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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Michael A. Conway
Signposts to a Future:
Synodality, Church,
and Culture

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as one who serves’
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Liturgy and Ecumenism

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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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Signposts to a Future: Synodality, Church, and Culture

Michael A. Conway

A good number of years ago I worked in a parish at the edge of the city.¹ I knew all the roads, the backroads, the shortcuts, and the throughways in the parish and surrounding area. In the meantime, thirty years hence, there has been a huge development in that part of the city; most of the roads have changed, new housing estates have been built, and many expansive areas of green fields have disappeared. And the entire infrastructure has been modified. Now when I drive through the area, I need most often to rely on the signposts to be sure that I am on the right road to get to my destination. It's strange when something or a place that was so utterly familiar in the past becomes unfamiliar, even confusing, in the present. It's destabilizing when your knowledge no longer corresponds to your lived and living experience.

There is something equivalent to be had when it comes to faith and religion in our contemporary culture in Ireland. Much has changed at the level of experience. It, too, can be confusing for us. In this short paper I'd like to suggest a few signposts that might help in navigating the terrain. They are directed at understanding the new 'layout,' as it were, and might hopefully (literally) point to a viable future. Clearly, what I have to say is in no way meant to be comprehensive but may help in understanding the fascinating place that we are now in when it comes to the journey of faith.

THREE PHASES OF CHURCH AND CULTURE

When it comes to the connection between Church as an ecclesial community and the ambient culture, we can, helpfully, speak of three phases or epochs. Each phase marks out a particular constellation of Church and culture, which, in turn, determines to a significant degree the capacity and ability of the Church to evangelize within

1 This is an abridged version of a talk given at *Croí Nua Spirituality Centre*, Taylor's Hill, Galway on 21 September 2022.

Michael A. Conway is Professor of Faith and Culture at the Pontifical University, St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

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the epoch in question. Understanding the relationship between the Church and the culture helps a faith community to chart its own journey and effectively reach out beyond its visible boundaries to fulfil more wholesomely its task of being the sacrament of salvation for all.²

In the first phase, corresponding to the inaugural period, the Church was a minority group in the culture that was interior to the Roman empire. It had no significant social or political power beyond the impact of the message itself of the Gospel and the Good News that it proclaimed. What attracted people to the community, above all, was the proclamation that the foundation of this community was charity (*caritas*), whereby each person, made in the image and likeness of God, was deemed to be a vital member of a community that was dedicated to realizing the kingdom of God among us.

The second phase saw the emergence of a powerful alliance with the Roman empire, and, with this, the foundation of a State-Church. This phase or epoch is sometimes called Christendom. Now the Church's destiny was conjoined with that of the political order *per se*. This led over time in many quarters to an intolerant totality that did not know what it was to respect and value difference.³ This was then translated into brutality, abuse (of various kinds), and, oftentimes, a deep betrayal of the foundational inspiration of the Gospel. It also gave the institutional Church *per se*, and particularly its office holders, an enormous level of power in every aspect and sphere of life. This phase began to fall apart with the Reformation and the wars of religions, and, to a significant degree, we are still experiencing the vestiges of this same collapse. This, in turn, goes a significant way in explaining the disjunction that has now emerged between the institutional Church and the wider culture at large.

We have now moved into the third epoch, which from the Church's perspective is definitively inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council. The Council marks the end of a certain way of being Church in the world and in doing so re-establishes vital connections with other churches, other peoples, other religions, and the wider culture. Just before the Council opened, the great French theologian Marie-Dominique Chenu spoke of what he

2 See *Lumen gentium*, No. 48. Here the Church is declared to be established by Christ as the 'universal sacrament of salvation (*universale salutis sacramentum*).' This is one of the most important insights to have emerged from the Council, and this understanding impacts every dimension of the Church's life.

3 You can see this concern, for example, in the stipulation of *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, their religion) at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. This, however, was already a step in the direction of recognizing greater freedom within the Holy Roman Empire.

termed ‘the end of the Constantinian era of Christendom.’⁴ He saw this in dramatic terms as both an end and a beginning, and as a beginning it was a ‘magnificent hope.’ From now on the Church is understood to be the sacrament of salvation for all peoples, and with this insight we’ve entered a new stage in the historical journey of the Christian Church.

All of this means that we are at present still in the throes of the transition from the second to the third epoch, where we can, indeed, look back (and recognize what we have known), but also look around and see much that is unknown (disaffiliation, new questioning, indifference, and so on). We can, of course, only attempt to look forward (and, at most, imagine what might be). When we do look back, what we see is Christendom, where the dynamics are those of what might be termed ‘ecclesio-imperialism,’ for which the Church together with the political, social, and cultural orders formed a unity. This unity, even at local level, meant that it was the Church that was the dominant power, represented in the person of the priest. It’s the world that most of us grew up in, that has collapsed, and that will continue to collapse. On this score, what we have now is the end or the last days of Christendom.

And even though most people recognize and agree that Christendom is now over, it is, nonetheless, the case that to a high degree the *dynamics* of Christendom still live on among us. Church leadership often continues to function in the mode of Christendom, ecclesial decision making still replicates the inherited modalities, and communal ecclesial life still follows the inherited patterns of the pseudo-unity of Christendom. These, tragically, are now leading progressively to an even greater exultation of the life of faith in our culture, particularly in a European context. Many in Church circles are far less capable or willing to admit that the *dynamics* of Christendom, too, need to change as we come to terms with living in this new epoch.

SEPARATION AND SECULARIZATION

In the place of this single, homogeneous world, where everybody had their place and there was a general agreement as to how everything should be done, we now have a programme of separation. Various areas of life have become separated out from the explicit connection to Church and religion: politics, the arts, medicine, (increasingly) education, peoples’ personal lives, and so on. There is at present a massive dynamic of separation, of differentiation, of disengagement, that is a real characteristic of

4 Marie-Dominique Chenu, ‘La fin de l’ère constantinienne,’ in *La parole de Dieu*, II, L’Évangile dans le temps (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 1964), 17-36, at 29.

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our times. And this is now a central feature of our culture, society, and world. And so, now, if there is to be a faith life, it must be able to live with, accompany, and blossom in this new kind of culture, marked by difference, separation, respect for otherness, parity of esteem, and so on.

This dynamic of separation is called most usually secularization. If there is going to be a faith life in our culture it must be able to negotiate a world marked by secularization and the separation of domains. And given that we claim that the gospel can be welcomed and lived out in any culture, then, it must be possible for it to take root and be lived out in a secularized world. And that is something that Vatican II saw clearly. The culture had changed, and the church was changing, too, to accompany that change of culture. *And what has become very clear is that this programme of separation is good for the life of faith; it is not a loss for faith life per se.* Thus, for example, Walter Cardinal Kasper, in his book *Mercy* points out the irony that

the secularization at the beginning of the nineteenth century that initially was experienced as an act of divestment and injustice – and actually was – has turned out to be a point of departure for spiritual renewal.⁵

I would like to understand why this is so and see what the implications might be when it comes to valuing the movement of secularization.⁶

Firstly, if, in your heart and soul, you are still living in the world of Christendom, then, when it comes to the movement of secularization, you will see and experience an enormous loss; of power, of prestige, of influence, of familiar ways of doing things, of what you judge to be important, and so on. You will also be somewhat disconcerted, perhaps disappointed, and maybe, even, despairing of our present situation. You may worry about family members, the Church, the future, and so on. Those who lament the implications of secularization (and who accuse it in the public forum), who see it in negative terms, are those, who wish, consciously or not, to live in that unified world of Christendom. They would like to go back. They would like to restore, even partially, the ecclesio-imperial dynamics, which, ultimately, have

5 Walter Cardinal Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (New York: Paulist, 2014), 173-74.

6 The best single study remains Hermann Lübke, *Säkularisierung: Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs*, 3rd ed. (Freiburg i. Br.: Karl Alber, 2003). See also the excellent chapter, 'Chiesa nell'oggi ; Tra fine della cristianità e secolarizzazione,' in Roberto Repole, *Come Stelle in Terra: La chiesa nell'epoca della secolarizzazione* (Assisi: Cittadella, 2012), 11-40.

to do with a world based on a foundational unity (even if it's deceptive), whereby a small cohort of people have certain power-over-others.

What is the fundamental, metaphysical weakness of Christendom? It is built on a conception of unity that, inevitably, stabilizes itself, becomes fixed, and crystalizes into uniformity. Gradually, you find that there is little room for creativity, for change, for personal exploration and conviction, for initiative, for diversity, for otherness (in the most concrete of terms). The unity itself, no matter how rich it might be, initially, becomes, in time, monotonous, and monotonous, inevitably, leads to sclerosis and death. Christendom has its own demise built into it. Like a star in the cosmos, it eventually burns itself out in time. It becomes too rigid.⁷ And Christendom as a manner of living faith is now a burnt-out-star. And in that sense, it is already over, even if much of its worldview and its dynamics still live on among us.⁸

When people complain about secularization and, falsely, see it as the abandonment of faith or a movement that is counter to faith, what they really want is to go back to that burnt-out-star and re-liven it. And this is often attempted at great investment and cost (and this, scandalously, may even be financial). It is, however, the work of Sisyphus. It will not get anywhere because the principle of life is elsewhere. It will not permit the Church to advance on its journey in history.

This collapse, however, is not the end of faith-life. Christendom no longer mirrors the life of faith as it might flourish in our present culture (and as it has now been understood and formulated at the Second Vatican Council). I know that this is counter-intuitive because, at the end of the day, what I'm suggesting is that death (and that is what we are witnessing in so many places) is necessary to life. But then, surely, there's no better foundation on which to consider and build the life of faith, its real import, its challenges, its hopes, and its vision for humanity. Once, you see this, not only can you not go back, but you are energized to move to the horizon that is always ahead.

A SECULARIZED CULTURE

Let me reflect a little now on this situation of being in a secularized world and culture. What does secularization do? Well, it separates out, it creates polarities, it opens a space for difference and for respect, and it allows other perspectives, other horizons, other ways of thinking; in short, it puts multiplicity, rupture, diversity,

7 Pope Francis regularly warns of the danger of rigidity.

8 See Michel De Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire* (Paris : Du Seuil, 1987).

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otherness on the same (metaphysical) level, as it were, as unity, continuum, conformity, and uniformity. It restores dignity to the other and to otherness in what is most often taken to be a realized economy of the same. It creates the real possibility of freedom and diversity, and, in doing so, opens, equally, a genuine space for conversation, for dialogue, for discovery, for different ways of living, and, I'd like to suggest, also, for new ways of exploring and living faith.

The separation that is secularization involves a kind of splitting in two, and this splitting in two is something that we find at the dawn of all creation: night from day, darkness from light, earth from water, man from woman or woman from man, and so on. Separation is necessary to creation and creativity. Duality is creative and life giving. It is two, not one. And when these two poles work in harmony, when they co-operate with one another, when they enhance each other's contribution, not only do you have the dance of difference and the movement of creativity, but you find, there, inevitably, new life. If you have only one pole you will fall fatally into the emptiness of egoism, the monotony of uniformity, stability, and boredom, and the darkness of indifference (and there is plenty of that around).⁹ If there is only one pole, you end up with a dead unity. The moment that you have an other over against you (in that real, substantial sense), you have the possibility of real conversation, of dialogue, of discovery, of creativity, and of new life. This, I believe, is one of the great learnings from secularization.

Secularization is not in opposition to faith life; it belongs with and even to the life of faith; and, in that sense, it is essential. Karl Rahner, one of the most distinguished Catholic theologians of the twentieth century said, for example, that 'there is a good sense in which the world is secular, the world as it exists with its possibilities, with its pluralism and the antagonism which this inevitably entails.'¹⁰ And Edward Schillebeeckx, an equally distinguished Catholic theologian, says that secularization is far less a comment about God or religion or faith and much more about 'a radical transformation of our relationship to the world.'¹¹ Secularization has taught us to view the world, the Church as an institution, and human dynamics differently, more soberly, more critically, and less naively. Without it, in so many ways (that I cannot discuss here) we would give free rein far too easily to some of the darkest dynamics of the human condition, which, are, sometimes, dressed up, even, in religious garb.

9 Egoism, monotony, uniformity, etc., are rooted, even etymologically, in 'unity.'

10 See Karl Rahner, 'The Church's Commission to bring Salvation and Humanization of the World,' *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14., trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 311.

11 See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Approches Théologiques: Le Monde et L'Église* (Paris : CEP, 1967), 135.

So, we are not, now, in a situation of an either/or, where you must choose between a world of faith and a culture without faith. No. It is, rather, a matter of negotiating a living, creative tension of both/and, which, in turn, is the situation of encounter, conversation, and concern. It takes place, firstly, for yourself, in terms of enriching your own life, and then, for the Christian community in terms of finding a new path forward, and finally, for the institutional Church as a whole, in terms of finding those structures that better serve the needs of gospel life in a contemporary setting that is a secularized culture. There is an interesting poem from Herman Melville (the author of *Moby-Dick*) that captures the importance and vitality of polarity when it comes to creativity.

ART

(by Herman Melville)

In placid hours well-pleased we dream
 Of many a brave unbodied scheme.
 But form to lend, pulsed life create,
 What unlike things must meet and mate:
 A flame to melt – a wind to freeze;
 Sad patience – joyous energies;
 Humility – yet pride and scorn;
 Instinct and study; love and hate;
 Audacity – reverence. These must mate,
 And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
 To wrestle with the angel – Art.

The Church journeys in time; there is an enormous temptation to want to go back. But you cannot do so in any credible, substantial, or sustainable way; and if you do, it is at the cost of cutting yourself off from the life force that is our common humanity. It sabotages its own creativity.

Of course, if you are used to being in the position of institutional power over others and this is taken away from you, you will experience the change as a loss. And when something is taken away from you, you may, indeed, react negatively. You may feel disappointed, undervalued, or rejected! No one likes being stripped, involuntary, from what they perceive to be theirs (and power is most often experienced and treated as a possession). But there is no growth when it comes to the life of faith without loss, without a *kenosis* (an emptying, to use St Paul's language). For the life of faith, loss engenders life because death accedes to new life in resurrection; that is the very heart of Christian faith. It is not a nice,

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pious idea; it is a real, living dynamic. When you understand this (reality) about faith, you understand the depths of Christian faith, and when you can live this, then, you facilitate God's Spirit at work in our world for the good of all. And, of course, you advance on your own faith journey.

Christian life never seeks power over others, and when some of us do, we undermine faith, always; personal, communal, and ecclesial. There is, undoubtedly, an intense experience of death at play at present in terms of Church and Church life, but with the eyes of faith, what I would like to suggest is that it is possible to see *the life of faith renewing itself* as it prepares to move into a new phase in the great, redemptive journey that is that of the Church through time.

CHANGE TO REMAIN FAITHFUL

You cannot resist death when it arrives; there is a real fatality attached to it; you cannot control it; and you cannot determine its outcome. No matter what your position might be in the Church, you are being called to conversion; to change your way of seeing, of interacting with others, of how you take responsibility, and so on. *The Church has its future through those of us, who are prepared to change responsibly and in fidelity with what we have inherited (which, emphatically, does not mean repeating the past)*. That's where you will find hope, and, ultimately, that is where you will find love; love for others, all others; love for the Christian community, even for those in it, who, for whatever reason, are unwilling or unable to change, or even value what is at stake; love for yourself, as you move to a new place in your own journey of faith. We are all called to change if we are to remain faithful to faith.

But it is faith, and only faith, that can live through and beyond death. Only faith knows of resurrection. And what you can now do is seek to live the very dynamics of faith that is self-renewing, whereby you yourself become a locus of death and renewal. You allow it to happen in you and in your life, in freedom. You become the transition. You permit the change that is necessary for the ecclesial community to be alive in you so that you move forward, not in despair and denial but in faith, love, and hope. These are the great theological virtues, and they are the energy of transition and new life. *The Church comes alive in you, not as something that you belong to, but as something that you are.*

JOURNEYING TOGETHER (AKA SYNODALITY)

I would now like to take one final step towards the future that has emerged from this healthy dynamic of secularization. It will

in time, I believe, open a new avenue in terms of being Church. This will not be a complete break with what we now have but will contribute to opening the possibility of a blossoming of gospel life in the culture at large.

The Church as an ecclesial community must change in time. It is not a stability, and nothing about it is an absolute stability. You could say that *it is its own stability in movement*. No part of Church life and structure is outside of history, which means that there is nothing that is not subject to the dynamic of change, growth, and redemption. The archbishop of Turin, Roberto Repole, reflecting on the contribution of Vatican II, remarks that ‘the Church ... is a historical subject, that journeys in time and that, while offering its contribution to the history of the world of humanity, receives simultaneously much from it.’¹² It is vital to recognize this dimension of receiving from the culture; this ratifies not only the duality (as I’ve just outlined), but also the importance of dialogue and the enrichment that goes with this. The Church is not a self-contained, immured enclosure in the culture. To a significant degree the Church is alive in the culture only when it gives *and receives*. And it is only in receiving from the culture that it remains, quoting again Repole, ‘*alive, active, and confident* both in God and in this particular historical and cultural epoch that is modernity in which, in one way or other, we are deeply emerged.’¹³ We belong in history, in culture, in conversation, and in dialogue with others; we bring to the culture, and we receive from it. And it is only through this exchange and conversation that the Good News of the Gospel can emerge in our epoch, not as a possession (maintained, supposedly, by a few), but as a life shared, immanent and transcendent in every moment. This can happen, clearly, only if we go out to others, not as people of power, advantage, and privilege, but as learners, seekers, and, ultimately, people of hope. And all of this must be honest; otherwise, we only prepare our own moral defeat.

We have a specificity in the world that is not built on the rejection or denigration of others and our culture, which, after all, is our homeplace, together with our families, our friends, our neighbours, and our homeland. You regularly hear complaints about the wider culture, especially from Church office holders, but that is not the voice of Christian faith; it is the old, cantankerous voice of Christendom, raging against the loss of its place in the pyramid of social and political power. We journey with others, with our neighbours (no matter who they be), with peoples of other religions, other Christian denominations, and we journey,

¹² Repole, *Come Stelle in Terra*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

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too, with people who, for whatever reason, do not wish to scribe themselves into any nominated worldview. All these journeys are, from a certain perspective, part of the Christian journey (for the Christian). This is a foundational truth for the Church in our world. The gospel and with it the life of faith is not an instrument of power, separation, domination, or alienation; on the contrary, it commands us to go out to others, again and again, in ways that are appropriate, life-giving, and open to the Spirit working among us. And it is the Good News of the Gospel itself that draws us and others together in their own good time.

Looking and Seeing A walk in the forest, or just looking at a solitary tree can provoke as much loving wonder and awe as gazing up at the architectural masterpieces of our most ancient churches. In his encyclical letter, *'Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says : 'the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet'. God is in every speck of dust!

– PAUL HIGGINSON, *Doing Christianity*, Dublin: Columba Books, 2023, p 146.

“But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27): *Women’s διακονία (diakonia) in Luke’s Gospel*

Marian Mortell

As discussions on synodality continue in the church, the concepts of servant leadership and *διακονία (diakonia)* as well as the ministry of deacon (both male and female) are frequent topics. As the discernment continues, it is worth looking at the Gospel of Luke and, in particular, the women in Luke’s Gospel as they can throw much light on those subjects.

What does the word *διακονία* mean? Most translations of Luke’s Gospel describe it as ‘service’ with its corresponding verb ‘to serve’ and sometimes, it is also translated as ‘ministry.’ Greek New Testament Lexicon definitions include services of any kind, both at table and in religious situations.¹

Why focus on women when discussing *διακονία* in Luke’s Gospel? A very interesting statistic might begin to answer the question. The word *διακονία* or the verb *διακονέω (diakoneo)* is used nine times in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus refers to it in two of his parables (12:37; 17:8) and he uses it three times in crucial teaching immediately after the Last Supper (22:27, 28). In the four other times when it is used, it refers to women (4:38; 8:3; 10:40a, 40b). The Lukan Gospel never actually uses it about men. A careful examination of the passages about the women elucidates this.

THE HEALING OF SIMON’S MOTHER-IN-LAW (4:38-41)²

The first woman to encounter Jesus in his adult ministry is Simon’s mother-in-law (4:38-39). Jesus goes to Simon’s house, where he

1 The lexicon defines the verb as “(1) generally, of services of any kind *serve*; (2) of supplying with life’s necessities *support, take care of, minister to*; (3) of table service *wait on, serve*; (4) of religious service relating the physical needs of believers *serve as deacon, perform duties of deacon*.” Friberg, Friberg and Miller, *Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*.

2 All biblical references refer to Luke’s Gospel unless otherwise stated.

Married with three adult children, Marian Mortell has recently completed a PhD in Scripture and is actively involved in promoting the study of Scripture in the Cork area. “It is essential that the revealed word radically enrich our catechesis and all our efforts to pass on the faith.” *The Joy of the Gospel*, 175.

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has probably been invited for the main meal of the day which would take place after the Sabbath service and here he is asked to help the woman who has been struck down by a very serious fever. While the healing of the woman is the second miracle recounted in the gospel, it is the first one where the person is identified as an individual (even if that is only in relation to her son-in-law). This pericope takes place in the private arena of a house, where Jesus is shown great hospitality. He has just come from the synagogue where there have already been signs of antagonism towards him. The demon shouted at him when he performed the exorcism in the synagogue at Capernaum (4:34) and, before that, Jesus was rejected by his own people in the synagogue in Nazareth and driven out of the town (4:29). Careful examination of the text shows that Simon's mother-in-law is given a prominent place in the story as *πενθερά* (mother-in-law) is sandwiched between two mentions of Simon (4:38).

Jesus is presented as a very distant figure in the description of this healing. He does not speak to the woman. He stands over her, draws on God's power from on high and rebukes the fever. Rebuke is usually used to describe casting out evil spirits and it has been used in this way in the exorcism that has taken place in the synagogue immediately prior to this. The two miracles are described in a similar manner because Luke often sees physical illness as demonic and so treats it as similar to possession by unclean spirits. It shows that Jesus has authority over both demons and illness and is equipped to carry out the mission of release that he had announced in Nazareth. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18-19).

When the fever releases Simon's mother-in-law, she responds immediately with service described by the verb *διακονέω*. This probably involves preparing and serving a meal for those present. In some households, the woman would have the responsibility for the preparation of the food, but would not always serve at table. Some religious regulations did not permit women to appear in front of strangers and, at other times, Sabbath restrictions prevented her from serving a rabbi.³ However, while she is not the householder/ the hostess, since the narrative makes no mention of both her son-in-law and daughter, she becomes the central figure in the household and is the person who epitomises both hospitality

3 Turid Karlsen Seim, "The Gospel of Luke," in *Searching the Scriptures: a Feminist commentary Vol II*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM, 1995), 728-740, 740.

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and service. She is in fact the first person to respond to Jesus since he began his ministry. At this stage there is no mention of Jesus having called any disciples to follow him and so, it could be said that Simon’s mother-in-law is the first person, male or female, who is reported as functioning as a disciple and following him.

The woman responds not just to Jesus by service but to the others who are with him as well. The others are obviously people who have been impressed by Jesus’ teaching or the exorcism that has just taken place in the synagogue or it may be Simon and some of his family. The woman now serves both Jesus and these people.

The woman’s serving foreshadows Jesus’ service later that day. Luke says that as evening arrived, people brought the sick to Jesus, who laid his hands on each of them and cured them (4:40). Interestingly, the verb *θεραπεύω* (*therapeuo*)⁴ that is used does not just signify ‘to cure’ but also ‘to serve.’ In fact, Luke gives it the meaning ‘to serve’ in Acts 17:25. The *διακονία* that Jesus models is a different type of service to that of the woman as he heals the sick that are brought to him and releases others from demons (4:40-41). However, by juxtaposing the two verbs, Luke shows the woman collaborating with Jesus in his work of healing and serving others. She ministers to them while Jesus heals them placing his hand on each. The ministry continues throughout the whole day as Jesus, the servant leader, is joined by the woman in that service and they model the ministry that has already been announced by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth (4:18-19).

GALILEAN WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED JESUS (8:1-3)

This short passage describes the Galilean women who followed Jesus and, along with the twelve, listened and learned to be disciples. They had encountered Jesus either through reports of his preaching and healing, through listening to his word or through being healed. They followed him in a very radical way by living a peripatetic life as they journeyed with him as disciples.

Among that group, a group of women who ‘provided for them out of their resources’ are mentioned (8:3). Once again the term service or *διακονία* is used. While Simon’s mother-in-law provided a meal and hospitality, the Galilean women develop the concept of *διακονία* still further by moving outside a household setting and expending resources and providing ongoing material support to Jesus and the group around him as they journey with him on the Way.

The women are a mixture of single, widowed and married women, but all provide in whatever way they can. “At a basic level,

4 Lexicon definitions include (1)To serve, be of service, (2) heal, (3) cure, (4) restore.” Friberg, Friberg and Miller, *Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*.

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then, the women materially aided the Jesus group with whatever ‘belonged to them,’ however meagre or munificent.”⁵ There is nothing to say that all the women are wealthy but neither are they all destitute. The group could contain wealthy women who could provide patronage, like Joanna (who came from Herod’s court), divorced or widowed women, who could contribute out of their *kettuba*⁶ or dowry and poorer women who could provide basic resources. Readers, having just followed the story of the woman who anointed Jesus where they saw largesse and generosity, now understand this pericope from that same generous perspective. Similar to the previous scene where the woman bought an extravagant alabaster jar of perfume, then broke it open, meaning that it could not be used again, and proceeded to anoint Jesus with actions that were far more lavish than normal hospitality (7:37-38), so here, readers presume that the women will provide with largesse out of their own resources. Like Jesus, they are willing to give with generosity.

As in the case of Simon’s mother-in-law, the women provide, not only for Jesus, but for the whole group, both male and female, travelling with him. “The women wait on each other as well as on Jesus and the Twelve and model *the mutual service* that the entire company is called to enact.”⁷ In this, they imitate Jesus and the broad concept of service that has already been evident in the scenes of healing, service and hospitality (4:40-44; 5:15; 5:17-26; 5:29; 6:18-19; 7:11-17).

A MUCH BROADER DEFINITION OF διακονία

At this stage in Luke’s Gospel, readers have encountered two types of διακονία, the household and table service of Simon’s mother-in-law and the broader provision of long-term financial and practical support offered by the Galilean women. An even broader understanding of διακονία can be seen in both the Gospel and Acts. Examples include service at table (4:39; 10:40; 12:37),

- 5 F. Scott Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: capable women of purpose and persistence in Luke’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 121. Sim agrees that the women came from different backgrounds but they pooled whatever resources they had to support the community. David C. Sim, “The Women followers of Jesus,” *HeyJ* XXX (1989): 51-62, 53.
- 6 “The *ketubah* restates the fundamental conditions that are imposed by the Torah upon the husband, such as providing his wife with food, clothing, and conjugal rights, which are inseparable from marriage. It includes the husband’s guarantees to pay a certain sum in the event of divorce, and inheritance rights obligatory upon his heirs in case he dies before his wife.” The *ketubah* contract was first formalised in the first century BCE by the Sanhedrin. http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/465168/jewish/The-Marriage-Contract-Ketubah.htm
- 7 Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows*, 120.

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providing resources (8:3; Acts 6:1), delivering a service (Acts 6:4) or being sent to carry out a service or perform a role (Acts 19:22). A recent study of *διακονία* recommends that the emphasis should be on the *motivation* for the work rather than the type of work involved and therefore it should not be seen primarily as a benevolent action on behalf of someone, but a sending “on behalf of the person or authority who mandated the activity.”⁸ Therefore, readers should see it as focusing on service of God, the one who has commissioned the action, rather than on any particular service.⁹ The women, whether serving at table or providing out of their own resources, are all motivated as followers of Jesus.

MARTHA AND MARY: FURTHER CLARIFICATION OF *διακονία*

Most commentators use the story of Martha and Mary (10:38-42) to make a comparison between the active and contemplative life or between prayer and action. However, from the point of view of *διακονία*, it is worth focusing on Martha and her service.

Before examining this passage, it must be remembered that the gospel stories were written to be read sequentially. Readers, or more likely listeners, in the early church built up a cumulative picture based on what had gone before in the gospel. Therefore, it is very important to realise that the parable immediately preceding this passage begins with Jesus’ teaching on loving God and loving neighbour. He then proceeds to widen the definition of neighbour through his recounting of the parable, which demonstrates the mercy and compassion of the Samaritan for the victim as he actively cares for him and (while the word is not used) demonstrates *διακονία* in action (10:25-37). Therefore, this pericope should be read in conjunction with the preceding parable as Jesus continues to teach about what it means to be a disciple.

As Jesus enters the village, two key verbs (*εἰσερχομαι* and *ὑποδέχομαι*) are used to show that he is welcomed with hospitality and that he accepts that hospitality. Martha is the model of that hospitality and of the *διακονία* that is involved. She is an independent woman, head of the house here and seems relatively prosperous as she hosts Jesus on his journey. When the narrator compares her with her sister, Mary, Martha is more prominent.

8 John N. Collins, “A Monocultural Usage: *Διακον*-words in Classical Hellenistic and Patristic Sources,” *VC* 66 (2012), 287-309: 301.

9 Gooder gives Collins’ example of the variety of service from Acts 6:1-4 where the seven men are chosen to organise the *διακονια*. While *διακονια* appears in both verses 2 and 4, verse 2 appears to be about waiting at table while verse 4 is about spreading the word. What is essential though is that both refer to the carrying out of a commissioned task. Paula Gooder, “Diakonia in the New Testament: A Dialogue with John N. Collins,” *Ecclesiology* 3 (2006): 33-56, 42.

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She is introduced first and far more information is given about her. Active verbs are used in contrast with the subordinate clause and passive verbs that introduce Mary. When they are first introduced, Martha is seen in a more favourable light as she seems to respect social convention, by serving, while Mary, by sitting at the Lord's feet, seems to put herself outside what is considered appropriate for women.¹⁰

However, as the story develops, certain ambiguities emerge with regard to Martha's service. The unusual verb (περισπάομαι) that is used to describe Martha's busyness with regard to her service can also mean agitation. So, is the fact that "Martha was distracted by her many tasks" (10:40)

- simply a neutral statement?
- Is the busyness understandable as she is showing hospitality and ministering as hostess in her home by entertaining an important guest who arrived unannounced?
- Is her διακονία very praiseworthy as she does it out of love or devotion for Jesus?
- On the other hand is the fact that the verb also means agitation implying that something is not right in her attitude?

Martha speaks to the Lord and reproaches him with an accusatory question. It is very self-centred as she begins by suggesting that he does not care about her and then uses personal pronouns to refer to herself and her difficulties three times (μου, με, μοι) and complains that she has been left to do the ministering or serving on her own (μόνος). "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?" (10:40). She describes Mary as "my sister"¹¹ and requests that Jesus tell "her" to help, thus ignoring Mary, who is beside her by Jesus' feet as she speaks to him. It is obvious too that Martha's address to Jesus is quite sharp and definitely not the language of hospitality. It takes the focus away from Jesus, her guest, and the hospitality and service that is his due.

The Lord's reply moves the spotlight to Martha's attitude rather than her complaint about Mary not helping and he chides her for being worried and agitated about many things. He is not criticising διακονία as this has been seen as a positive attribute of discipleship (4:39; 8:1-3), but he is criticising her attitude which is choking her ability to hear the word of God and put it into practice (8:14). Finally he rebukes Martha for her attitude to her sister and warns

10 Matteo Crimella, "Notes Philologiques À Propos de περισπάομαι en Luc 10,40. Entre Philologie et Narratologie," *RB* (2010): 120-125, 123.

11 Another example of this type of 'distancing' can be seen in 15:30 when the elder son berates his father for welcoming back his younger brother. Just as Martha does not personalize her sister by naming her, the elder brother describes his younger brother as "this son of yours."

her that Mary’s choice must be respected. Nothing is said about Martha’s reaction and readers are left wondering in the end about the outcome.

So the concept of *διακονία* is developed even more in the story of Martha and Mary. There have already been examples of table service and the providing of resources and support, but there is something more here. Martha’s service fits in perfectly with the concept of *διακονία*. She welcomes Jesus, invites him to her home and provides for him (and whoever is with him), but she fails to follow Mary’s example and listen to the Word of God that comes from Jesus. She is so caught up in worrying and being ‘hyper-busy’ that she misses out on really connecting with Jesus. To return to Collins’ broader definition of *διακονία*, she does not fully appreciate *who* is recommending this service and *why* it is demanded.

This is the *last time* that the term *διακονία* is used to refer to anyone other than Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. In 9:51, Luke says that “Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.” As he sets out on this journey with his disciples, there are fewer miracles described and the focus is very much on Jesus and his disciples, as he teaches them about the Kingdom of God and how to be his disciples. The women have already imitated Jesus’ service in the first half of the Gospel. Now Jesus consolidates its importance by direct teaching and parables.

THE PARABLES REGARDING *διακονία* (12:35-38; 17:7-10)

In the *first* of these parables, the servants are ready and waiting when the master comes home and his reaction is to sit them down to a meal and serve them, thus reversing the normal roles of master and slave (12:35-38). In doing this, the Lord is showing the importance of *διακονία* and especially of servant leadership.

In the *second*, Jesus explains that when the slave comes in from the fields, he is still expected to serve his master before he eats and drinks himself. He points out that there is nothing unusual in this as it is what is expected of a slave (17:7-10). In a broader context, service is what is expected of the follower of Jesus.

On first reading, these parables seem to contradict one another but in fact they are two sides of the same coin. Everyone is called to serve and in serving, everyone is doing the work of the Lord. It is what is expected of followers of Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus models that service during his earthly ministry and calls his servants to do the same. Moreover, the Lord values those who serve and will reward them for that service.

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JESUS' TEACHING ON *διακονία* (22:26-27)

Immediately after the Last Supper, a high point in the Gospel (22:26-27), Jesus gives his crucial teaching about *διακονία*. He points out that he is among them as one who serves and therefore reveals himself as the servant leader. Having begun his ministry with healing service, he now concludes his ministry by setting this service as a standard for all of his followers, thus challenging them to imitate his example of servant leadership. Furthermore, by proclaiming and exemplifying this service, readers are left in no doubt as to what their response should be. "But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (22:26-27).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Service and servant leadership are fundamental teachings in Luke's Gospel and, alongside Jesus, it is women who epitomize this. Simon's mother-in-law foreshadows Jesus' *διακονία* by immediately getting up and serving in response to her healing. As the day progresses she collaborates with Jesus as he cures people of physical ailments and evil spirits. Both she and the Galilean women, follow Jesus' example by modelling mutual service in serving not only Jesus, but those who accompany him. While it is true that a number of men (for example, the men who bring the paralysed man to Jesus (5:18) and Levi who organizes a banquet for Jesus (5:29)) demonstrate *διακονία*, it is never actually named as such. However, it is the women in Luke's Gospel who exemplify the servant leadership that Jesus explicitly preaches in his farewell speech to his disciples after the Last Supper. The positioning of that speech implies that he delivers it as his last will and testament and, therefore, wants it to be taken very seriously by his followers.

To return to the discussions on synodality, one of the questions that is frequently asked is whether or not women should be allowed to become deacons. By considering Luke's Gospel and the obvious demonstration of *διακονία* by the women in that gospel, the answer would certainly be in the *affirmative*. Women foreshadow and demonstrate service to both Jesus and their community. They also work collaboratively with Jesus, the servant leader. The question regarding deaconate should not even arise as it has already been answered by their service/ *διακονία* in the Lukan Gospel.

‘Low Morale’

William King

On a bright June morning we came across one another: the first day of the priests’ annual retreat now held in a Monaghan hotel instead of in All Hallows College – our stomping grounds for decades. Like other seminaries long closed and now enjoying a new incarnation as universities, All Hallows was off limits – *The Times they are a- Changin’* as Bob Dylan puts it. So, we are latter-day children of Israel *by the rivers of Babylon*.

‘Where are you now?’ I asked – the small change of conversation between two priests whose paths cross randomly at some meeting, or at the side chapel of the Pro-Cathedral while robing for the Holy Week ceremonies. We were between breakfast and the first reflection held in the conference room, and not the elegant chapel of All Hallows. ‘Free time’ it was called in the *horarium* – a term that now seems like something found in an old trunk of seminary days.

He named the parish.

‘Alone, I suppose.’

‘Alone, but I get help from the Jays (Jesuits) – for however long that will last. Their days are numbered also.’

‘And you,’ he said, ‘you’re retired, I hear, so it must be all sweetness and light, and salad days.’

‘No, not at all. Believe it or not, I came out of retirement.’

His knitted brow said it all: ‘You what?’

And to take the edge off his bemusement, I tried humour: ‘Sinatra did it, why can’t I? I’m the same age as Dolly Parton and Dolly is still hitting the boards.’ But my effort to be a stand-up comedian met with a sudden death. He looked away in the direction of Shancoduff where Patrick Kavanagh made poetry out of bringing a *gabhail* of hay to ‘three perishing calves’.

My priest friend shook his head and smiled – out of politeness – I suspect. ‘No. I’d pack it in tomorrow morning if I could. And I’m not alone in that.’

He was at least fifteen years or more away from the canonical age – the time for a priest to hand in his badge and his gun to

Fr William King, is Chaplain [*pro tem*], Our Lady of the Rosary, Harold’s Cross, Dublin 6W. His new novel *The Decent Thing* will be published later this year.

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the bishop. I was well into my first curacy when he was making Confirmation.

‘No. It seems to me, we’re redundant: well, that’s the impression I get. For goodness’ sake, sure they don’t come near us until they want something, like a baptism or to fill out their marriage papers.’ He was now in the mood for talking and indicated the gravel path that meanders through the neatly trimmed lawn. And he related an incident that may have a resonance for many priests nowadays.

‘I brought a First Communion class and their teacher on a tour of the church recently. “What’s that over there,” a child asked me, pointing in the direction of a confessional.

“Come and take a closer look.”

‘We stood outside the confessional. “Now, children, what d’you think it is.”’

After studying the confession box, cocking their heads, like perky chickens, and straining their necks at the purple curtains meeting at the middle and resting on the half door, one bright spark shot up her hand. “Father, I know, I know. Oh, please, ask me. It’s a Punch and Judy show.” (Out of the mouths of babes and infants, Ps 8:21).

He looked at me: ‘See what I mean. I’d go now, but I’m only sixty-one.’

A SENSE OF LOSS

He kept showing up in my reflections that day and, like when one disturbs still waters with a rod, I brought other comments from priests to the surface – the most frequent and pervasive being – ‘*low morale*’. And I wondered if that phrase, like the bad penny, which one hears so often in clerical company, is a first cousin knocking at the door of a priest’s darkness. And if such is the case, it may not come as a great surprise.

For the last fifteen to twenty years, priests have been on the rack and, despite that, have continued bravely with their ministry. Some commentators claim that even in periods of crisis in our country’s history, priests didn’t have to battle against such a head wind as in today’s social climate. (Nevertheless, I’d take my chances any day against postmodernism rather than against Cromwell’s forces)

There was a time when the high regard for clergy was reflected in that barometer of social discourse – the cinema. In those days, we were ‘trailing clouds of glory’. Few, I suspect, would want a return to that!

There was Gregory Peck, the heroic figure who goes as a missionary to China in A.J. Cronin’s *The Keys of the Kingdom*. On *the Waterfront* depicted the fearless Jesuit, Father Corrigan, standing

bravely and alone against the exploitation of longshoremen in New York harbour. Now, apart from films like Jimmy McGovern’s *Broken*, the priest is represented as a figure of fun – or worse. In the main, the priests in *Father Ted* compose a gallery of eccentrics, likeable rogues, or half daft individuals. All that said, as satire, it is most enjoyable. But *Father Ted* or *Ballykissangel* should be the least of our problems.

A sense of loss must surely be latent in those hold-all terms: *low morale* or *burn-out* or *keeping our heads above water*. A kind of mourning, if you like, for the times when, on a Sunday morning, a priest would, with confident step, approach the altar to a packed church and the full swell of the organ to greet him from high up in the choir loft. *Ecce sacerdos magnus!* Now he steals a glance at the same few, the *anawim* – the faithful remnant.

And in quiet moments of reflection, when he comes across the framed ordination piece and glances from one cameo to the next, he remembers those who have gone, those who had found the torc of celibacy tightening and who left to find, what they hoped, would be a more natural way to live. He remembers too the classmate who died alone: he was a fine footballer and a joker who lightened the rigor of seminary days.

And he sits in the silence of his presbytery and asks: Why has it come to this? Was it the spate of child sex abuse cases, and the spiriting of offending clerics from one region to another? But if he looks back at the past, and even if only an occasional student of Irish social history, he will discover the enormous power the Catholic Church gained in the mid-nineteenth century from its brave and generous response to basic human needs. He will learn about the huge sacrifices made by priests and religious to set up schools and hospitals. Nuns teaching piano or crochet after school hours.

He will recall the beauty in stained glass windows, the decorated altars at Christmas and the intimations of mystery in the cadences of the Latin Mass. All this conspiring to raise a struggling people from the drudgery of their circumscribed lives.

But he, the occasional student of history will also learn that, unlike John the Baptist, the Catholic Church refused to step aside and allow a country to grow until it was knocked off its perch over a century later (in the 1990s especially) by governments no longer afraid ‘of a belt of a crozier’.

One doesn’t need to do painstaking research into the changing face of Catholic Ireland to identify the shift in mood of the people. Local events however insignificant can reveal much.

In 1967, the sultry Jayne Mansfield, of Hollywood fame, was refused permission to sashay onto the stage of a Tralee hotel

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ballroom by order of the Bishop of Kerry. Contrast that with more recent times (and this is mingling fact with fiction) when a ‘dirty fillum’ comes to Craggy Island. The bishop orders Fr Ted and Dougal to protest. *Down with this sort of thing* is their manifesto as they – two ludicrous figures chained to a hand grip – stand outside the cinema. The Craggy Islanders bid the protesting priests a cheery ‘goodnight, Fathers,’ and pack into the picture house. Without knowing it, they were living embodiments of a postmodern culture.

So, in this environment of vast cultural change, when one ‘ism’ is following closely on the heels of another – *and your idea is fine so long as you keep it to yourself, thank you* – all has changed. We live in an age where the *grand narrative* meets with rejection. Narcissism is the new religion. So, is it any wonder that priests are despairing and would ‘retire in the morning, if I could.’ Most of the priests battle on bravely; some take comfort in retail therapy (‘a nice, new car’), and Netflix for the long winter nights.

Others too, when they realise, they can no longer ‘have the best seats in the synagogue,’ begin to claw back lost ground and become versions of Captain Mannering, the diminutive stuffed shirt in the television series, *Dad’s Army*. It’s not unknown for a priest with that mindset to arrive in a parish and to trample on the work of his predecessor and lay leaders by disbanding the pastoral council and then to go on a solo run: surely a most effective way of hastening secularism.

STRAWS IN THE WIND

So, if the condition of the priesthood in Ireland today is given expression in fragments such as ‘low morale’ or ‘keeping my head above water’ surely attention needs to be paid. Anecdotes, of course, do not constitute accurate information, but they hint that all is not well: that some priests may be lost. And if that is the case, then their capacity to meet the challenges of the modern world are sorely diminished. Even if only a minority can be described as in a state of ‘low morale’, they too deserve attention. Isn’t there an obvious biblical precedent: *the good shepherd* went after the one that was lost and left the ninety-nine in the desert. (Matt. 18: 10 – 14)

In keeping with the programme for renewal known as Building Hope in the Dublin diocese, with its emphasis on listening to the people of God, wouldn’t it be instructive for bishops and priests to take themselves off ‘to some quiet place’ for a period of prayer and reflection. And indeed, to avail of that occasion for priests to share their hopes as well as struggles, their dreams as well as their disappointments, and all done in a spirit of Christian charity.

The opportunity such an event provides would make the efforts at renewal more grounded. It is incumbent on Church leaders to apply the principle of listening to priests as well as to laity. Listening is the mood music in the leadup to the Synod and other similar movements in Irish dioceses. I wonder will this happen for priests.

Just before the dreaded covid 19 hit our shores, I attended a meeting to discuss the priest’s life today. We were about fifty to sixty: ‘bloodied but unbowed’; some had served their time in the parched lands of Africa.

As with these assemblies, ours had a sober beginning, but it didn’t take long to work up a head of steam; one man’s courage to speak out emboldened others. Those who spoke – a fair sampling of the gathering – described their feelings of isolation, periods of frustration and loss of energy, and loss of interest too in their calling. Some described mental breakdown and seeking comfort out of a bottle, others, like in *Othello*, ‘*loving not wisely but too well.*’

The contributions were not for the faint-hearted: the stream of expletives would make Joyce’s *Ulysses* look like a handbook for the Legion of Mary. Over the top? Maybe, in places, but that was at once, necessary and cathartic.

When the dust had settled and the air, blue as a Dubs football shirt in a rainy Croke Park, had fallen away, one priest opined: ‘isn’t it a pity that no bishop was present to hear all this.’ And so said all of us.

SCAPEGOATING

To pick out weaknesses in Church leadership, of course, and to attribute clerical pains and frustrations to authority figures solely is both unfair and inaccurate and reflects a woeful ignorance of life’s crooked path. When a young man steps inside the door of a seminary for the first time (in my day, at around 18years) he brings in his inner holdall a register of disappointments, anxieties, shadows of sorrow or, conversely, an outstanding (and maybe inordinate) belief in his own ability.

Many entered seminaries with a ‘flawed pedigree’. One doesn’t need to be a card-carrying Freudian to know that the absence or failures of the real father can be imposed onto the seminary president or the bishop. The many ways in which the script and the *personae dramatis* of the human drama, we call the family, impacted on that young man of 18 must be grist for the mill of any enlightened spiritual programme. The value beyond price of such a journey is that it may free the candidate (and later the priest) from shadow boxing.

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This insight, nevertheless, doesn't absolve Church leaders from taking a closer look at the condition of the priesthood in Ireland today.

THE CARE OF PRIESTS

As a woman who is committed to the mission of the Church, said recently at a deanery meeting: 'why can't a bishop sit down with his priests and ask: "well, what is it like for you?"' Or as the good people of Derry put it: 'how's it about ye.'

Much is made of the diocesan commitment towards the care of priests; conversely, priests themselves are sceptical about the way it is constructed and carried out. They claim that those who are delegated to the ministry of tending to the 'wounded healers' lack the ability, the training, or the understanding of what is required for such a role. Limiting this ministry to the ordained too is also considered a mistake: ordination *per se* doesn't confer the skills for much needed direction or counselling.

It would seem a no-brainer to suggest that a priest, in a climate that is indifferent, if not hostile to what he represents would need to be heard in strict confidence by one who is familiar with the vagaries of the human mind and the mysteries of the immortal soul. One who avoids judgement while not flinching from responding in a way that will facilitate greater self-understanding and freedom for the enrichment of a priest's life and ministry.

Strangely, there seems to be a reluctance among priest to pick up the phone to seek help to do God's work more effectively. In casual conversation, I asked a senior priest: 'do you think many go for spiritual direction or to a counsellor?'

His laugh was derisive as if he found my question thoroughly naive. If he is correct, it's a pity, because then the riches of the inner world are never harvested, and we are flying by the seat of our pants.

'To thine own self be true,' says Polonius in *Hamlet*, 'and it must follow as day the night, thou canst not then be false to any man.'

But long before Shakespeare wrote his play, Luke 17:21 records Jesus as saying: 'the kingdom of God is within you.'

CONCLUSION.

Church leaders need to provide a forum where priests can speak the truth of their unease; promote a climate that would encourage them to hear the stirrings of their souls and hear their confusion about being missionaries in a world, not so brave or not so new as

it imagines. The *fervorino* delivered before lunch on the last day of the annual retreat hardly meets that requirement. Something more is needed for priests to taste the splendour of the *Elected Silence*, the poet Gerard Hopkins so deeply desired. That might be a fruitful beginning that could lead on to the birth of the great promise in Ezekiel: 36:26,

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Religion and the Twenty first Century. It is surely ironic that as indifference to and disengagement from religion grows in Ireland, the need to understand religion, its politico-cultural significance, its enduring appeal for millions around the globe, and its role in society is being increasingly recognised by academics, diplomats, government advisers and policymakers in the major capitals of the world. What is becoming increasingly evident is that we live in a world where religion is very important: nearly every news bulletin is a reminder of this.

- T P O’ Mahony, *The Politics of God: The Rise and Rise of Political Religion*, Dublin: Veritas, 2023, p 173/4.

Catholic school ethos and the integration of migrant students.

Amalee Meehan

Although Ireland has experienced significant inward migration in recent years, the sustained growth of immigration dates from the late 1990s. Schools in this country have played a key role in the integration of immigrant students. Despite an abundance of research internationally in the area of education and integration, how the ethos of a school underpins approaches to the integration of migrant students remains unexplored.

This article focuses on how the Catholic ethos of one second level school influences its approach to providing support to young migrants. It emerges from the work of Transnational Collaboration on Bullying, Migration and Integration at School Level (TRIBES), a project focused on migrant experiences of school bullying across the European continent. TRIBES is a European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) action, with six working groups across 33 European countries. Ireland is part of a working group focusing on the policies and practices schools adopt to deal with integration of immigrant pupils. While working through the data, researchers noted that two schools in different countries (Malta and Ireland) cited ethos as a significant influence on their approach to integrating migrant students. Moreover, these were the only schools with a denominational (Catholic) ethos. Researchers decided to investigate this further by means of a small-scale case study on the actual influence of ethos on the integration of migrant students. It does not investigate government-led policies around language and academic support, which should be visible in every school with migrant students, regardless of ethos. In Ireland, the case study school self-identified as having a Catholic ethos in the tradition of Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters.

CATHOLIC SCHOOL ETHOS AND MIGRANT STUDENTS

Generally, ethos is considered as the formal values, beliefs and practices that emanate from a mission statement, and/or the informal

Amalee Meehan is Assistant Professor, School of Human Development, Institute of Education, DCU.

atmosphere arising from everyday elements within a school,¹ including images and symbols, as well as goals and expectations. In a Catholic school, such formal and informal aspects should emanate from that faith tradition. At the same time, there is little static about school ethos. Manchester and Bragg state that a school often has a distinctive ethos, influenced by the founding intention and developing over time to form an identity that makes that school unique.² The ethos of a school evolves, depending on that school's own history and context.

Johnson proposes that schools which follow a “pluralistic ethos” are more equitable, purposeful and culturally responsive.³ On the other hand, Catholic social thought teaches that Catholic schools should be responsive, welcoming communities, inclusive of all, especially those who are most in need. Care for the vulnerable and hospitality towards the stranger is an ancient and recurring theme in Catholicism, stretching back to the oldest biblical texts. The creation stories of Genesis insist that everyone is made in the image and likeness of God - no exceptions. We hear in the Book of Exodus the imperative that ‘you shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt’ (Ex 22:21). The Christian Scriptures clarify the implications: ‘For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”’ (Gal 5:14). These words of Jesus compel people to recognise Christ himself in all people, especially the abandoned or excluded (cf. Mt 25:40.45).

In recent times, Pope Francis (henceforth, Francis) has been at the forefront of developing Catholic social teaching on care for migrants. Francis’ first pastoral visit outside Rome after his election in March 2013 was to the tiny island of Lampedusa, one of the nearest gateways to Europe for Africans fleeing poverty and conflict, to highlight the plight of refugees worldwide. It has been a central concern of his papacy, articulated clearly in his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Here he proposes that by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, humanity can reawaken the universal aspiration to a single family. ‘Let us dream, then, as a single human family . . . as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice.’⁴

1 D. Faas, B. Sokolowska & M. Darmody. ‘Everybody is available to them’: support measures for migrant students in Irish secondary schools’. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(4), 2015, p. 447–466.

2 H. Manchester & S. Bragg. ‘School ethos and spatial turn: “Capacious” Approaches to research and practice’. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(10) 2013, p. 818–827.

3 L. S. Johnson. ‘The diversity imperative: Building a culturally responsive school ethos’. *Intercultural Education*, 14:(1) 2003, p. 17.

4 Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*. 2020, #8. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

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When hearts are open, sensitive to the difficulties of people outside our own nucleus, we come to experience others as part of the human family.

Schools can help realise this vision by creating what Francis terms a ‘culture of encounter’ that is rooted in the dignity of all people, who share a common humanity.⁵ A true ‘encounter’ is not just with people who think alike, but with those from outside one’s own circle, with those who are different. The presence of different cultures in schools is a source of mutual enrichment for everyone. His development of Catholic social teaching in this regard amounts to a call to cultural responsiveness, not just as a way to meet the needs of students, but as a source of human transformation. Building inclusive community where that type of experience is possible is a central theme of his papacy and of Catholic social teaching. A corresponding theme is the call to serve others, above all those who are victims of poverty and injustice of any kind. These should be key characteristics of Catholic schools. In short, the responsibility to migrants is clear and essential for schools which claim a Catholic ethos.

THE CASE STUDY

Inclusion and care as ideas and ways of living are integral to other faith traditions and worldviews, and to many systems of education. It is not the objective of the wider TRIBES project or of this paper to compare or contrast schools (denominational or otherwise) in this respect. The specific aim here is to investigate if and how the case study school, St Clare’s Secondary School (henceforth St Clare’s)⁶, fulfils this obligation. Located in the heart of an urban area, it has a Catholic ethos in the tradition of the Presentation Sisters and is now part of the lay trust Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST).

St Clare’s is open to all religions. The student population (all girls) is approximately 300. Like 99% of second level schools in Ireland, it is non-fee-paying. By and large it caters for students of a low socio-economic index, with higher than average ethnic and religious diversity. From less than 1% in 2005, the proportion of immigrant students now stands at 40%. This school has DEIS⁷ status, meaning it is recognised and supported in caring for an educationally and economically disadvantaged population. With

5 Francis. *Educating for Intercultural Dialogue*. 2013. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20131028_dialogo-interculturale_en.html.

6 Pseudonym

7 DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: an initiative of the Irish government to recognise and support schools serving disadvantaged populations.

a mission statement that includes welcoming students in the tradition of the Presentation Order, St Clare's hosts students from many different countries of origin including Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Poland, Lithuania, Brazil and latterly Ukraine. Some of the school literature is translated into 15 languages.

In depth, semi structured interviews were held with the school principal, English as an Additional Language (EAL) specialist teacher, and the mother of a family who had recently arrived as migrants to Ireland. These in-depth interviews explored practices to integrate migrant students at school level and the rationale behind these practices.

Table 3: Participant Profiles

	St Clare's Secondary School	Anonymised designations
Principal	Irish, Catholic	Niamh
Teacher	Non-Irish, Non-Catholic	Monica
Parent	Indian, Hindu	Brinda

The study is limited by sample size. With such a small sample, research results cannot be generalised to a larger population. However, educational research is rarely generalisable as there are too many circumstantial variables constructing the findings. Rather, this is an exploratory study which seeks to explore a particular issue (in this case, how Catholic school ethos influences integration of migrant students) in an attempt to identify where further research might be focused.

RESULTS

The results indicate that the integration strategies and practices adopted by St Clare's are inspired by its founding religious order, which contributes to its particular expressions of ethos. The overarching approaches in this regard are: (1) establishing a community of care and inclusion, and (2) encouraging a whole school approach to integration.

(1) Establishing a community of care and inclusion

In its mission statement, St Clare's describes itself as a community that welcomes students in the tradition of Nano Nagle, founder of the Presentation Order. The Principal, Niamh, situates the culture of inclusion and care squarely in this ethos. She sees Nano as an

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inspirational figure, who ‘transcends all religions’, from whom everyone can learn:

I know that there may be a perception that, how can you be a Catholic school, if you have a growing percentage of Muslim students? I don’t feel that conflict because I think we are doing the greatest work that could be done - we’re helping students who are extremely disadvantaged within society [as Nano did].

In faithfulness to Nano’s vision ‘we look outside ourselves to the needs that we have here in the school and look to cater for them’ (Niamh). Monica (EAL teacher) explains that

‘the school as a Catholic school is very inclusive ... the ethos of the school is all about community. This really encourages and supports students to integrate. . . . The school works hard to build a sense of family and community.’

For instance, over the years, St Clare’s has developed various initiatives to draw parents of NAMS into the school community and make them feel welcome. Niamh described how, as well as intercultural events, the school devises and delivers evening classes such as art and craft classes to function as social gatherings:

[Some of the mothers are] fantastically artistic. ... They don’t have a word of English, in some cases, but they will come [to the classes] and they will be so proud of the work that they produce. We can then put [their work] on display in the school.

This was the experience of Brinda, who says that being Hindu was ‘never an issue’ for her or her daughters. In fact, it was helpful that the school was clear about its ethos and religious roots. It helped her to recognise shared religious values, which were very important:

the basic meaning is the same . . . Hinduism [teaches] us to be kind, be helpful to others. Here, the values are the same. The values of every religion are the same, it’s just [that] the way of teaching and preaching is different.

Brinda and her family experienced a culture of inclusion embedded in ‘the way they do things, their commitment to all students.’ This sense of community may be a contributory factor in student attendance: in St Clare’s, attendance of migrant students is regular and dependable. However, the reality of translating aspiration

into action provides challenges, especially in the area of religious practice. For instance, the school struggles to provide adequate prayer spaces for Muslim students, an issue which emerged through the Student Council. Identifying and accommodating the needs and practices of students of other faiths and cultures can be challenging.

(2) *Whole school approach*

Participants assert that an inclusive community of care is possible only with a whole school approach. Both the principal and the EAL teacher situate their individual roles and responsibilities to integrate all students in the collective effort as a school – this is what makes successful integration possible. Niamh describes how ‘we are always looking for ways to improve, always open to initiatives. We are always on the lookout for CPD [Continuous Professional Development].’ St Clare’s twenty-year history of reflective practice was evident here: over time it has developed a wide, varied extracurricular programme as a means of integration, largely run by staff volunteers. Monica ties the success of this strategy with the school ethos:

Migrant students are represented at all levels and in all aspects of school life. Just look at the End of Year book! They are so visible on social media. We have a multicultural student council. They are involved in every after school activity and we couldn’t be more proud of them. It’s the culture of the school, the Catholic ethos, the way they are looked out for and looked after. No particular encouragement is needed: the ethos is there, it is visible, it is our strength.

Brinda explains how ‘there are two EAL teachers but lots of other teachers are interested and help out.’ However, despite their efforts and openness to integrate migrant students and their families, both Niamh and Monica report mixed success. Niamh was frank in this regard, describing how the school had been doing well pre-Covid, but the momentum faltered when everything moved online. It has been very hard to re-energise that momentum. A second challenge is resources. With little discretionary spend, almost all extracurricular efforts and activities rely on the good will and volunteerism of staff. Time and resource pressure on teachers and on the school community can have a significant effect. Niamh explains that ‘it can be challenging for teachers to take on other work outside of their own specific subject areas or interests’. Relentless government-led ‘reform’ measures over the last number

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of years can have a cumulative fatiguing effect, with recruitment and retention of both teachers and principals now a significant challenge.

A sub-theme of whole school approach is that the sense of responsibility for migrant students and their families is not confined to school activities. Brinda reported the willingness of some school personnel – individually and collectively – to ‘go the extra mile’ – particularly for families like hers, who might not be familiar with organisational and administrative set-ups beyond the school system. She spoke of situations where the principal/teachers provide guidance on cultural mediation and bureaucratic procedures, and give their time voluntarily, for instance with filling in forms and negotiating websites. Paradoxically, both Niamh and Monica identified parental involvement as an area for improvement. For instance, despite their considerable efforts, parental involvement especially in formal bodies such as the Parents’ Association and Board of Management remains low.

CONCLUSIONS

Ethos is a strong theme in the findings and all participants reference the ethos of the school as a motivation for fostering a culture of inclusion and a caring community. With a large migrant population which has grown over two decades, St Clare’s has developed practices such as evening classes for parents, some of which are non-language dependent so that language ability is not a condition of participation. Another successful approach is the school’s strategically developed extracurricular programme, largely due to the goodwill and volunteerism of staff. St Clare’s encourages all pupils to take part, and celebrates all types of achievements and events. In this way, students have opportunities not only to develop their interests and talents, but also to mix and make friends within a safe environment.

Although the themes of human dignity, culture of encounter and the call to serve are resonant here, it is the connection with the founding religious order rather than the contemporary Catholic Church that is the articulated primary inspiration. St Clare’s intentionally tells the story of Nano Nagle: it is her work, her vision, and the work and vision of the community she founded, that provides the primary source of encouragement for their integration of *all* students. Niamh is very clear that Nano’s appeal is universal. She can be a source of inspiration for everyone, teacher, parent, pupil, regardless of faith tradition or country of origin. It is the figure of Nano, and her outreach to the poor and vulnerable, rather than for instance recourse to the call to serve in Catholic social

teaching, that provides the primary inspiration for the school's attitudes and practices. The biblical imperatives used by Pope Francis, and indeed the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, are missing from the language and conceptual frameworks used by the participants. This resonates with the insights of Manchester & Bragg that the distinctive ethos of a school is often influenced by the founding intention developing over time; this identity makes that school unique.⁸ The tracing of roots in this regard, rather than in the Catholic tradition, especially the Gospels, may be of interest to Catholic patrons.

On the other hand, it is evident that first principles of Catholic social teaching such as a welcoming the stranger, building community, and care for the vulnerable are intentionally applied and given expression in this schools. The experience of Brinda, the Indian Hindu parent, is interesting here. Her description of the school feeling like a family, that in finding St Clare's she had found a family, and of the connections the school gave her with her host country and other parents, echoes the hope of 'a single human family' so prevalent in *Fratelli Tutti*.⁹ Findings indicate that the challenge of Catholic social teaching is being addressed in this school with courage and compassion. This is particularly true of the school principal, who is very conscious and articulate about the Presentation tradition she has inherited, very confident about its universality and relevance for today, very clear about how it can and must be applied. Moreover, she has the backing of the school staff, most of whom, like her, are prepared to 'go the extra mile.' While the school struggles with aspects such as accommodating various faith practices and parental involvement, social inclusion is a priority and the community is committed to inclusive practices. This defies Johnson's proposal that schools which follow a "pluralistic ethos" are more equitable, purposeful and culturally responsive.¹⁰ Findings suggest that Catholic education contributes to universal human values and therefore to a democratic society. This may be of interest to those concerned in the debate of publically funded denominational schools.

As an exploratory study to identify areas of further research, this project throws up more questions than it answers, for instance, is the inspiration of Nano Nagle particular to this (Presentation) school? Is a similar ethos at work in schools serving more affluent populations? How does ethos influence other aspects of school life (besides integration of migrant students)? Are there areas where ethos has a negative influence? What might the student voice add?

8 H. Manchester & S. Bragg. 2013.

9 Francis. 2020.

10 L. S. Johnson. 2003, p. 17

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What might be learned from practices and inspirations in multi-faith, multi-denominational, non-denominational and secular schools? A next step might include similar studies on a broader scale, to increase validity and address some of these questions.

Random Reflections

- I have only now. The past is dead. Tomorrow is hope.
- Ants work hard, but they never miss a picnic.
- Aim at being more rather than having more.
- After each parting from others, do I leave light or shadow?
- Many things catch your eye. Follow the things that catch your heart.
- In conversation, try not to make up in length for what you lack in depth.
- Some people meet God as a demander. Some meet God as a gift.
- Table fellowship for Jesus was boundary breaking and communion making.

– DES O’ DONNELL OMI, *Random Reflections*, Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022, pp 21, 29, 42.

Asking “What’s Possible?”: Synods and Community

Séamus Lillis

This article addresses how the principles and practices of community development support the purposes of the Synod and vice versa.

INTRODUCTION

The Synod is significant because it has consulted the laity, the community of the faithful, world-wide for the first time in living memory. This unprecedented discourse or Synodality will persist and will feature in all future major events of the Catholic Church. After almost two thousand years of the Church’s existence, this Synodality initiative by Pope Francis will undoubtedly become a hallmark of his pontificate.

The Church is a community. Its core concerns are the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the implementation of His will on earth. Community in the Church is empowered by loving relationships of the faithful with one another and with God. Faith in the Mystical Body of Christ and in the Communion of Saints emphasise the communal nature of the Church.

A revealing insight into Pope Francis’s initiative in calling for a Synod of the People of God is captured in his address to bishops on October 9, 2021, where he emphasised the expected role of the Holy Spirit:

“I am certain the Spirit will guide us and give us the grace to move forward together, to listen to one another and to embark on a discernment of the times in which we are living, in solidarity with the struggles and aspirations of all humanity.”

This Synod calls the whole People of God, the ordained and the lay faithful, to engage collaboratively in this discernment.

Séamus Lillis has worked in rural community development and with parish pastoral councils. He can be contacted at seamuslillis17@gmail.com

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COMMUNAL CONVERSATIONS

The Church and civil communities experience agreement and variance in their communal practices. The guiding principles and learning experiences of both are relevant resources towards future progress and improved performance.

Civic communities conduct intricate networks of purposeful conversations about matters that concern their members. Like civic communal organisations, the work of the Synod is predicated on consultative conversations about shared concerns with the laity. These Synodal conversations began in parishes and continued through their diocese and onwards to 112 bishops' conferences worldwide; they were completed in October 2022. This is being followed by meetings of continental assemblies early in 2023. The Synodal conversations involving the laity are arguably the most geographically extensive in history. Comparable widespread consultations in society have not occurred.

DESIGNED AND EMERGENT STRUCTURES

The Church – a humanly and divinely founded community – has, like other organisations, both Designed and Emergent structures, not in detached domains of influence but in symbiotic collaboration (Capra¹).

Designed structures are formal and more powerful. They are largely static and objective in nature; are observable and quantifiable and concentrate on outcomes. They, in contrast to organisations' processes, are often the State's primary focus, when it scrutinises voluntary organisations. Designed structures articulate organisations' legal and financial standing, together with their policies and regulations through which organisations bind their members to conform.

Emergent organizational structures arise from an informal networks of relationships that continually grow and respond to changing local contexts. These structures are dynamic, flexible and subjective. They deliver novelty and elasticity. Emergent structures deliver the unique and valued capacities of human organisations. Significantly Emergent structures generate the organisation's values such as compassion, persistence, creativity and caring. These values are shared by the Church and civic communities.

The Church's Designed structures are set out in canon law, in its parochial structures and diocesan sees, maintained by a

1 Fritjof Capra, *The Hidden Connections: Integrating the Biological, Cognitive, and Social Dimensions of Life into a Science of Sustainability*. New York: Doubleday, 2002 p. 121

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hierarchical leadership. The customs and traditions of the almost 2,000 year-old Church can also become onerous and controlling in themselves. The Church’s Emergent structures are found in the personal and communal relationships of the faithful with Jesus Christ and with one another as desired by the Lord (Jn 13:34). Through these relationships and both structures, the kingdom of God is being realised.

Emergent structures over time impact Designed structures. A *similar* impact can be anticipated to arise from the Synod on the Designed structures of the Church. The influences of Emergent structures, which are more focused on processes *rather* than outcomes, are not easily quantified and can remain unrecognized.

In human organisations there are tensions between Designed structures, which embody relationships of power, and Emergent structures, which represent the organization’s aliveness and creativity. Both structures combine to express an organisation’s uniqueness. Each structure may separately dominate, with problematic results. An organisation that drifts too far toward design becomes overly rigid and unable to adapt to changing conditions; arguably the state of the Church, pre-Vatican II. An organisation drifting too far toward emergence loses the ability to deliver its original mission. The removal of either structure leads to the predictable ineffectiveness of the organisations.

When Vatican II (1962-1965) was first announced by Pope John XXIII, it was in circumstances of a change – averse Curia. The leading participants were the world’s diocesan bishops, who in time delivered a remarkable legacy of spiritual renewal and a notable outreach to separated Christians and those of other faiths and none.

Some sixty years later, the Synod *complements* Vatican II. It seeks to engage with the universal ‘People of God’. In this it is mining a resource that has not been hitherto involved in purposeful conversation. In revisiting the findings of Vatican II, the Synod’s participants may well achieve a renewed appraisal of the deliberations of Vatican II.

LEARNING FROM CIVIC COMMUNITIES

For success in civic community work, a phase of community building is essential. Assemblies, or gatherings of individuals, are not immediate communities. Having agreed to become a community, gatherings have yet to identify their intricate networks, start their purposeful conversations and engage with their concerns. This takes time and encouragement, which may have been minimal in the parochial conversations of the Synod.

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Margaret Wheatley,² renowned community worker, urges community participants to ask: *what's possible?* not *what's wrong?*' These two separate questions generate two dissimilar conversations.

The Irish Bishops' Conference's Report, *The National Synodal Synthesis*³ (August 2022), recorded effective, wide-ranging conversations. The themes of this report suggest a series of responses to a question, more like Wheatley's *What's wrong?* rather than her challenge to address *What's possible?* Synodal participants spoke about Abuse and the Church, the Role of Women, LGBTQ, Sexuality and Relationships, all capturing reservations. Ecumenism, the Environment, Social Justice, the Church's Sacramental Life and Missionary Outreach were listed as being disregarded by participants in the report. When Pope Francis's Synod in Rome will have completed its deliberations, a Synod for the Irish church, to be known as *The Irish Synodal Pathway* will take place after 2024. This is not yet widely known at parish level. Hopefully this *second* opportunity will provide for community building and for a focus for the Irish laity to address the creative and life-giving question, *What's possible?* as it deliberates on the future of the Church in Ireland.

Would the Irish Synodal Report have been different had the participants, after some community building, accepted from the outset that they were a community, a privileged People of God that acknowledged a communal indebtedness to the Lord and responded purposefully to *What's possible?*

Experience of working in community development suggests that initial meetings of prospective communities tend to focus on dissatisfaction. This disposition is not unrelated to experiences of social media and is largely because participants, not yet knowing one another, have neither confidence nor experience in engaging in community processes. However, it is likely that as confidence and experience grow, the laity will move on to realise and implement its emerging role arising from its divinely conferred calling and begin to respond to *what's possible?*

When members share their motives for participating, their understandings are at one with the contribution of the Emergent structures of all communal organisations. This also holds true for the Church in its abilities to reach out to the margins and do good there effectively. Additionally these motivations express members' values, about having a personal conviction, a willingness to take

2 Margaret J Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope in the Future*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers Inc, 2002.

3 The Irish National Synodal Synthesis - August 16th, 2022 - Association of Catholics in Ireland (acireland.ie)

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risks, about principles, a truth that members will aspire to live by and maintain.

Actively subverting the laity’s calling compromises the Church’s communal nature. Some, leaning towards Design structures – to the disadvantage of Emergent structures – are more enticed to focus on measurable, predictable outcomes, rather than the *personal* benefits hidden in communities’ processes and in the promising emancipation of the Church’s laity. When Design structures dominate – i.e. disavowing personal insights, talents and character, being always risk-averse, or declining to foster and value emergent insights – society and the Church are disadvantaged by an underperformance on a scale unlikely to be fully realised.

‘*Listening*’ in the Synod implies paying attention to participants. In community organisations, it means listening to discourse or purposeful conversations. For civic communities, *purposeful conversations* are the core, reliable and perceptible – albeit widely underappreciated – means of creating and maintaining communities. Without these conversations, instituting and sustaining communities are unachievable. Human organisations generate a shared system of understandings, explanations and values – a common context of meaning – that is continually created, shared and sustained by ongoing purposeful conversations. The Synod can confidently anticipate a similar effect among its members. The Synod is a very significant initiative on the part of Pope Francis, not just because it is unprecedented, but because the laity’s contribution is unlikely ever again to be denied or returned to its pre-Synod non-participatory state.

COMMUNITIES LEARNING FROM THE CHURCH?

As emerging Synodal reports are being compiled, the practice of drafting and re-drafting is evident.⁴ This reiteration brings improvement and elucidation, certainly not suppression nor censorship. Drafting and re-drafting are exercises in discernment and a clarification of the deliberative conversations. This fortifies the processes of the original parish-grounded purposeful conversations on which the impending Continental documents are founded, preparatory to their being returned “to the people of God for the second stage of the 2021 -2023 Synodal process.”⁵ There will be even further deliberation because on 16 October, 2022, Pope Francis announced that the 16th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place in two sessions: the *first*

4 *General Secretariat for the Synod*, News Release 03/10/2022 at ‘end of meeting to draft the Document for the Continental Stage...’

5 *Ibid* p.2.

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from 4th to 29th October 2023; the *second* in October 2024. This lengthening of the Synodal journey is meant to be an opportunity – as Pope Francis said:

“... to foster an understanding of Synodality as a *constitutive dimension* of the Church, and to help everyone to live it in a journey of brothers and sisters who bear witness to the joy of the Gospel”.

In this discerning process, the Synod *exceeds* the practices of civic communities. Civic communities do not adequately address the need to capture their ongoing experiential learning. Minutes of their meetings range from minimal records of their decisions, to lengthy verbatim accounts of members’ contributions. These are devoid of reflection, learning and wisdom and are defended as fulfilling legal requirements, i.e. keeping of minutes. Thus the opportunity to maintain a record of reflective learning is neglected; a rich learning resource is squandered. This is *not* the case in the planned delivery of the Synod’s findings, a model from which communities and other civic organisations might profitably learn. The Synod’s approach allows for reflection and enhancement of original drafts.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The laity can expect to have an impact, not *only* on the Emergent structures of the Church, but also – in time – on its Designed structures. A renewal of our relationship with God and with one-another is likely. This renaissance will stimulate a more widespread conviction with potentially a significant impact world-wide. No other universal organisation, such as the United Nations, has a comparable promise. It is also probable that the laity will always be consulted henceforth; snubbing the ‘People of God’ will not be viable.

Developing the Instituted Ministry of Catechist: Exploring Six Organising Principles¹

Patricia Carroll

We are living in rapidly changing times or as Pope Francis has said a change of era.² It is within this context, that the instituted ministry of catechist was announced by Pope Francis.³ In this very short document, Francis describes this ministry as both ancient and new. It is ancient in the sense that when we look at the history of the Church we can see that there have always been a variety of ministries arising from the need of the Church, and the document traces this out. At the same time, it is new in the sense that newly emerging needs now in the Church seem to indicate that within the setting of the pressing need of evangelisation it is time to formalise and strengthen this role.⁴ This development is rooted in a rediscovery of the centrality of baptism and the realisation that baptism is not only a gateway to sacraments but is in itself a sacrament of ministry. All the baptised are anointed for service and confirmation strengthens us once more for service.⁵ This connects intentionally to the original meaning of the word ministry, which is simply service.⁶

LOOKING BACK AT DEVELOPMENTS

Since the second Vatican Council, lay ministries have slowly but surely been developing across the globe. For example, in the United States roles such as parish catechetical leaders, directors

- 1 This article is based upon a workshop given in the Archdiocese of Dublin to a group exploring the role of instituted catechist on the 1st December at the Centre for Mission and Ministry, St. Paul's Church Arran Quay Dublin
- 2 Pope Francis Address to the National Italian Conference, Florence, 10th November 2015
- 3 Pope Francis: *Antiquum Ministerium*, 10th May 2021
- 4 See the Directory for Catechesis (DC) 2020:1 – 5, Pontifical Council for Promoting Evangelisation
- 5 DC 2020: 122
- 6 Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Theology for Ministry: An Introduction for Lay Ministers*, Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota 2014: 108

Patricia Carroll is Director for Mission and Ministry in the Archdiocese of Dublin with extensive experience over thirty years of forming lay people for ministries.

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of evangelisation, music ministers and pastoral associates are all recognised as lay ecclesial ministries. Whereas in Germany, the development of roles for laity in pastoral ministries took the form of developing particular areas of expertise, where the pastoral assistant role focused on mainly teaching and counselling, the community assistant on parish outreach and leading liturgy, the administrative assistant on parish administration to support the pastor. As well as this Germany also developed the role of lay preacher, where a trained lay person preaches at community worship. In the Irish context the two most recent and striking examples of the development of lay ministries would be in Dublin and Killaloe, both emerging as a consequence of growing pastoral need.

The role of parish pastoral worker in Dublin is focused around four organising principles: animating, relating, praying and educating. It is a full-time paid ministry and each parish pastoral worker was commissioned for their role by the Archbishop. In contrast to this, Killaloe diocese has recently developed two new lay ministries. The first is a pastoral care ministry with an intentional outreach to nursing homes, the sick and the bereaved. The second role is a catechetical ministry around faith development and sacramental support. Both of these ministries are part-time voluntary ministries commissioned by the Bishop. In each case, these ministries emerged because of ongoing pastoral needs.

KEY FEATURES OF THE ROLE

Within the Dublin development of the role of parish pastoral worker the four organising principles provide an intentionality to it, where *animating* is about team building, gathering, leading, presenting to and developing groups. *Relating* is about the ability to make pastoral connections, building relationships alongside clergy, being available and approachable. *Praying* is not about saying prayers, but having the ability to offer opportunities, devising prayer experiences, planning liturgies, running *lectio divina* and offering parishioners training in reflection skills. Finally, the organizing principle of *educating* is about forming adults for ministries, supporting sacramental preparation, liaising with schools, promoting adult faith development and highlighting the importance of social justice and the care of creation. These organising principles bring clarity and focus to the role, helping the parish and team members to imagine the possibilities of the role and move beyond the idea that this role is about helping Father. It also allows for the giftedness of each person to flourish within the role and develop particular strengths. When we look at the ministry

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of catechist in the *Directory for Catechesis 2020*, we see that it is also structured around organising principles. This helps us to envisage what a catechist can do and the scope there is for future development here in Ireland.

SIX ORGANISING PRINCIPLES

In the new *Directory for Catechesis 2020*, there are *six* organising principles used to describe the scope of the catechists' role.⁷ The breadth and depth of these principles are very useful in enabling us to see the expansive possibilities for lay ministries. Here the catechist is described as a witness of faith and keeper of the memory of God, a teacher and a mystagogue, and accompanier and an educator. These six organising principles need to be unpacked in order to see how each of these aspects can be practically grounded in the pastoral reality of our parishes today.

1. Witness of Faith

It was Paul VI who helped us to see that if modern people are going to listen to teachers, then that is because of their authentic witness to a living relationship with the Lord Jesus.⁸ This is why the ability to witness is a core skill for any catechist. The catechist must be able to simply share their experience of Jesus with others, not only sharing the goodness and truth of the Gospel but also saying 'I know the Lord.' Without this ability to witness, the notion of mission is incredulous. It implies that in any formation, catechists will be helped to build up the confidence to do this well and simply, will be in touch with their own personal story of faith and will be able to help others to share their story too. The quality of the catechists' personal witness will often have more impact than the quantity of input given in sessions. This connects with the original form of catechesis, which was about people who were touched by Christ sharing how it changed their lives. It is a fact that when we really encounter Jesus on our journey of faith, we want to get to know him more.⁹ Just as all of Jesus' methods have one clear objective and that is that 'Jesus evoked and elicited a personal response from his hearers.'¹⁰ It's the role of the catechist to facilitate close encounters with Jesus. These encounters with Jesus happen through reflection on the Gospel, learning to pray, connecting to his presence in the liturgy and in the Christian community.¹¹

7 DC 2020:113

8 Paul Vi, *Evangelli Nuntiandi* 1975:41

9 DC 34

10 DC 161

11 DC 4

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2. Keeper of the memory of God

It is the *Memoria Dei*¹², which informs this concept. This relates to the living presence and action of God in the world and in the Church, celebrated in prayer and liturgy. It is the role of the catechist to enable others to experience this and implies that the catechist will be a person who can help others mine the rich tradition of prayer as well as grow in an understanding of God's presence. This means that in the catechists' way of being present to others they point towards the presence of the divine. Catechists enable others to connect to the presence of God. This implies an invitation to ongoing experiences of prayer, adapted for different ages and stages. The Catechist enables others to reflect, to wonder, to pray, to celebrate and to plumb the depths of God's love. Keeping the active presence of God in everyday life at the centre. Engagement with adults as this level is critical because only adults who are reflecting, praying, celebrating and living their faith can offer convincing and compelling witness to a younger generation. This encounter is experiential and interpersonal. Faith is something that is not just believed, but celebrated, lived daily and prayed.¹³

3. Teacher

It is very easy for us in Ireland to immediately think about a school classroom when we hear the word 'teacher', but the catechist is more than a classroom teacher. The vision of the *Directory for Catechesis* roots the role in the life and ministry of Jesus. Inspired by this, the role of the catechist is about growing in the Jesus way of teaching, learning from him. Jesus used many methods; he sometimes provoked questions, as well as taking time to explain things in depth. He told stories provoking reflection on life and context, he illustrated with example. He enacted how the Kingdom is built, he taught his disciples to pray. The way Jesus taught was always connected to the rich content of the Tradition, rooted in a teaching for change of heart and a new way of life.¹⁴ It is this which informs all that the catechist teaches, and the way that the catechist interacts with others.

4. Mystagogue

This relates to deepening knowledge of Jesus and about the Christian way of life. The term 'mystagogue' originates in writings of the early Fathers of the Church, who offered ongoing formation

¹² <https://www.monasterodibose.it/en/prayer/spiritual-lexicon/447-memoria-dei>

¹³ DC 79

¹⁴ DC 164

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after Christian Initiation. This is the dynamic of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* where, after an adult has celebrated the sacraments of initiation at Easter, they enter into a period of deepening their understanding of Jesus in his Church and the challenge of the Christian way of life. For all who call themselves Christian this is essentially a *life-long ever-deepening* journey. Often in catechesis this element is lost. Putting on the mind of Christ is a life long journey, implying a deepening of relationship. This journey of faith means that with the help of catechesis we can choose the Jesus way of living so that we begin to feel, think and act like Jesus. Catechists enable a dynamic journey that lasts a whole lifetime.¹⁵ It is the task of the catechist to form for living the Christian life, calling for integration. This connects with a faith that does justice. A faith that doesn't do justice is not yet mature, this is an essential element in deepening the journey.

5. Accompanier

In *Evangelli Gaudium*, Pope Francis has called *accompaniment* both a style and an art.¹⁶

In embracing this style the catechist learns to adapt to each person and be flexible in approach. Practising the art of accompaniment implies growing in the ability to listen well, practising patience with the gradual growth of others, openness to the action of the Holy Spirit and commitment to the journey. Led by the experiential questions of the one journeying, the catechist is touched by the questions and confronted by the life situations of participants. As the ministry of the catechist is both an art and a style, it cannot be isolated into simply giving lessons on the content of the catechism. In this accompaniment, there will be more emphasis on *process* than programmes and *continuity* rather than a focus on one off moments. Accompanying cannot be left to one or two individuals, this is why it is important to emphasise the communal nature of catechesis.

6. Educator

It is interesting to see that the *Directory for Catechesis* makes a clear distinction between the catechist as teacher and educator. This relates to Jesus's way of relating to others in what is described as 'its exquisitely educational quality', evoking and eliciting a personal response from his hearers.¹⁷ This *educare*, leading

¹⁵ DC 18

¹⁶ *Evangelli Gaudium* 169 – 175

¹⁷ DC 160 – 161

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or drawing out, requires an ability to listen well and enter fully into the dynamics of human growth, noticing the joys and hopes, sorrows and fears of those being accompanied and relating these to the Gospel.¹⁸ The methodology that Jesus used includes observing facts that everyone in the community is aware of, moving his hearers to question, which then begins a process of reflection. In this reflecting his hearers began to recognise God's presence and call to change.¹⁹ Catechists can gradually learn this way of being with others where the key emphasis is educating for discipleship, for being a member of a believing, praying, celebrating, living community of faith.

FLEXIBILITY OF ROLE

In his letter of the 3rd December 2021, Archbishop Arthur Roche further clarified this new role, as dioceses throughout the world began to explore the possibilities.²⁰ He made it clear that this role of instituted catechist is about much more than teaching the catechism or the Faith. It is about a *broader* ministerial role of leadership, which builds up the Church, in response to a deeper vocational call and in closer collaboration with the ordained.²¹ A key question for many is about whether all who take part in catechetical activity should now become instituted catechists. In terms of development, for going forward, it is envisaged that there will be some who feel called to occasional catechetical ministries for a time, and others who realise that this is their life-long calling. *Some* may engage in ministries such as children's liturgy, baptism preparation, communion preparation, confirmation preparation or as youth catechists for a time. *Others* may emerge in a more stable form of ministry as catechetical leaders who oversee catechetical leadership where they have a broader pastoral care in the absence of a resident priest. This is essentially a missionary model, a ministry of building up the Church in a local setting and perhaps training others. It is in this stable form that catechists are most likely to be instituted. Meanwhile with the formulation of the six organising principles there is great flexibility about this role. Those who feel called to this for life are responding to a call to missionary service of others.²² Stability of ministry means this role is available to the local Church to respond to pastoral need. This

18 DC 113c.

19 DC 200

20 Letter of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists, 13.12.2021

21 DC 110, CIC 759

22 *Christus Vivit* 253

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stability also means that a person who is instituted will always be a catechist, even if they do not have a current ministry. Institution is a *public* authentication of a personal call. It celebrates a closer collaboration with the ordained as a co-worker with the Bishop. It is this flexibility that will be key to the development of the role, as we embrace this change of era we are experiencing now in the Irish Church. This could be one of the creative developments of our synodal pathway. It will be important that each diocese now begins to set up a process of accompaniment in order to journey with those who feel called, and that for some this will lead to the formalisation of their role as instituted catechists.

The Fifteenth Station: The Resurrection. I am not sure when the fifteenth station was added to the traditional Stations of the Cross. I have seen some churches where there is a fifteenth station of the cross. However, as far as I am aware most churches still have only fourteen around their walls. The addition of the fifteenth station is a powerful reminder that when the body of Jesus was hastily laid in the tomb, that was not the end. The body of Jesus lay there until that first Easter Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead.

– BRYAN SHORTALL OFM Cap, *The Stations of the Cross*, Dublin: Veritas, 2023, p 75/6.

Homilies for May [A]

Eugene Duffy

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 7

Acts 6:1-7. Ps 32. 1 Pt 2:4-9. Jn 14:1-12.

Most people will have heard that gospel passage read at a funeral Mass – “let not your hearts be troubled, trust in God and trust in me” – and certainly many families and individuals have been greatly comforted by those words. When Jesus spoke those words, according to St John, it was in the context of his Last Supper with the disciples. He knows, and they also know, that a violent death is awaiting him very soon. The disciples are deeply distressed at the prospect of facing a future without him. And by the time that John is writing his gospel, perhaps as long as sixty years after the death of Jesus, many of those whom he knew are wondering about the sense in following an absent Jesus, one who died so scandalously on the Cross. Maybe, the uncertainties and questions that troubled those first disciples still bother us if we stop to think about who we are and what we are doing as followers of Jesus.

This gospel responds to a whole range of questions we might have with regard to our own faith. We are often troubled when we look around us and see so much suffering in the world, some of it caused by human greed and aggression and some of it apparently random, as when hurricanes or earthquakes strike or someone is struck down by debilitating illness. There are so many occasions on which we are confounded by what is happening and by the evil that surrounds us. The disciples were understandably floundering, too, as they attempted to come to terms with the senseless and imminent death of their close friend and hero, Jesus. This man who demonstrated such goodness, integrity, and faithfulness to God was being struck down. If that can happen to him, what chance is there for the rest of us and what will we ever do without him? These questions inevitably arose for them.

Jesus responds to their fears and anxieties. He says, “Trust in God still, and trust in me”. That statement could also be read as “Trust in God, that is, trust in me”. He is asking them simply to

Eugene Duffy is a priest of the diocese of Achonry and Episcopal Vicar for Pastoral Renewal and Development.

trust him, he is the answer to their questions and to their fears. He is still saying that to us amidst our own uncertainties.

Later he tells them that he is “the way, the truth and the life”. He reveals God’s perspective on things for them and for us. He speaks God’s word because God and he are one. He is, in his person, God’s very presence in the midst of the people. If you listen to what he says, if you take notice of how he lives and what he does, then you know what God is really like. To have seen him is to have seen the Father.

He is the way to the Father. It is he who gives us access to God. He tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them and that there is ample space in God’s household for all of us. This is our ultimate destiny, this is where we are headed, even if now things may seem confused and challenging. He has shown us the way to get there, which is to trust in his word and to follow his example.

Jesus doesn’t give pat answers to the wide range of problems we face. Rather, he simply asks us to trust in him. Take him seriously, listen to what he has to say and follow his example. This will ultimately lead us to the lasting peace which he guarantees will be ours with him, in the Father’s household.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 14

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17. Ps 65. 1 Pt 3:15-18. Jn 14: 15-21.

Today’s gospel continues Jesus’ final conversation with his disciples as they were about to share their Last Supper with him. He is giving them reassurances that although he will be leaving them he will not be abandoning them. Following his death and resurrection he will no longer be physically present to them, but he will send another Advocate to be with them for ever.

The suggestion of sending an advocate must have awakened the interest of his disciples. Sometimes, this advocate is called the Paraclete, not a word that we use in everyday language. Indeed, neither is the word advocate one we use very frequently. When Jesus used this word, he was probably suggesting that he would send a comforter, an instructor, a guide, someone who would stand beside them like a legal assistant in a courtroom. Jesus seems to be implying that they will be facing difficult challenges but that they will be supported in defending themselves against the various adversaries who will come their way. We know this advocate as the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting, too, to notice that Jesus calls him ‘another’ advocate. He implies that there was a previous advocate who taught and guided them. He was that advocate. He had given them a deep insight into what God was like. He had shown them in very

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concrete ways what God's love was like and how one responds to God's love.

He comforted people who were in distress; he healed their illnesses; he freed them from heavy burdens that their religious leaders had imposed on them; he forgave their sins. He showed them that God is a God who cares deeply for the people. The God whom Jesus showed his people is a God who desires freedom and joy for his people. In a word, he showed them that 'God is love' and that God loves us dearly. Now Jesus is telling his people that the response to God's love is to keep his commandments. St John does not spell out the commandments in detail. Rather he sums them up in one word again, 'love'. This is the human side of the bargain – God loves us, now we must love one another. This is simply how we show our love for God.

While Jesus was among his disciples he could speak to them and they saw him with their own eyes and heard him with their own ears. This will no longer be possible after his death and resurrection. He now wants to assure them that they will not be orphaned or left without support. He will send the Holy Spirit who will never leave their side. The Holy Spirit may not be visible, as Jesus was, but the Spirit will be their constant companion, guiding them, shaping their lives and enabling them to speak of God and the things of God even when that is difficult to do. Jesus is inviting his disciples, and that includes us, to trust him, to accept his word as true.

Notice that he speaks to them as a group and not simply as individuals. This Advocate who is to be given to them is a gift to the whole community of disciples. It is in the community that one will really notice the presence of the Spirit of truth. Today we can say that the Spirit of truth is to be found in the Church. The Church at its best is where we will find guidance and support in living the life to which God is calling us. The Church can help us to see what love is like in the present situation of our lives. Love is not an emotion or a feeling, it is a way of doing things. It is to live in such a way that we treat others with the utmost respect, speak the truth, act with justice and walk humbly with God. It is showing compassion to the stranger, the weak and the vulnerable. The more we practise that way of life the more keenly we will sense the presence of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit at work among us.

The Ascension of The Lord

May 21

Acts 1:1-11. Ps 46. Eph 1:17-23. Mt 28: 16-20.

Today's first reading is the beginning of St Luke's second volume. Typical of the style of his time, he begins it by summarising

very briefly the contents of his earlier work. In the briefest way he mentions the teaching and actions of Jesus during his public life, the calling of his disciples, Jesus' passion, his resurrection, his appearances and the promise of the Holy Spirit. He is suggesting that this phase of his life is ending and we are about to move into a new phase in the Jesus story. Luke is helping us to make the transition from the public life of Jesus to a time when we will no longer see him with our eyes.

There is a short dialogue that occurs with the disciples just before Jesus departs. They are wondering if and when Israel, their nation, will be established as a great kingdom where God's rule will hold sway. But he evades a direct answer. The kingdom of God is not about territory or politics, it is about hearts that are aligned with God's vision of things. It is to that interior disposition they need to pay attention and then to show in their actions and way of life that they are attuned to God's way of seeing and acting. That counsel can still speak to us, because so often we get preoccupied with territorial claims, with structures and all kinds of political manoeuvring without ever looking into our hearts to check on our more deep seated dispositions and motivations. If our hearts are not in tune with God's approach to things, then we are going to be disorientated and unhappy.

Jesus is very aware that we are not able to attune ourselves to God's ways without God's help. Therefore, he reassures the disciples that they will receive help; they are going to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This will not be just a private privilege, enabling them to navigate their way through their day to day lives. This is a gift that will enable them to be witnesses to all that Jesus has said and done in his public life. They are the people who will now embody his mission in the world. In fact, they will be able to do this to the ends of the earth.

We can take what is being said by St Luke as being addressed to us, just as directly as it was addressed to those who watched Jesus ascend into heaven. We are the heirs to that final message of Jesus as he took his leave of the world, a message that is perhaps much stronger than we might at first realise.

We are now the disciples of Jesus, we have to get on with the work of the original disciples in our own time and place. We have to renew our trust in his word, take it to heart and allow our outlook to be conformed to that of Jesus. Not only is it a matter of our inner dispositions being changed, it has to find expression in the way we act towards one another. We are called to embody the very compassion of Jesus in the way we engage with one another, especially those who are weak or vulnerable, those on the margins, the poor and the stranger in our midst. Even more, we are being

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called to give an account of the motivation that inspires us to act the way that we do. We have to be ready to state that the way of Jesus is what inspires us and urges us on. Being witness to Jesus is an all embracing activity. Our hearts, our actions and our words have to be aligned in a way that is consistent with the vision of Jesus himself. However, we are also guaranteed that we will have the inspiration and support of the Holy Spirit to help us to be the witnesses for our time. Next Sunday, we will remember and celebrate that outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the world.

Pentecost Sunday

May 28

Acts 2: 1-11. Ps 103. 1 Cor 12: 3-7, 12-13. Jn 20: 19-23.

As modern men and women, we are very conscious of time and we can measure it with incredible accuracy. Our days are measured out in minutes and we are constantly watching the clock, waiting for the alarm or struggling with traffic to get to school or work on time. We almost live by the clock. Ancient people, those whom we read of in the bible, didn't have clocks; rather they measured time by the sun and moon. Despite our sophistication, we still have residues of their ways of measuring time, especially in the way we celebrate the great Christian feasts.

The Jewish people celebrated their great feast of Passover at the time of the first full moon after the Spring equinox. That was once their cue to move their sheep from winter to summer grazing, and they marked the event by sacrificing a lamb. We follow them by celebrating our great feast of Easter on the Sunday following the first full moon, after the Spring equinox. Then fifty days later, they celebrated the first harvesting of the wheat crop. It was a week of weeks, fifty days, after the Passover. It was one great time of celebration for them. We follow them, as well, and a week of weeks, or fifty days, after Easter we celebrate Pentecost. Pentecost in Greek simply means fiftieth.

Like the Jewish people, then, we have a fifty-day celebration in the life of the Church. Today marks the culmination of our Easter celebration, as we are reminded of the outcome of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is physically no longer with us, but he is present in a powerful way through the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is poured out on us. We are given the gift of the Spirit that enabled Jesus to exercise his powerful ministry while he was among us. This Spirit now enables us to embody his presence in our world in real, effective ways.

St Luke describes how the Spirit came with wind and fire. Any Jewish person who heard about that combination of sights and sounds would be reminded of the time when God made an

agreement with Moses to form the Jewish people into a chosen race, a favoured nation. When God bound this people together as the chosen people, it was with similar sound and light effects. This new event with wind and fire was a sign that a new people was being formed, the missionary disciples of Jesus, the Church.

The multitude of nations who heard the disciples speak, each heard them in their own language. They understood what was being said. Again, an attentive Jew would have remembered what happened at the tower of Babel: as a punishment for their vanity in trying to reach heaven by building a skyscraper, God confused them by imposing a multitude of languages on them. Now that punishment was being undone and they were again able to understand one another. God's desire was for their unity and fellowship. God wished that they would be in good relationship with one another and with God as well.

This week of weeks was now reaching its climax. The disciples were given renewed energy and courage to speak about Jesus and all that he had done for them. The same Spirit that came upon him at the start of his ministry was now being given to them so that they could share the message of Jesus and embody his compassion and mercy in the world. They would very quickly begin to talk fearlessly about him, offer forgiveness of sin in his name and build up new communities of disciples across the known world.

In the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, we have all received the gifts of the same Spirit that was made available at Pentecost. We are the contemporary disciples of Jesus and we have the same mission that they had, to make known the message of Jesus in our words and in our actions, even when to do so is challenging and unpopular. Yet we are not alone when we make the effort. The Holy Spirit unleashed at Pentecost is still with us. We need to grow in trust of that Holy Spirit at work within us.

News and Views

Thomas Murphy, National Secretary of St. Joseph's Young Priests Society [theoffice@saintjosephsyoungpriestssociety.ie] writes;

Ireland's enthusiastic embrace of the synodal process can be credited, at least in part, to the uniquely popular and democratic character of Irish Catholicism's emergence from persecution. In the post-revolutionary era, when continental Catholicism was so often associated with political power, Irish Catholicism, on the other hand, was associated with the demands of the people for civic equality. While we acknowledge the influence of O'Connell and the repeal movement upon Ireland's democratic traditions, I think we ought not to overlook the influence, also, upon the unique character of Irish Catholicism expressed in democratic lay organisations such as *St. Joseph's Young Priests Society*. The heroic endeavours of religious congregations founded in Ireland over the past 250 years, often under the most unpromising circumstances, to ensure education and healthcare, is known, even if it is not sufficiently appreciated. Their impact on civic society in the fields of education and health are sufficiently obvious. Perhaps less obvious, perhaps even less sufficiently appreciated, is the character of Irish Catholicism that produced so many capable and determined women, not only foundresses but they above all, who were able to articulate their vision within a system that would, in other circumstances, have been less accommodating.

Those two splendid characteristics, democratic spirituality and openness to the contribution of women, came together in the person of Mrs. Olivia Taaffe, the foundress of St. Joseph's Young Priests Society. This lace-capped Victorian lady does not appear to our eyes to be a radical but she created a movement, concerned for the welfare of others, in Ireland and abroad, that gave to countless thousands of Irish people an outward-looking and generous internationalism and a safe space for self-expression that has lasted down to the present day. She had been connected with a French Archconfraternity of St. Joseph for almost thirty years when, in the 1890s, she was stuck by the most personal tragedies. Her husband and her only son died in quick succession. The irrepressible spirit of Mrs. Taaffe, even in a time of bereavement, focussed upon the practical needs of others. In 1895, she founded

the English-language edition of the Archconfraternity's journal, entitled *St. Joseph's Sheaf*. That work survived her and survives still in the quarterly *The Sheaf* of which I am humbled to be the incoming editor. It is still to be found in many – but not yet all – Irish Churches. A powerful but quiet contribution by Mrs. Taaffe to present-day Irish Catholicism.

Responding to a request on behalf of a French student for the Priesthood whose means were not equal to his call, the readers of *St. Joseph's Sheaf* contributed so generously that Mrs. Taaffe was inspired to establish St. Joseph's Young Priests Society, that has been a feature of parish life in Ireland for a century and a quarter. Irish Catholicism has unique strengths and it has unique weaknesses. One of those must surely be our seeming inability to pursue the causes for canonisation of our own with sufficient vigour. As I look out from the Society's office at 23, Merrion Square, which is another legacy of Mrs. Taaffe, I can think of half a dozen of her contemporaries and near neighbours who, in other Countries, would be well on their way to the Altars. The founders and foundresses of our great religious congregations, lay organisations, or those who, whether martyrs or confessors, held high the light of Faith during the dark years of persecution, are all still uncanonised. I do not suggest that canonisation is a merit award but I do think that, as we walk the synodal path, we need to consider how we regard those who have made us and our Church what we are today. How we treat them is a factor in how we hand on their precious legacy.

The legacy of Mrs. Taaffe is indeed precious. It is a radical and synodal legacy. Our Catholic organisations, like our parishes, are imploding. Volunteerism is being lost in the practicality of increasing need for paid staff. Is there a risk that we are losing a centuries old tradition of synodality? What an irony it would be if we allowed our Catholic organisations to disappear just as the World is crying out for synodal engagement. I doubt that Mrs. Taaffe would have used the language but it is obvious from her contribution that she valued the concepts.

The Society that she founded, on democratic principles, is, in my opinion, a work of spiritual genius. It is a lay organisation. The young priests are to object the Society's prayer and work. It prays for vocations. It promotes vocations, particularly to the Priesthood, but also the vocation of its members and the lay vocation in general. It gives practical expression to its prayers through the contributions of its members and benefactors to support the studies of students for the Priesthood.

That first inspiration, of support for a student from abroad, was never forgotten and recent years have seen the Society returning

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with greater intensity to that original apostolate. Today, a majority of the students supported by the Society are in seminaries in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. In recent years, the Society has supported about 600 students each year, of whom, more than half are studying in seminaries and houses of formation in Africa. The particular fruit of the prayers and contributions of the Society's members and benefactors has been the ordination, each year, of about 100 students who have received support from the Society. What is needed now from Irish people, and from parishes in particular, is an openness to organisations like St. Joseph's Young Priests Society. Will you make your contribution?

Vincent McBrierty writes; A Thought for Easter

As Easter approaches it is timely to ponder on the full meaning of Holy Week which encapsulates the fundamentals of our Christian faith in a most concise and dramatic way. The triumph and adulation of Palm Sunday transforming into the agony and rejection of Good Friday, is a precursor of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, confirming God the Father's enduring promise to us of our eternal heavenly calling which is an abiding expression of assurance and hope for all.

But the resurrection was only made possible by the events of Holy Week which were in stark contrast to the glory of Christ's resurrection. Each time we look at a crucifix we are reminded of the *physical* agony and torment endured by Jesus in his last days on earth. It is clear from the Old Testament Scripture predictions, some eight centuries earlier, that Jesus was fully aware of what was about to unfold. We are less conscious, however, of the parallel *mental* anguish, loneliness and abandonment which he suffered, particularly when he was most in need of the support of his disciples and followers. Jesus gave voice to this loneliness and abandonment on the cross, when he cried out '*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*', which is '*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*' (*Matthew 27:46*)

Holy week began with Jesus entering Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday: '*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. (Psalm 118:26, Matthew 11:3)*'. Two days later in the Mount of Olives, while in the company of some of his disciples, Jesus truly revealed his dual human/divine nature as he reflected on the price he must pay for our redemption. His human side prayed ardently to God the father to '*take the cup away*', but with absolute obedience to His will, added, '*not my will but thy will be done. (Luke 22:42)*'. Aware that his disciples would also be tempted by the devil, he urged them to '*pray that you will not fall into temptation*'.

At the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, Jesus established the abiding link, or Communion with him for all generations to come through the sacrifice of the mass which is both a commemoration and a true re-enactment of the last supper. Later, Jesus taught a lesson in humility and Christian virtue when he washed the feet of his disciples before proceeding with them to the Garden of Gethsemane. There he again prayed in agony to the Father: *'His sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)'*.

Jesus's need for the prayerful support of his disciples at these, the most painful times for him, was paramount: but the disciples were found wanting. This was all the more evident with Jesus betrayed by Judas Iscariot, notably with a kiss, and after he was taken to the home of Caiphas for trial by the whole Council where he was subjected to false accusation, humiliation and condemnation without a voice being raised in his support. He was scourged and led away by the soldiers who indulged in further humiliation by placing a crown of thorns on his head to inflict further pain and to mock his claim of authority as King of the Jews. (*Matthew 27-29, John 19:2,5*). In another venue his beloved Peter was to deny him three times. On his way to Calvary, he witnessed his mother's grief and pain, and only on two occasions did he receive compassion, first, from Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry his cross, albeit reluctantly and, second, from Veronica who wiped his face: both were strangers. He was then stripped of his outer garments and hanged on a cross between two thieves, one of whom sought forgiveness and the other not, once again emphasising that it was never too late to seek forgiveness that was earnestly sought. At the foot of the cross, there were only four who mourned him: John the apostle, Mary his mother whom He designated mother of all humanity, her sister Mary, and Mary Magdalene. Where were all his other disciples and followers?

Jesus's last words on the cross included: *'Father forgive them for they do not know what they do (Luke 23:24)*; his cry to God the Father at being forsaken, mentioned earlier (*Matthew 27:46*) which, additionally, revealed the human nature of God the Son, and fulfilled the Old Testament prophesy in the opening words of Prophet David's Psalm 22; When he knew that he was close to the end, again to fulfil the Scriptures, he said, *'I am thirsty'* (*John 19:28*) but refused the proffered drink of vinegar, gall and myrrh (*Matthew 27:34, Mark 15:23*); and, finally, his last words, those of Psalm 31:5, Jesus called out with a loud voice, *'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'* (*Luke 23-46*)'.

The events of Holy Week touch upon the core fundamentals of our Christian belief, both from the spiritual and practical

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perspectives: They reaffirm the dual nature of Jesus as God and man, fulfilling God the Father's mission for Jesus to secure our redemption through suffering death on the cross. The week also emphasised the power of prayer and, in this respect, highlighted the human frailties of even the staunchest of followers of Jesus and the compassion of others from whom you would have least expected it.

What is seldom appreciated is the human agony and grief of his mother Mary who witnessed and shared the torture and humiliation experienced by her beloved son throughout Holy Week, as predicted earlier by Simeon in the New Testament during the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple: *'And a sword will pierce through your own soul also. (Luke 2:25–35).'* She later experienced the human pain of separation from her son at the time of his ascension into heaven, while she remained with the fledgling church for some years before her own ascension.

A number of lessons can be learned from the events of Holy Week: First, the direct relationship between repentance and suffering; the implicit power of communal prayer as sought by Jesus on many occasions; the virtue of humility; more generally, an appreciation of the mental anguish and despair that accompanies loneliness and isolation at times of critical need; and the role of Mary as the designated mother of humanity, serving as a conduit to her Son and then, through Him, to the Father to intercede on our behalf.

We do not need to look too far to see the myriad examples of such concern in modern life today.

New Books

Maynooth College Reflects on Facing Life's End. Perspectives on Dying and Death. Jeremy Corley, Aoife McGrath, Neil Xavier O'Donoghue & Salvador Ryan, eds., Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022. ISBN 9781788125826

Death and dying form the subject matter of this book by members and associates of the teaching community of St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth. Death is a mystery which invites deep theological reflection, dying a subject more readily reflected upon from the perspective of pastoral care; both are treated sensitively in this unique and timely collection.

The book's twenty contributions are spread over four sections: Facing with Care, Facing Goodbye, Facing Challenging Questions, Facing Suffering with Hope, a sequence that reflects the progress of life's final phases. The overall theme is then 'facing' and expresses the aim of the book, which is to provide encouragement and practical help in facing the most unavoidable issue in life, namely mortality, an issue regularly put out of mind in order to get on with living. Part of the stratagem often used to exploit the opportunities life affords, or face the challenges it presents, is to live as if we were not mortal.

Though the book is dealing with end of life issues, it has relevance not only for carers but also for those of us not involved in such ministry; reflecting on life's end is in fact an appropriate daily practice for everyone, according to St Benedict in his *Rule* – though hardly typical of modern spirituality. While it is a relief to believe that the bell does not apparently toll for me, the book has an obvious application for the daily life of all of us.

More than that, it has relevance for current cultural attitudes towards death and dying, as ethical issues concerning prolongation of life for patients in an apparently vegetative state, or assistance to die for those requesting it, are now coming to the surface, or are already prominent in political and popular discourse in many countries, including Ireland. It is worth noting, then, that this book has been authored by members of a Catholic academic institution, because end of life issues present new challenges for two evolving disciplines, theology as well as medical science. The four editors make it clear in the Introduction that this context forms a background for the book's sensitive pastoral and theological reflections on the care of those actually nearing death.

The successive chapters have practical themes leading to theoretical reflections. The experience of caring professionals is evident in the detailed descriptions, often clinical, of actual cases: from the nine-year old girl with catastrophic brain injury to the personal testimony of a neurosurgeon

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struck down early in his career to the elderly woman peacefully dying at home. The reality of these cases has immediate impact on the reader. So too, does the account, the 'liturgy' as the article puts it, of an Irish wake and the statement it makes that can be a cultural shock to visitors from a secularised society, where death is privatised and sanitised. The actual liturgy is dealt with in contributions that vary from nostalgia to textual analysis to the eschatological import – including an insightful treatment of the disembodied soul after death.

The third section deals in five contributions with challenging questions inevitably raised by both death and dying. Care workers at all levels of involvement with seriously or terminally ill patients have to make prudential judgments, the role of which is discussed, based on alleviating suffering and respect for life based on human dignity. It is a situation that can include conflict of judgments; two pieces, from a philosophical and from a theological perspective, 'Death, Dying and Dignity' and 'Being's Mystery: On Not Belonging to Ourselves', are very helpful in this regard, though the relational nature of the human person could have been dealt with more broadly in the latter piece. There are also contributions from a scriptural perspective on our mortality, and how the prototype role of Jesus' suffering can bring deeper understanding to the suffering of the victim in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

It is a very comprehensive work dealing with a specialised topic, but with a broader relevance. It focuses to an extent on contemporary Irish life, and it would have been good if it also had a contribution looking back to the accounts of the death of the early Irish saints, especially the touching details of Columba of Iona's final days and hours recorded by his biographer Adomnán.

As the title is *Maynooth College Reflects on Facing Life's End*, it is appropriate that each chapter ends with 'Questions for Reflection and Discussion'. With a 'List of Frequently Cited Sources' and a 'Select Index' as conclusion, it is a work that fills an important gap in contemporary pastoral and theological discourse.

Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick

FINTAN LYONS OSB

The Parish as Oasis. An Introduction to Practical Environmental Care. Kevin Hargaden and Ciara Murphy. Dublin: Messenger Publications 2022. ISBN 978 1 788125 765. Pp135.

Ciara Murphy and Kevin Hargaden, both from the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, have produced a readable and hopeful book for people and parishes who wish they could make a positive difference to their environment but are not sure where to start.

The book falls into *three* distinct parts. It begins with a short reflection on what church in Ireland might look like if we took seriously the call to care for our common home. The bulk of the book is devoted to exploring twenty eminently practical 'Experiments' and there is a short final section pointing to further resources for taking the next steps.

The Coptic Christian church in Ethiopia provides a striking, generative metaphor for imagining how parishes in Ireland could fulfil the role of being hopeful, transformative nodes in our interconnected social and natural world. The churches in northern Ethiopia build a stone wall around their church complexes and nurture the land as woodland areas, working with the rhythms of nature and protecting it against encroachment. This has resulted in a network of 500 of these verdant, cooling spaces across a vast area of what has become largely desert. The church spills out into the surrounding space in a life-enhancing way. What could it look like if the church in Ireland became a series of oases, providing verdant spaces for biodiversity, yes, but also social oases, places of refuge and kindness against the harshness and indifference in society?

The twenty Experiments cover a wide range of topics, from tackling food waste and installing solar panels to building on the possibilities for local pilgrimages; from making space available for a community garden to opening up space for meaningful dialogue on contentious social issues. The suggestions are rooted in good theology and good science. Case studies and interviews bring them to life. I was particularly struck by how interconnected the physical, social and spiritual are shown to be. The book clearly reflects the close relationship between environmental protection and human flourishing reflected so strongly in the papal encyclical *Laudato Si*. The environment is natural, built and social, and caring for it is not an add-on to the Gospel or an optional extra; it is at its heart. Caring for our common home *is* loving our neighbour.

The complexity of the challenges facing our world can lead to paralysis or even denial. What this book does is give a buffet of options so that any group can find one or two things that are attractive and doable in their specific contexts. The actions called for are good in and of themselves and also make a real difference. Even small actions, insignificant in themselves, open us up to ecological conversion. Every little change, every small step, not perfect but sincere, comes together to transform our world, like the little church oases in the Ethiopian desert.

This is a good book for everyone to read. It is even better if it is read by a group. The ideas here provide wonderful opportunities for building intergenerational community while tackling the climate issue. And because these are human and not just religious issues, there are opportunities for building community beyond the church walls too. I would love to see pastoral and parish councils and other faith groups reading it together with a view to finding the practical steps to which God is inviting them in their own contexts.

Pontifical University, Maynooth

JESSIE ROGERS

The Politics of God: The Rise and Rise of Political Religion. TP O' Mahony. Dublin: Veritas, 2023. ISBN 978 1 80097 040 3.

Veteran journalist TP O' Mahony, who acted as religious affairs correspondent for several decades with the *Irish Press* and, latterly,

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with the *Irish Examiner*, has published a fascinating and highly relevant book on the role of religion in our world. With a *Foreward* by Dr Mary McAleese, the book critically examines the rise of political religion in contemporary society. The demise of religion predicted by many scholars in the 20 th century has failed to materialize. Religion is alive and well in many regions of the world [outside of Europe] and continues to play a significant role in people's lives. We have also witnessed the rise of 'political religion' across the globe where elements of faith and politics are mixed to produce, in many scenarios, a lethal end product that is characterized by intolerance, fundamentalism and violence.

Divided into an Introduction (The Return of the Taliban) and twenty three short and very accessible chapters the books examines the link between religion and politics in many different scenarios and time frames, including Ireland and the United States. The bulk of the book, however, focuses on the rise of fundamentalist regimes and movements in the Islamic world post the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. Each chapter begins with a memorable quote from a range of distinguished authors/academics [including Madeleine Albright, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Peter L. Berger] that set the focus for the chapter. The book leaves one in no doubt that the relationship between religion and politics is complex and has the potential to do both great good but also great harm. One is also left with the conviction that if 'we don't understand religion, including the abuse of religion' we won't understand what is happening in our world.

This book is a timely and important contribution to the contemporary discussion on the role of religion in our world. It provides a wonderful overview of events that have shaped the narrative of world politics over the past two decades and provides wise counsel for the journey ahead.

Cork

P. J. McAULIFFE

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- 10.45** Coffee
- 11.15** Mary Kenny – Author of ‘The Way We Were’.
Liberation and the cost of permissiveness.
- 12.00** Prof Gladys Ganiel
Religion in a Post-Catholic Ireland: Signs of Persistence and Decline.
- 13.00** Light Lunch
- 14.15** Prof Michael A. Conway
Dismantling a World: The Catholic Church in Ireland.
- 15.00** Break
- 15.15** Round Table Discussion,
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- 16.15** Conclusion

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