almost every country in the world. It has become very evident that this type of so-called development is unsustainable and immoral; it involves despoiling the Earth and it brings about an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the vulnerable.'

28 Ormered & Vanin, p 340.

29 Ormered & Vanin, p 339.

30 Todd A. Salzman & Michael G. Lawler, *Introduction to Catholic Theological Ethics – Foundations and Applications*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 10545, 2019, p 174.

31 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, p 14.

Cultural Values: Pope Francis tells us that 'Ecology involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense. ... Culture ... cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment' (LS, 143). He points out immediately where the problem is: 'a consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalised economy, has a levelling effect on cultures.' There is here, he says, 'a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures' (LS, 144). In opposition to the dominant anthropocentric culture the Pope proposes a new ecological culture as 'a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm' (LS, 111). Signs of this 'cultural revolution' are already to be discerned as, he says, 'An authentic humanity, calling for a new synthesis, seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, almost unnoticed' (LS, 112), putting us on the way 'to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur' (LS, 114).

Personal Values: It is obvious that, if moral conversion in this ecological context is to become a reality, all of us must play our part and make a conscious, determined and continuing effort to promote the welfare of the environment and thus enhance God's creation. If we don't, Pope Francis does not hesitate to say that there will be a need for us to *repent* of the ways we have harmed the planet and he challenges us to acknowledge our sins against creation (LS,8).³² The Pope re-affirms this when he writes: 'A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop unless people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more fraternal.'³³

As we pursue and promote the values we have been considering, we will develop and deepen the virtues required for our ecological conversion, or, as Francis names them, 'ecological virtues' (LS, 88). 'Only by cultivating sound virtues,' the Pope tells us, 'will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment' (LS, 211). Francis reminds us that there is a need for us Christians to practise the virtue of gratitude to God for the gift of his creation and to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works (LS, 220). The Pope also lists a number of simple ways of acting that can promote the ecological conversion in question here and improve the world around us. Examples are: avoiding the use of

32 See Jane Mellett, 'Ecological Sin', *Messenger*, December 2020, pp 32-33.

33 Beloved Amazon *Querida Amazonia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis. Veritas, Dublin, 2020, n. 58.

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plastics and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights (LS, 211).

TOWARDS MAKING THIS ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY A REALITY

We have discussed ecological spirituality at length in both its contemplative and active dimensions. We have highlighted many of the values required in order that each of us may become ecologically committed and active in promoting the welfare of the environment, both in undoing the damage we have already done and in enhancing God's creation in a positive manner. Many people are already committed to this *twofold* task or vocation which we have as human beings and especially as Christians. Much good has already been done; much more is needed by individuals, groups, businesses and companies, national and international, and, of course, by Governments. In relation to these business and political groups, it seems, however, that the news is not so good. Donal Dorr says:³⁴ '...the dominant powers in our world are not willing to make the kind of changes that are required to deal with climate change.' And in the same context he quotes another writer who says: 'global inaction on climate change is by no means the result of confusion or denialism or a lack of planning; to the contrary, the maintenance of the status quo is the plan'.³⁵ The basic reason for this firm stance of the dominant powers in our world is that they subscribe to 'the dominant ideology of subordinating ecological concerns to the making of short-term profit'.³⁶ 'At the present time most politicians and governments are locked into the current exploitative system.'³⁷ Supporting this system is 'the present dysfunctional business ethos and model of development' that have been adopted by almost every country in the world.³⁸ We may add another quotation that makes the same point. Dermot Lane says, quoting Naomi Klein: 'The triumph of market logic, with its ethos of domination and fierce competition, is paralysing almost all serious efforts to respond to climate change.'³⁹

34 *Doctrine & Life*, October, 2019, pp 22-23.

35 Same, p 23, footnote 1: from Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. 2016, University of Chicago Press, p 145.

36 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, September 2019, p 29.

37 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, October 2019, p 22.

38 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, October 2019, p 25 and *Doctrine & Life*, July-August 2019, p 14.

39 Dermot Lane, 'Convincing the Public about the Urgency of Climate Change', *Doctrine & Life*, Nov. 2017, p 45-46.

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With these attitudes and practices dominant in society and in economies nowadays one has to admit that overcoming climate change and promoting the welfare of God's creation is at this time a very uphill task. And with the Catholic Church in urgent need of renewal in its spirituality and theology,⁴⁰ it is not hard to imagine that the world is set to see even more damage done to God's creation.

CONCLUSION

Well known writer on ecological issues, Seán McDonagh, can provide us with some words to end our reflections. He writes:⁴¹ 'As a species we need to educate ourselves about the impact of our wasteful industrial societies and, most of all, we need to devise urgently strategies and lifestyles that will allow us to live in a more sustainable way with the rest of creation. Every group of society, including politicians, economists, industrialists, farmers and religious people will need to be involved. It is a gigantic task but essential if we are to leave a beautiful vibrant and fruitful planet to future generations.' Jane Mellett adds: 'living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience (LS, 217). This requires a radical change of heart, a true ecological conversion.'⁴²

40 Dorr, *Doctrine & Life*, October, 2019, pp 27-35.

41 *Messenger*, Messenger Publications, Dublin, January 2021, p 50.

42 'Ecological Sin', *Messenger*, December 2020, p 34.

Homilies for March (A)

Columba McCann

Second Sunday of Lent

March 5

Gn. 12:1-4. 2 Tm. 1: 8-10. Mt. 17: 1-9.

From the days of the Irish famine countless people have left our shores in search of a better life. More recently people have come to Ireland to escape war or poverty. The great father-figure standing behind Judaism and Christianity was also a migrant, Abraham, or Abram as he is called in today's reading. 'Leave your country your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you.' And God promised to shower him with blessings.

In Lent God can lead each one of us on an equally important journey, even if we never move house. He will show us where we need to go and what we need to leave behind. In today's gospel he shows us our final destination: we will share in 'that glory whose beauty he showed in his own Body, to the amazement of his Apostles' (Prayer over the People). When we consider Jesus, his body shining in light we are looking at our own future. There are countless blessings in store for us, if we are willing to make the journey and leave a lot behind. The Letter of St John says that, in the end, when we see Jesus face to face, we will discover that we have become like him.

We know from the gospels that Peter and Andrew left behind a perfectly good fishing business to follow Jesus. One day they said to Jesus, 'We have left everything to follow you.' Jesus replied that they would receive back a hundredfold in return. Zaccheus the tax collector had to leave his greed behind, and in the process left behind a lot of unhappiness. Matt Talbot was a teenage alcoholic who, once he decided to follow Jesus in earnest, was given the strength to leave alcohol behind for over forty years. Each of us has our own addictions. Aside from the obvious ones like sexual addiction or drugs or over-eating, other addictions can also pull us apart, like being addicted to praise. Jesus once challenged his listeners: why do you look for the glory that comes from other people instead of looking for the glory that comes from God?

Columba McCann OSB, Glenstal Abbey.

Jesus led his disciples away to a place where they could be alone. Every Sunday, he leads us away from our homes and our usual preoccupations to gather together and to be with him in a privileged way. Each Sunday the voice from heaven calls out, this is my Beloved Son: listen to him. Maybe he's leading some of us to more silent time away with him outside Mass as well. We might be asked to leave behind some of the non-essentials that are making us too busy to have time to pray. We might be asked to put aside time to consider more carefully the scripture readings so that we can really listen to him more deeply. Today God says to each of us: start your journey – I will show you.

Third Sunday of Lent

March 12

Ex 17:3-7. Rm 5: 1-2, 5-8. Jn. 4: 5-42.

Jesus meets a woman at a well, and asks her for water. Before long, everyone in her village is convinced that he is the saviour of the world, just by hearing what he has to say. In our own time, thousands of people around the world are still turning to him. They have caught onto something of who he really is. They are getting ready to be baptised this Easter, and during the Sundays of Lent their parishes are praying for them. They are thirsting for something only Jesus has to offer.

This living water is described by St Paul: it's the love of God which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. Yet we have to be honest with ourselves: do these words of St Paul really ring true? Am I aware of a divine love that has been poured into my heart? Some people do occasionally experience overwhelming love, almost out of nowhere; others find, for example when they pray, that there is a gentler movement of love stirring within them; but let's admit it, talk of 'love poured into our hearts' sometimes feels like a foreign language – it must be about somebody else, not me.

There might be various reasons. Psychologists say that there is a lot within us of which we are not conscious; this might include God's love. Maybe sometimes God plays hard to get, in order to draw us out more. But sometimes it may be that we are like a well that has gotten filled with debris: the water continues to flow deep down but it is inaccessible. There can be so much noise of inner traffic in our heads that we don't hear the gentle whisper of love. Maybe we don't believe in it much and don't make space for it, so God, like a discreet lover, draws gently back.

When adults prepare for Baptism, Lent is a time of purification and inner healing as they approach the fountain of living water.

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For us who are baptised, Lent is the time to start turning *back* to the fount of living water, almost as if for the first time, because we too need healing.

So where do I start? A meeting with Jesus, like the woman at the well, is a great place to begin. He knows already that her life has been marked by sadness and rejection. So he gently suggests, 'Go and call your husband'. This gives her an opportunity to open out the story of her fragile heart just a little, and within a few sentences the whole truth is out. In response he reveals himself to her in a surprising manner when she mentions the Messiah: 'I who am speaking to you, I am he.' No words of rejection from him. Mutual self-revelation.

The tough, painful story of human living is also poured out in the first reading: the people are terrified they will die of thirst, and Moses is terrified of them. They cry out, perhaps with only little faith, but God's response is to refresh them.

A first step towards the living water might be to tell Jesus what it's really like to be me ...

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 19

1 Sm. 16: 1,6-7, 10-13. Eph. 5: 8-14. Jn. 9: 1-41.

Around now people start to say, 'It's great to see a bit of a stretch in the evenings.' The days are lengthening, and indeed this is the meaning behind the old English word 'Lent'. It's getting brighter and warmer, and nature is beginning to respond: animals come out of hibernation and plants begin to grow. We all look forward to a little more sunshine.

In 1972 Stevie Wonder's song 'You are the Sunshine of My Life' went to the top of the charts. It was about his wife. Clearly there is a different kind of sunshine that means a lot. Today St Paul offers us the most intense version of this when he says, 'Christ will shine on you.' Christ is, in the words of the gospel, 'the light of the world', and when we look towards him we come back to life.

When you love someone you see things about them that others miss. When God sees us he sees beyond appearances. When God saw David the shepherd boy, a little nobody in his family, he saw the future king of Israel who would shepherd his people. In the gospel, Jesus saw a beggar whose blindness would eventually reveal God's glory.

When the man was healed it seems that the onlookers had turned blind: they were confused as to whether he was still the same person they had seen begging on the side of the road. They might as well have been in the dark. The Pharisees made themselves blind

with stubbornness: they refused to see the hand of God at work in Jesus because he had apparently broken a Sabbath regulation. The parents of the man locked themselves in the dark, perhaps more dumb than blind, because they were afraid to speak out about what Jesus had done for their son. We too can be tempted to remain silent about our Christian faith for fear of rejection.

The man born blind didn't just get physical sight; he came slowly to recognise Jesus, to see him for who he really was. At first he referred to him as 'the man Jesus', later he was able to say that he was a prophet; and finally he recognised Jesus as the Son of Man, and worshipped him as his Lord.

What about us? Firstly, any time pray we are as close to Jesus as was the man born blind. Turning our minds and hearts towards him is already turning towards the light. Secondly, I might recognise that I have certain ways of acting and speaking that I only do 'under cover', in the dark so to speak. It may be an indicator that I should stop. Thirdly, the word of God can open my mind to see the world from God's perspective, so any time spent with the scriptures will help us to see beyond appearances to what really matters. Awake, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 26

Ez. 37: 12-14. Rm. 8: 8-11. Jn. 11: 1-45.

'I am going to raise you from your graves, my people,' God says in the first reading. But you might say, 'Sorry, I didn't realise I was living in a grave!' Whatever about us, the people to whom the prophet Ezekiel spoke certainly felt as good as dead: invaded by a foreign army, their country ruined, they had been uprooted and dragged into an alien land. But the prophet promised that God would plant them again in their own soil, and they would come back to life. Something similar, only far greater, is on offer for us through Christ.

Wouldn't it be great to be so deeply and strongly rooted ourselves that we would be fully alive and really fulfilled, no matter what happened? Could my roots go so deep that, I would find happiness no matter where I live, happiness whether I am popular or not, happiness whether money is tight or flowing, happiness whether health is good or poorly? Our deepest roots are actually in God, this is what keeps us alive. Our homeland is God. But the problem is that, so often we uproot ourselves, and then we begin to wilt. In the words of T.S Eliot, we end up 'living, and partly living'. The word of God, on the other hand speaks of the person who is like a tree planted beside flowing waters. Even when other plants are

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shrivelling up, it puts forth beautiful green leaves with careless freedom, because its roots are drawing water from deep down. The New Testament describes this as being ‘rooted in love and built on love’ – the love of God revealed in Jesus.

Today’s readings invite us to come to full life through him, with him, in him. Still, the journey to fuller life has its darker passages. Lazarus was a close friend, and yet Jesus let him die before visiting Bethany. Jesus put Martha and Mary through four dark days of grief. He even wept himself. But he knew what he was doing. He knew that they would experience something far more wonderful as a result. Like the blind man of last Sunday, the man who died would reveal God’s hand at work in Jesus.

If at times we feel we are living in the narrowness of the grave, we need to hear those words of Jesus, ‘I am the resurrection and the life’. I am your resurrection! Life with him puts down roots that will outlive biological death. Life with him brings joy that is not dependent on success. Even the darker struggles can be transformed by him into deeper sources of life.

Jesus called Lazarus powerfully out of his grave. His voice resounds today at every Mass. I am the resurrection and the life! I am the bread of life! Be one with me and come out of your grave

John O’Hagan. A lover of literature, poet, lawyer and judge, friend to John Henry Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins, O’Hagan was described in the weekly British magazine, the *Spectator*, as ‘known to all not only as a most learned and experienced lawyer with a serene temper and a judgement of rare balance, but as a scholar of wide and liberal culture, a man beloved and respected by all who knew him’. In the final quarter of his life, O’Hagan was closely associated with the scholars and poets who circulated around the Jesuit, Matthew Russell. He was a frequent contributor to Russell’s publication, the *Irish Monthly*, and was, in Russell’s view, the best man he had ever known, a virtual Irish Thomas More.

– THOMAS J. MORRISSEY, SJ, *The Most Estimable of Men: Judge John O’Hagan*, Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022, p. 9.

New Books

The Spirit of Catholicism. Vivian Boland OP. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2021. ISBN 978-1-4411-7802-2.

Introducing a book bearing the title *The Spirit of Catholicism* the names of twentieth century theologians such as Karl Adam, Henri de Lubac and Romano Guardini serve as a reminder to both how deep its roots run and how any renewal must tap into such sources. While ‘they proposed the Catholic Church as at least a sign pointing to an alternative understanding of a shared human life and a common human destiny’, their vision is vital ‘at a time when public perceptions of the Catholic Church in some parts of the world are often simply negative, a situation brought about to a significant extent by the actions and inactions of members of the Church themselves’. Complementing this view from within the Catholic Church there is also an acknowledgement of the ‘View from Outside’, especially as offered by ‘Olivier Clément from the perspective of Eastern Orthodox Christianity’ and ‘Walter Brueggeman from the perspective of Protestant Christianity’. With a tidy theological twist the theme emerges that ‘there are many reasons why it seems appropriate to say that the spirit of Catholicism is embodiment, the continuation in human history of the Incarnation of the Son of God’. By building on this experience of the embodied life in the church ‘understood in terms of sacramentality’ it is not only possible but necessary to envisage its membership and mission as essentially inter-related.

Divided into four parts the first is the shortest, starting with a chapter entitled *A People of God?* While the definition coming from Saint Cyprian of Carthage - ‘a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’ – describes communion as the initial and indispensable identifier of the church this part presents a plethora of images, both biblical and theological, indicating and interpreting the church present in the world and history. However, this plurality points to the ‘mystery of God [as] the reality that supports everything that is said’ about the church. *Part Two* develops the incarnational perspective in its scriptural presentation of Christ the Last Adam who, as ‘image and sacrament’, reveals and realizes the ‘sacred signs [by] which human beings continue to be restored to their true nature and are introduced to their eternal destiny’. Borrowing a sporting metaphor, the trifacta of Christ, church and sacrament treated in this part explore the models of body and city for the church which for Thomas Aquinas ‘both speak of unity and diversity’. With the focus on the structure and life of the church the final (of fourth) chapter examines *Forms of Corruption in This Body* which ends with the evaluation that ‘While many people see first, and to

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the exclusion of all else, the “earthiness” (corruption, crudeness, banality, kitsch) that excludes this institution from carrying any unique treasure of value to humanity, there are still many who see first, and fundamentally, the treasure that it carries, however deeply obscured it may be for others’.

Part Three also contains four chapters. A study of *Authority, Service and Leadership* opens with another Newman, Jeremiah Bishop of Limerick and the story ‘that in explaining Vatican II’s preference for describing the Church as the people of God he said it meant that ‘everybody in the diocese is equal, from me down’. This ends with ‘while acknowledging the authority of the Church’s office holders, recalling the third hierarchy of which we have spoken, the third *magisterium*: that of holiness, a hierarchy in which the one who is first is the one who, in love and obedience, has made themselves last of all and servant of all’. The third chapter, *Take All thought Captive*, responds to the Irish novelist Brian Moore’s assertion that reason is the opposite of religious faith, affirming that ‘the Catholic faith is about knowledge and wisdom, not anti-intellectual for it seeks to incorporate in its vision of the world and of human life the best that science, philosophy and reason can determine [and] is not counter-cultural except where it meets principles or practices that it finds to be unworthy of the dignity and destiny of the human person’. The fourth chapter here looks at ‘the life of a communion’, especially the Eucharist and the fragmentation of communion, finishing with the figure of Mary who ‘within the poetry of the Bible and of the Catholic tradition represents the Church as the archetypal disciple and is also therefore the one whose communion with him has a unique intimacy and depth’.

Part Four is doxological, picking up on the declaration in the *Introduction* that ‘only God is worthy of our adoration’. Its three chapters *With the Son: Christ, the Head of Humanity/In the Spirit: The Love of Christ Urges Us On/To the Father: From Glory to Glory* ‘consider how the life of the Church is a life directed towards the Father, the one to whom both Jesus and the Spirit point us’. A highlight of the first chapter is its imaginative and insightful consideration of the prayers of the Church on the Good Friday liturgy while the second shows that the life of the Church is one of freedom and not fear for it ‘consists primarily (so Thomas Aquinas puts it) in the grace of the Holy Spirit itself and only secondarily in laws that can be written down on paper or chiselled into stone’. The third ties together prayer and hope in the awareness of God’s presence and providence for ‘the Church [which] is a pilgrim in history, living from the past but living also from the future, believing that it beholds and reflects already the glory of a kingdom that is coming’. This is the kingdom of God in which glory and grace dovetail. This book, with its *Notes and Index*, is thoroughly theological without being technical. Whether read individually or in a parish/community group, a major appeal lies in its biblical basis which lays the foundation for the development of *lectio divina*. Two responses from this reviewer refer to study and synodality. Firstly, having designed and delivered throughout the past decade an introductory module to lay and clerical

students entitled *What is Theology?* this book would be at the top of a recommended reading list such is its scholarship, seen in its spectrum of scripture and selected theologians. Secondly, taking a cue from the author's preference for Friedrich Von Hugel's linkage of the institutional/intellectual/mystical dimensions of religion with the threefold office(s) of Christ as king/prophet/priest, that this is 'a better way of thinking about the Church than an approach based on 'various models of the Church', because such an approach 'almost inevitably, will pull people towards choosing among the models on offer, comparing and contrasting them in order to decide which is better and which is best' (p.124), the *communion*, *participation* and *mission* called for and carried out in the synodal process are inseparable and should be both seen and shown as a spiral rather than a straight line. With *communion* as a form of ecclesiological final causality, this book embodies the scriptural, sacramental and spiritual energy for both *participation* and *mission*.

Wilton, Cork

KEVIN O'GORMAN SMA

Disciples of Courage: Ten Christian Lives that Inspire. Brendan Comerford SJ. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022. ISBN 978 1 78812 567 3.

In the preface to his book, Brendan Comerford is at pains to point out that he has written nothing but an introduction to "the lives of ten witnesses to Christian faith from very recent times" (5). It is worth naming his fascinating selection: Edith Stein, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pope John XXIII, Thomas Merton, Pope Paul VI, Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero, Pedro Arrupe, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Roger of Taizé. These ten Christian disciples "lived rich and varied lives, [of whom] three [are] converts to Roman Catholicism, one from Judaism. Two were Lutherans. Five are now canonised saints and the cause for the beatification of both Pedro Arrupe and Dorothy Day has already been introduced" (5).

The book is the result of retreats which the author has given based on the lives and witness of each of these persons. What captured the author's imagination was the unique "depth of their lived experience" but with certain common features of discipleship which can inspire all who reflect on these peoples' "journey of faith; the profundity of their prayers; their personal struggles with their own humanity; their experience of loneliness and fear; their courage; but pre-eminently their lived companionship with Jesus Christ" (5). With an impressive capacity for conveying both the brilliance and burden of the human, Brendan Comerford manages with (seeming) effortless to bring forth the human story behind each of his disciples of courage. From reading chapter after chapter of this book, one gets the undoubted sense of what the Vatican Council said of Christian holiness – that "all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (*Lumen gentium* 40). However, there is no sense that the author shies away from the adversities of life. In fact, he frequently demonstrates that the triumphs in life come by means of the courage to be resolute in keeping faith with

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God. This is not the place to systematically go through each of the ten of Fr Comerford's selection save to say we have before us a well written, pithy and provocative account of ten Christian lives that inspire. Each chapter concludes with a reflection which will be helpful in bringing one to prayer and further meditation. The book includes a succinct and valuable bibliography where the reader can delve further into any one or more of these disciples of courage.

Maynooth

SEÁN CORKERY

Called – Women in Ministry in Ireland. Anne Francis. Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2022. ISBN 978 1 6667 4235 0

This is a book which looks at what it is like to be a woman in ministry in modern Ireland. It is written by Dr Anne Francis, who is a pastoral theologian and herself a woman in ministry, with over thirty years of experience. The interesting thing about this work is that it is more than a catalogue of what women “do” or how they “help out” in their various roles in Church and community. It explores in a very real way the motivation, the challenges -spiritual, cultural, and practical - the determination and the resilience of a range of women in a number of different roles within their lives, their work and their vocations.

The content in the book is drawn from the responses to a questionnaire from women in various ministry roles, together with a number of interviews which were held with women engaged in ministry in the Irish context. The final step in this journey was a gathering of women in Christian ministry, who spent time together discussing the findings.

The honesty of the responses and the reality of the picture which they paint of women's place in the various Churches is fascinating. The most consistent of the themes which emerged for these women was the sense of being called by God – the sense of swimming against the tide is very strong! Resistance to God's call is possibly something many people experience, but because of the patriarchal structures of Church women may well have more reason to resist than men. We often think of the role of women in leadership in Church as being an issue for the Catholic Church, but this book shows clearly that it is something which applies across other denominations as well.

Reading the stories of the five women shows so clearly the importance to them of women supporting each other, the importance of community, the significance of family life and support, and the need for connections to people. One of the greatest lessons for me, is the importance of the role of women – the presence of men and women working together is essential to life, to growth and to change in our churches. There will always be challenges, but the call of God is strong, and the pull of vocation is unrelenting. An insightful read for anyone interested in the journey of women in ministry!

Co. Kildare

TRISH O'NEILL

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