NOVATE VOBIS NOVALE

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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.

Editor: Ronan Drury, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, to whom editorial correspondence should be addressed.

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Catholic Ireland?

Patrick Hannon

Not quite dead and gone, as Yeats thought romantic Ireland was in 1913, but certainly looking poorly. The standard narrative has it that Catholicism in Ireland is in more or less steep decline. Evidence is seen in decreasing Mass attendance, the loosening of the hold of 'the Church' on education and health care, a slight but perceptible trend toward civil weddings and humanist funerals, and of course the paucity of vocations to religious life and the priesthood. The situation varies as between larger urban centres and the rest of the country and it isn't quite the same in Northern Ireland. In the background of the island as a whole, though, is a loss of credibility on the part of church leadership, deriving from the child abuse scandal and church institutional response.

MOURNERS

All of this has an impact on Catholics who continue to practise and on those who minister to them, and something of that impact came home to me recently in company with some priests who work in parishes. The conversation ranged over all the signs of change, turning eventually to religious education and its fortunes at primary and post-primary levels, in a changing system of patronage and management and staffing. There were anecdotes about the reluctance of some schools to facilitate out-of-hours religious instruction, notwithstanding the wishes of parents who pay for it. New kinds of school at second level was another topic, especially the emergence of a type of 'non-designated' community school, where the religion syllabus for Junior and Leaving Cert may be taught, but where any other contact with religion is rigidly precluded.

The mood of the conversation seemed a kind of grief, with stages of the grieving process represented in the contributions of the several participants. At one end of the spectrum there was anger and resentment at the side-lining of religion in the education system of a country which is still nominally Catholic and still

Patrick Hannon is a priest of the Diocese of Cloyne. He is Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

overwhlemingly religious, as it seems. At the other end there was an acceptance of the fact that Roman Catholic Ireland no longer moves like a Titanic through untroubled waters, to borrow an image from John F. Deane.[1] This is how things are now, was the attitude; we all need to get over it.

GET OVER IT?

Get over it isn't something to be said unfeelingly to parents who are troubled because their children no longer go to Mass, or to anyone pained by a loved one's loss of faith. Nor is it right to discount the weariness and disillusionment of servants of the Gospel whose ministry has come upon hard times. But as with all grief one might hope not to be trapped in it, and to move forward toward acceptance of loss. And that process might start with a candid recognition that Ireland is no longer 'a Catholic country', even if most of its citizens still self-describe as Roman Catholic. There's a factual plurality of cultures and a diversity of religious allegiance, and the population includes people who now profess openly to have no religious faith.

How to interpret these facts is another matter and it must be said at once that the situation is complex, and to unravel its skeins would take more than an article. What I'd like to do here is to try to pick a way through the complexity, avoiding misleading simplification, and hoping to identify some points relevant to a pastoral response. And we might begin by putting the modern Irish experience in context.

EVER THUS?

John Deane's image is eloquent, but it's also true that the waters weren't ever entirely untroubled, and there were cross-currents and undertows that novelists and playwrights and poets have charted. Patrick Kavanagh's 'House Party to Celebrate the Destruction of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland' is a reminder that a wish to see the end of 'The Church' isn't new, even if there's irony and ruefulness between the lines. Gaelic poets of an earlier time – Brian Merriman, Aindrias Mac Craith, and Art Mac Cumhaigh are three of the better known – were sure of a hearing when they satirised clergy; a fact that puts in question the current fashion for depicting our forebears in mute thrall to their priests. A difference between then and now may be that the anti-clericalism of that era was as it were in-house, and that Irish people then were noted for the fervour of their faith.

And changing the metaphor one might add that the past wasn't all sweetness and light. Some time ago I saw an old photograph of the

1 John F. Deane, *In Dogged Loyalty*, Dublin 2006, 105.

Forty Hours' Adoration in the church of my native parish. Though it was old and in black and white, it brought back to memory the brightness and warmth and colour of the occasion: rows of lighted candles on either side of a golden monstrance, the altar bedecked with flowers, women of the Children of Mary in their white veils and blue cloaks kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. The picture was taken in the late 1940s or early 50s, a time thought to be a high point for Catholicism in Ireland, a time contrasted with our own. But then I remembered boys and girls who had no shoes to come to school in, and I remembered some of the boys being beaten by teachers for not coming; and that the 40s and 50s were also a time when children were sexually abused, including by priests and religious. And it was a time when some of those who occupied the front seats could be harsh in their dealings with people who worked for them, or with girls who got into trouble, as the saying went.

ALL IS NOT LOST

Moreover, the scene today is not completely bleak. There's continuing support for Church agencies whose outreach is to the needy at home and abroad; there's a new participation by lay people in church life: in parish councils and liturgy committees for example, as well as in liturgical ministry, and in bodies and movements engaged in one or another of the forms of apostolate. Noteworthy too is the revival of earlier traditions of Christian spirituality, in movements such as Contemplative Outreach and the World Community of Christian Meditation and groups who meet for *lectio divina*, and there's an interest in Celtic spirituality. Retreat centres continue to be popular, the well-known ones at religious houses now complemented by such as Sanctuary in Dublin city centre, and mainly lay-run programmes at venues around the country.

All of these developments are significant for pastoral planning, and it may be hoped that they're thus read by those with oversight of the work of the Gospel, and it's obvious that they call for a fresh vision and a comprehensive pastoral strategy. And vision and strategy are best elaborated out of the middle of the *ekklesia*, from the experience of men and women whose lives are the Gospel's living witness. Included of course are the bearers of ministries, and not least the presbyters, whose witness and experience are often overlooked; and theologians and liturgists have a part to play. There's a case for a national synod or something like it, though maybe such is best done at diocesan level as it was in Limerick recently, or perhaps a new evangelisation might better start with initiatives aimed at parish renewal.

Diversity of culture and religion was addressed fifty years ago by Vatican II, speaking of and to the world at large. The Council said that the *gaudium et spes* and hopes and anxieties of humankind are shared by the followers of Christ, and that the church we call Catholic can be a *lumen gentium*. And the mission to reflect Christ's light isn't just for those with oversight and ordained ministry, said the Council: the mission a*d gentes* is a calling of all the baptised; and evangelisation *nostra aetate* must respect other faith traditions as well as other Christian churches. What the Council said can be heard with profit still, and some of what it addressed is to be seen in Irish society still, some for the first time. Most challenging perhaps is the open avowal of agnosticism and atheism to which I referred earlier.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Loss of faith is not a peculiarity of Irish Catholics of the Second Millennium, nor is the abandoning of religious practice, and some purported explanations of its causes are at best shallow. Especially unpersuasive is the fashion for attributing the decline to the 'new catechetics': consider only that some of the key figures in political and financial corruption – not to mention the child abuse scandals – are products of a religious education in which 'learning the catechism' was central. And if Sunday observance is the measure, what are we to make of the fact that a falling-off was already noticeable among adults whose childhood religious fare included the 'Green Catechism' or its blue-covered predecessor and Sunday sermons based on the Ten Commandments?

A similar question arises about the role of the scandals associated with child abuse in the church. No doubt the scandals have shaken the faith of many, and a loss of trust in the institution and its representatives has contributed to the malaise. But, as others have remarked, it may be that for some folk the scandals were just the last straw, or that invoking them is the rationalisation of a process already begun.

A third account sees the falling-away to be a consequence of secularisation, and this is nearer the mark as we shall see. But talk of secularisation tends to suffer from a lack of clarity about what it means, and it's sometimes confused with secularism, itself confused with secularity. Secularism is the name given to an ideology or world-view that excludes any reference to God or a 'supernatural' order, and it may be atheistic or agnostic, and some versions are militant. Secularity in the words of one commentator is 'an approach to religion-state relations that avoids identification of the state with any particular religion or ideology (including secularism itself) and that endeavours to provide a neutral framework capable

of accommodating a broad range of religions and beliefs'.[2] Thus understood, secularity is not at odds with church teaching as set out in *Dignitatis humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom of the Second Vatican Council.

SECULARISATION

Secularity and secularism are products of a process that has been in train in Western Europe over several centuries, the process known as secularisation. The process can be seen as a 'flight from authority':[3] from ecclesiastical hegemony in the natural sciences, with the Enlightenment and the rise of sciences originating in experiment and measurement; from pope and ecclesiastical magisterium with the Reformation; and toward democratic forms of government with the French Revolution. Liberal democratic philosophies and institutions, a separation of church and state, and a tendency toward the privatisation of religious belief have been the outcome.

These and allied developments gave rise in due course to what sociologists call the secularisation thesis, a view which holds that 'modernity' – the sociocultural conditions that the developments brought about – has made a decline in religious belief and practice inevitable. Such was the early view of US social scientist Peter Berger, whose later repudiation of it placed him at the forefront of a radical critique. Berger's revised position is shared by most leading religious sociologists in the United States and Europe.[4]A consensus has emerged that the thesis at best holds for Western Europe, where however it's increasingly challenged by demographic changes brought about by the expansion of the European Union and by immigration, most notably of Moslems in France.[5]

… AND HOW DOES SHE STAND?

Where does Ireland fit in the picture? As we await publication of data on religion from this year's Census we may take the 2011 statistics as indicative. These are to be found at the website of the Central Statistics Office, and summary comments are offered in the section entitled Profile 7. A key finding in terms of our interest here is that the percentage of the population professing Catholicism in

2 B.G. Scharffs, 'Four Views of the Citadel: The Consequential Distinction between Secularity and Secularism', *Religion and Human Rights* 6 (2011), 111.

3 Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority*, South Bend 1981.

4 For his view and that of other sociologists of religion see Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?* Aldershot 2008.

5 See José Casanova, 'Religion, European secular identities, and European integration' in T.A. Byrnes & P.J. Katzenstein (eds), *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, Cambridge 2006, 65-92; also J. Bryan Hehir, 'The old Church and the new Europe: charting the changes', *op.cit.*, 93-116.

2011 was at 84.2% the lowest in over a hundred years. And the commentary observes that despite the arrival of large numbers of Catholics from Poland, Catholicism saw the slowest annual average growth of the religions which presented in the Census.

Meanwhile the non-Catholic population showed significant growth, and for two reasons. First, there was an increase in membership of the religions of immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, notably among Orthodox Christians who at 45,223 were the fastest growing group, followed by Apostolic and Pentecostal churches, whose numbers rose from 285 to 14,043 in the twenty years since the Census of 1991. Most striking though – the second reason – are the figures for those who professed no religion, together with declared agnostics and atheists: the total was 277,237, showing a fourfold increase since 1991; and the greatest increase was in the number of adherents to atheism, which grew from 320 to 3905.

To discover what the data might imply for ministry and church leadership requires attention to several questions. Where have those who have left Catholicism gone: to other churches, other faiths, or atheism or agnosticism? What do the figures say about the age-profile of those who leave? Can one predict what will happen in the years to come? Above all – a question rarely asked, though surely critical – why are people leaving? Social science expertise is required if adequate answers are to be found, but perhaps the why-question could be tackled at an informal level too, by the simple expedient of asking, sensitively of course, those around us who have left and are prepared to have ecclesiastical feathers ruffled.

THREE SECULARITIES

One way to understand what's happening is with the aid of a paradigm that's been proposed by the Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor.[6] Taking secularity as the outcome of secularization – and broadly as described earlier here – Taylor distinguishes three senses of the term; or one could think of them as three phases of secularization. The first he calls Secularity One, the retreat of religion from the public space, whereby functions of government and administration passed from clergy to laity, eventuating in all that's implied in the separation of church and state. Secularity Two is 'the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church'– a fact of life in present-day Irish society that we've just been remarking. But when one looks for an explanation of Secularity Two, account must be taken of Secularity Three: 'a move from a society where belief in

6 Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, Harvard 2007. For an explanation, see the Introduction. The quotations which follow here are from pp2-3.

God is unchallenged and indeed unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace'. Taylor elaborates, in terms which will strike a chord for an observer of the Irish scene:

> [T] he change… is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least not in God, or the transcendent). Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one's faith.

The Republic's embrace of Secularity One is enshrined in Bunreacht na hÉireann, and the decline in religious practice means that Secularity Two has taken hold. But the novelty that faces Christian leaders in Ireland is what Taylor says of Secularity Three: we're in a time when unbelief is a live option, Christian faith is one option among others. We've connected with Secularity Three, and it has nourished Secularity Two, and is sure to continue to do so.

SO WHAT NOW?

What to make of this? Again a complex question, not to be answered in a short piece, or apart from interdisciplinary dialogue, or at an academic level only, and the answer will take time to arrive at. But there are aspects of the question that a pastoral response can meanwhile take note of, about which a few remarks may be made.[7] And first it seems important to recognise that when people cease to practise Catholicism – stop going to Mass and availing themselves of the Sacraments – it doesn't follow that they're rejecting everything in the vision of life that Christianity stands for. A Christian commits to the pursuit and custody of certain values: the dignity and equality of each human being, the rights that each possesses by virtue simply of being human, and all that's comprised in the concept of a common good. The Christian way gives priority to love, and it exhorts to mercy, and it works for peace and justice

7 One needs to keep in mind the *caveat* implicit in the argument of those sociologists of religion who question the view that modernity and secularization must spell the end of faith, and it's early yet to make firm predictions about the trajectory of developments in Ireland. But it seems unlikely that the latest Census will tell an appreciably different story, and in any case it's the present situation that must concern church leaders and all whose calling it is to keep the Gospel alive.

and respect for God's creation. But many of these values are shared by people of other religious and philosophical traditions, including people who have no church affiliation or profess no religious faith. It's simply not true that there's no moral compass outside of the Catholic church, and we acknowledge this freely now of other churches and other faiths. There's no reason to doubt that the same holds for all conscientious people. A them-and-us conception of the task of a servant of the Gospel is flawed at root.

We need to recognize too that people who leave the church may do so for reasons of conscience, and that there are men and women of deep moral seriousness outside the church's boundaries, and that Catholic teaching enjoins respect for the consciences of everyone. In the decades since the Council it's increasingly been accepted that God may be encountered in other ecclesial communities and indeed in other faiths, a Council teaching endorsed in word and deed by every pope from John XXIII to Francis. Not so readily recognised is another Catholic teaching: that the Spirit is active in people of good will everywhere. That's the teaching of St Paul as of Vatican II, and it's part of the rationale for the initiative of the Pontifical Council for Culture when, encouraged by Pope Benedict, they set up a Courtyard of the Gentiles: 'a space of expression for those who do not believe, and for those who are asking questions about their faith, a window open to the world, to contemporary culture and to the voices that resonate'.[8]

One hears often of 'the secular agenda', espoused by media, the programme of a militant secularism. Militant secularists there are of course, mirror-imaging the fundamentalism to which they think all religion can be reduced. But in responding to them it would be a mistake for churches and faith-traditions to take stances that are merely reactionary. Nor should they be drawn into culture wars, where religion is made a weapon in the senseless conflicts that are poisoning inter-religious relationships and politics in the United States at present. There is no need to fear that an appreciation of the values in a non-theistic humanism must lead to a blurring of boundaries, or the loss of Christian identity; we don't fear that Catholic identity is lost by ecumenism, and the popes have long been calling the church to dialogue with other faiths. And to accept the end of Catholic Ireland is not defeatist, but a first step toward a new evangelization.

8 See the Council's website at http://www.cultura.va/.

Where are We with *Share the Good News*?

+ Brendan Leahy

The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, *Share the Good News*, was launched in Dublin in early January 2011. Five years on, it is timely to ask: where are we with it? This is a question for all of us, not just specialists. Commenting at the launch, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said,

> The National Directory is directed to and must involve the entire Church in Ireland. It is not a document entrusted to the catechetical establishment ... It is an invitation to break away from our current situation which is overly school-oriented and bring back into the picture in a more focused way the central role of the parish and the family.

Immediately after the launch, a series of seven leaflets was made available designed to introduce people to the Directory. The Bishops' Conference established a National Faith Development Team that meets four times a year to review collaboration and inter-action between the various elements of the mission of the Church as represented at national level by various bodies at the Columba Bishops' Conference Centre in Maynooth. In 2015 Ms. Kate Liffey was appointed the new National Director of Catechetics and since then has also become the Co-ordinator of the National Faith Development Team. She has brought great energy and enthusiasm to her new role shaped within the *Share the Good News* framework.

A very significant event that marks the implementation of *Share the Good News* has been Pope Francis' remarkable Apostolic Exhortation on the joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

On the basis of *Share the Good News* and *Evangelii Gaudium*, the regular meetings of the Faith Development Team have helped

+ Brendan Leahy is Bishop of Limerick. He is Chair of the Council for Catechetics and of the National Faith Development Team of the Irish Bishops' Conference

raise awareness of the missionary dimension of all aspects of the Irish Bishops' Conference work. The Columba Centre has organised in-service familiarisation with the Directory for staff present in the Centre. Some dioceses have done likewise for their clergy and laity involved in ministry. The *Share the Good News* Directory has provided various agencies (for instance, Trócaire, the Finance office, the Communications Office, the Pastoral Renewal and Development council) with a solid framework for promoting their work. Initiatives such as the monthly '*Sharing the Good News*' e-newsletter have come to life.

The Council for the Family and the Council for Catechetics have worked more closely together and this has prepared the way for greater collaboration in preparation for the 2018 World Gathering of Families. The Pastoral Renewal and Development Council organised a National Pastoral Conference, 'Growing in Faith Together as Local Church Community', with a view to promoting living faith communities with the awareness that all pastoral ministry is catechetical.

The Council for Family prepared a family prayer book that has already sold some 4000 copies. Some months ago, a gathering of ecclesial movements and communities was organised by the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Development. It saw hundreds from movements across the country come together in a lively missionary spirit to give witness to the good news of mercy. Representatives of those involved in youth ministry have also met to see how best to proceed with *Share the Good News*.

In short, good work has been done. A fine start. But it is true that many of the indicators of achievement have yet to be realised.

FOCUS ON THE LOCAL

The real focus, however, of the implementation of *Share the Good News* has always to be LOCAL. Each bishop and diocese is best placed to promote and review the Directory in the local diocese. It's a question of 'mainstreaming' it, not as an extra but rather as an invitation to join the dots of much of what we are already doing in our dioceses. It is a summons to recognise we all need to engage in creative, *collaborative* catechesis at all levels of Church life.

Each diocese has to discern its priorities. Each diocese has its own journey of *Share the Good News*. Many dioceses set up committees to review how to proceed, but found it wasn't easy to understand where to begin! Nevertheless, action has been taken. Dublin Archdiocese, for instance, introduced a new Baptismal Pastoral Programme. Some dioceses have appointed faith development co-ordinators, some are actively engaging in the formation of catechists or sacramental co-ordinators, some

have appointed new youth officers or communications officers. Several dioceses worked on diocese-wide projects. The dioceses of Armagh, Killaloe and Kerry engaged in a listening process that resulted in new pastoral plans for those dioceses. The dioceses of Kilmore and Down and Connor also held diocesan assemblies. The 'Living Church' initiative in Down and Connor saw 1,800 people from the diocese come together at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast to launch a pastoral plan. The diocese of Limerick held a three-day Synod of four hundred delegates with the theme of faith formation one of the major topics for review.

It is clear that what is coming across in engagement with *Share the Good News* is the need for formation and training. It can be hoped that the establishment of a new Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies in Mary Immaculate College (Thurles and Limerick) and the new Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education (Dublin) will bring new energy in response to this need.

ADULTS AND FAMILIES, SCHOOLS AND PARISHES GROWING IN LOVE!

Since the launch of *Share the Good News*, a number of important resources have been produced. The publication in 2014 by Veritas of the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* saw a positive response. Some 5000 copies sold. Veritas and the IEC Communications Office prepared material such as a study guide, internet clips and offered seminar days on the Adult Catechism. Indeed Veritas offered to 'train the trainers' for any diocese/church council or agency that proposed to get together a team of people to promote the Catechism. This is something that could be explored further.

There is a growing sense that we need committed lay people who will take on a period of formation to be voluntary catechists/sacramental co-ordinators/adult faith teachers in dioceses. It is also clear that we need to stitch adult catechesis (which, let's remember, is considered by the Catholic Church to be the principal form of catechesis!) into what is already going on in parish activities and in the programmes of sacramental preparation for children.

It should also be noted that there are already groups throughout the country that study the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* following a guided reading prepared by the Maryvale Institute. Other study projects of the Catechism are in the pipeline. The 'You Cat' version of the Catechism, written in collaboration with, and more suitable for, young people is available and has been distributed, for instance, to Transition Year students. Very recently, the 'Do Cat' has come on stage. Again, this is a text written more for young people; its focus is on the social teaching of the Church.

While adult catechesis may be the principal form in theory, in practice when we think of catechesis, our minds turn spontaneously

to schools. It is true that religious education in Catholic schools has a strongly catechetical dimension. A very significant development in this area has been the publication by the Irish Episcopal Conference of *The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland,* something recommended by *Share the Good News*. It is the first formal religious education curriculum for Catholic preschools and primary schools in the whole island of Ireland. On the basis of the Curriculum, Veritas has produced a primary school religious education series, *Grow in Love*. Significantly, this new programme, *Grow in Love*, has taken great care to emphasise the role of the family and parish.

One of the features of the new programme is a simple and attractive book to be brought home so that the family can continue what has been done in school. The book offers opportunities for parents to review the themes that have been covered in school and chat with their children about. This development is very positive. Stories are told of children coming home enthusiastically to their young parents wanting to talk about what has been done in religious education that day, asking, for example, if they could look in the Bible for the psalms!

This new focus on involvement of parents is crucial. It is one of the key goals indicated by *Share the Good News*. It has been said that we need a further resource for parents to help parents have a deeper grasp of the themes being covered in school. Veritas is now working on that. But, truth be told, this cannot be reduced to a few publications from Veritas. It is going to require all involved in ministry to see how we can help.

The school is important. The family is important. But so too the parish community as a whole. The introduction of the new *Grow in Love* programme offers a new opportunity for priests, parish councils and liturgy groups to reflect on how the parish community can really be more centre-stage in the catechetical formation of children.

This year the new programme is rolling out its teacher manual and textbooks for children of first and second classes (P3 and P4 in Northern Ireland). These are the years when children are prepared for reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist for the first time. Children and parents inter-relate most with the wider parish community at this time. Now is a golden opportunity for parish communities to renew the way they interact with the children, their parents and the school.

Reflecting the vision of *Share the Good News*, the Irish Episcopal Conference has offered a valuable guidelines and discussion document entitled, *Preparing and Celebrating the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the First Time*. This

document is primarily for parishes. As the introduction says, 'it is hoped that it will assist parishes to engage further with parents/guardians and schools'. The material is proposed in a way that can be adapted by dioceses and parishes seeking to develop their own guidelines and resources in this area.

The document puts it clearly, when it reminds us:

> The role of the Catholic school and its teachers is to support families and their parishes in the Christian initiation of children, not the other way around. There is broad agreement that greater balance is needed, one that encourages and empowers home and parish communities to take on a greater degree of responsibility. For many years, parishes across the country have made great efforts, through programmes like *Do This in Memory*, to ensure this greater balance is achieved. These guidelines are an attempt to encourage further collaboration between school and parents/guardians and families in the area of sacramental preparation and celebration.

We need imagination and creativity. It requires a new approach to young people by our Sunday congregations. I believe we have to move towards some form of Sunday school or its equivalent. Perhaps only a few will come. But so be it. At least it's a start. It's important that young people have a *living* relationship with the parish.

In terms of interaction between school and parish, Veritas has just published another short text entitled *Grow in Love: A Guide for Priests and Parish Workers when visiting Classrooms*. The Guide covers the 'junior-infants-to-second-class' age group. Priests and parish workers contribute much if they make regular visits to classrooms in Catholic primary schools. This book offers an insight into the language children are taught. The introduction notes that

> the priest or parish worker comes, not in the role of teacher, but as a person of faith who is recognised by the children as having a particular role in the local Church. He or she comes, therefore, as a friend, as someone who is interested in the children, and who wants to share the responsibility of handing on to them the faith of the community, whom they represent.

As we move in these years to engage more with the parish side of catechesis, we will be challenged to think through what this means for young people at second-level education. The primary school level of catechesis has links with the parish through the preparation

for the sacraments. At the second level the parish connection is not so evident for young people. This needs urgently to be explored both nationally and locally. It was partly with this issue in mind that I raised the question of the possible raising of the age for Confirmation.

WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES 2018

The news that Pope Francis had selected Dublin as the venue for the 9th World Meeting of Families broke on the evening before the official launch of the Curriculum and Veritas programme, *Grow in Love*. It was a happy coincidence, reminding us again not to leave religious education only to schools but to promote a family and parish commitment to it.

If we look again at *Share the Good News*, we discover it refers often to the theme of family. In section B, chapter three (especially n. 56) it focuses on Christian marriage. In section C, chapter four we find references to marriage preparation and support, parenthood and family ministry (ns 80-84). Paragraphs 89 and 90 look at the importance of intergenerational learning within parishes and families. Paragraphs 91 and following in Chapter 5 help us consider sharing our faith with the young. Section D, chapter seven offers resources for implementation.

In n.134 we are told that the catechetical and religious education needs of young people should to be given high priority in the life of the parish. It suggests establishing a support system for family catechesis, helping parents/guardians, grandparents and young people to speak and pray together in the light of their everyday experience. It refers to a Family Mass ministry in the parish. And it focuses on the link between the parish and schools in terms of preparation for the sacraments of initiation. The recently published document mentioned above builds on this.

The two years of preparation for the 2018 Meeting offer a window of opportunity to focus together on the theme of family and catechesis. Each diocese has been asked to have a representative or establish some form of family representative forum in preparation for the event. It has been said on many occasions that the catechetical element has to have a priority in our preparation over the coming two years.

It can be hoped that the theme of family ministry/family catechesis will be on the agenda for all diocesan and parish meetings over the next two years. *Share the Good News* reminds us that the family itself is a main agent of evangelisation.

The Council for Marriage and the Family is organising a one-day conference entitled 'The Joy of Love, *Amoris Laetitia* and the World Meeting of Families in Ireland', on Saturday, 22 October 2016, at

St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. It will be the official launching of the preparations for the 2018 Meeting of Families in Ireland. It will be an opportunity for dioceses and parishes to send representatives who can take the day as a formation/training day.

CONCLUSION

The National Directory for Catechetics, *Share the Good News*, can be considered an ambitious template for catechetics in Ireland. Does it expect to achieve too much? Perhaps. But we need to aim high. Despite what at times might seem difficulties, we have so much going for us in Ireland!

By European standards we still have a relatively high practice rate. There is great work going on in Catholic schools. Grandparents are active in wanting to hand on their faith to listening grandchildren. Youth ministry up and down the country is in contact with many young adults. It was wonderful to witness the almost 2000 Irish at the World Youth Day in Krakow. The work of the Diocesan Advisors, primary and post-primary, is exemplary. They meet regularly and their enthusiasm for their task is encouraging. There are very many teachers doing their best both in primary and second level schools.

Third-level chaplaincies are in contact with young people. Members of religious orders and congregations, though ageing, are still very much present. A clear message coming across at diocesan assemblies from lay people is that they want to do their part. They want to be involved in expressing the parish's mission to communicate the Gospel. There are many ecclesial movements and communities, both old and new, in Ireland.

What is needed most now is creative, *collaborative* catechesis, vital at this point in Ireland. We need to work at joining up the dots, seeing how best to utilise the resources we have. As Pope Francis reminds us, what matters is to generate new processes that will have their own impact in time. One thing is clear: we can't continue business as usual.

Chapter seven, the final chapter of *Share the Good News*, presents policies and objectives to be pursued at all levels of Church governance and membership. Alongside each objective, we find indicators of achievement, suggestions on how to achieve the objectives. Five years after the launch, it would do us all good to re-read this chapter and see where we are – each of us, as parents, as bishops, as members of parish councils, as priests, as school principals, as deacons, as members of diocesan teams, as parish workers, as members of liturgy committees, as teachers, as grandparents….

The words of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at the launch in 2011 continue to be relevant: 'If the new Directory is to be successful, we have to understand that it aims at much more than tweaking at the current system. The current system has been very comfortable for parishes. What is being proposed here in the Directory is revolutionary for our parishes.

The new religion. While both sport and politics dominate the media – with religion being increasingly confined to the personal and private sphere – for many of the participants it was the webs of meaning woven around sport that had more significance than either religion or politics. Sport can be seen as the new religion in terms of providing a sense of identity, bonding and belonging, of collective effervescence, and, in some respects, of models that interpret life in terms of effort, performance, and chance, of winning and losing and, generally, models for how people should live healthy and fit lives. However, there was a strong divide among the interviewees. For some sport was an integral part not just of their leisure lives, but of family and community life. It was a central element in their cultural repertoire. This was often the case even if they did not play or had never played. However, for many others, sport meant little or nothing. They neither followed, believed in, nor played but, as with atheists in religious culture, they have to live in cultural world increasingly dominated by sport.

– Tom Inglis, *Meaning of Life in Contemporary Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) p.190.

Supporting Priests

Paddy Sweeney

Over the past twenty five years, there has been a growing interest in the issue of the support of priests. Year by year the interest fluctuates. It intensifies when tragedy strikes in the life of a priest, when a priest surprises colleagues or parishioners by leaving ministry, when a priest unexpectedly becomes ill, or the dearth of vocations to priesthood makes itself felt.

For the past fifteen years it has been my privilege to be involved in the pastoral care of priests. The editor of *The Furrow* has invited me to share thoughts and ideas about supporting priests which are based on that experience. I will begin by introducing myself, then set out how I attempt to serve and support priests and finally share thoughts as to how support for priests can be developed.

A word of caution. This is a very broad topic which can only be touched upon here, given the constraints of space, yet hopefully this reflection might contribute to some thinking, discussion, and action. I must also caution that what I offer is a particular 'take' on the topic, others will approach it in quite different ways. My approach is shaped by my personal journey in priesthood, my training, professional experiences, and the contexts within which I work.

INTRODUCING MYSELF

I am a diocesan priest, ordained in 1969, forty-seven years ago. Since ordination I have been teacher/chaplain in a Vocational School, director of a residential centre for troubled and troublesome adolescents, worked in a number of parishes and then fifteen years ago received my current appointment, which has never had a title, but the letter of appointment said that I was to engage 'in the pastoral care of priests'. Like all diocesan priests I had training in philosophy, theology, spirituality and pastoral practice. In addition, during my time as director of a residential centre, in order to upskill myself for my task I had taken a training in what is known

Paddy Sweeney is a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin and a systemic psychotherapist. Address: 13 Home Farm Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

as systemic psychotherapy, also known as family therapy, at the Mater Hospital in Dublin, and later had the opportunity to take advanced training as a psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic in London, one of Britain's main psychotherapy training centres.

DEFINING THE TASK

When first appointed I had to decide how to engage with my task and in that regard certain considerations weighed heavily upon me.

I was anxious that 'pastoral care 'would reach out to priests generally, to the many not just the few who were severely distressed, the many whose burdens were borne very privately and had not attracted the attention of parishioners, colleagues or leaders.

I was keen to see that priests were not labelled, not pathologised, that their struggles were normalised, seen as the norm not the exception.

I was also very aware of the fact that the struggles of an individual had a context and this must also be taken into account and I was particularly keen to see that what I was offering was, and was seen to be supportive and not a tool of control.

FIRST STEPS

I embarked on my venture by writing to all the priests working in the Dublin Archdiocese introducing myself, saying a little about my new role, my training and qualifications and then defining my function. I said that I could provide counselling, psychotherapy and referral, but that above all I could provide something I called 'Supportive Conversation'. I pointed out that priests wanting to avail themselves of this service should contact me directly, that the conversations would be confidential, but not absolutely confidential, because the norms of good practice relating to the disclosure of a crime or serious risk to the individual or another would be adhered to. I pointed out that the authorities might suggest to men to come and talk to me, but that no one could be compelled to come. I also made clear that no information would transfer from me to the authorities, unless the individual wished it and explicitly mandated me to share information. This again was not an absolute commitment, but a relative one bearing in mind norms of good practice as set out by the authorities in state and church.

'Supportive Conversation' I explained was a term I use, because of a strongly held belief that everybody's journey through life requires them to negotiate many challenges, challenges arising from a loss experienced, a significant and difficult change of appointment, a trying relationship encountered, ill health, hurts endured, faith and commitments shaken, or just wear and tear. At

such times heads can drop; energy deplete, self confidence gets shaken. Repeatedly in life such challenges must be faced, and usually with some effort and help from friends are successfully dealt with. Sometimes however it is harder, challenges continue and do not seem amenable to solution, and often there is the temptation to embrace solutions that only amplify the difficulties and more serious problems are spawned. In such situations we all can do with conversation that enables us to break free from what entraps us and enables us to move forward. Often it is easier to have those conversations with people who are at an emotional distance from us.

To experience challenges and to need to talk about them is normal and part and parcel of the human condition, indeed a gateway to growth and development. I was very keen to normalise the difficult experiences of priests and to place such difficulties in a non pathological context.

THE RESPONSE

In the first week, after circulating the letter there were several enquiries. Over the first year many came to talk, usually beginning by saying they were drawn by the concept of 'supportive conversation'

After a first introductory conversation the priest was given options. He could continue to talk with me or we could make a referral. The great majority opted to continue talking with me, though in a few cases it was necessary to advise men to involve other professionals, and to assist them in taking that step.

Fifteen years later this work of 'supportive conversation' continues and seems to make a contribution to the wellbeing of our priests.

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WHAT IS TALKED ABOUT?

So what are the distresses that trigger priests to make contact and seek conversation. The range is very varied, and there are no issues that stand out above all others, and certainly very little that would make sensational media headlines.

Some priests seek conversation who are experiencing anxiety and other difficult emotions because they are about to receive or have received a change of appointment.

Research shows that major changes in life can set off a great deal of stress, e.g. change of job, change of house, change of work colleagues and of those one serves. A change of appointment for a priest involves not one, but all these elements.

For others distress is generated by work overload. It becomes more acute if a priest perceives that he is overloaded while colleagues appear to him to be far less burdened, and also when a priest must shoulder the work of a colleague absent through serious illness and this extra burden seems unacknowledged by those in leadership. In such situations resentment, hurt and feelings of abandonment can seep in and overlay the pressure of extra work.

Everyone needs to feel that they matter, that they make a contribution, that their work makes a difference. Many priests today are wondering if their work makes a difference. They expend a huge amount of energy, on sacramental preparation, on weddings, and funerals. People do acknowledge that the priest's efforts make a difference but very often not the difference the priest wishes to make. Priests' efforts are best rewarded when parishioners are growing in discipleship of the Lord, but sadly this is often not apparent, the sacramental event is instead a social and personal celebration, not a spiritual moment.

Very many conversations have been with those distressed because they are embroiled in conflicts – conflicts with other priests with whom they must collaborate; conflicts with or within parish councils and with boards of management of schools; conflicts with church workers, conflicts with authority, and of course inner conflicts – conflicts between who a priest is and who he wants to be or should be.

There have been conversations with men suffering from serious illnesses; some of these conversations are about helping the men to come to terms with the illness. With others the conversations are about helping them to discern and negotiate with the authorities and others regarding what can be their contribution to church life in the future – a contribution that is meaningful and satisfying, a contribution that is manageable for someone chronically ill and yet a contribution that does not put others under too many burdens.

Conversations have been about bereavement and losses of various kinds. Often the loss is the death of parents and siblings. As Catholic priests do not marry, the death of parents, especially the death of the second parent and the dissolution of the family home, can be very upsetting, as can the death of a brother or sister with whom the priest has had extensive contact, at Christmas, holiday time, and times of crisis when a confidant is needed.

But there have been lots of conversations about other losses: loss of reputation through diocesan gossip, loss of reputation through false allegations, loss of goodwill in parishes due to decisions that had to be made.

Priests at times feel compelled to review their decision to become priests. These men seek help in discerning how to go forward,

whether to opt to leave the ministry or to stay; if they opt to stay how to deal with the situations that triggered the whole review, and if they go, they need to talk through the transition involved as they journey into a new life.

Distress enters the lives of priests because of the environment within which we live. Our environment until recently allowed us to be people of influence not just in ecclesial matters, but in the public square, in social and cultural arenas. People admired our choice of life, our sacrifices, our commitment, our contribution. This has changed, priests have less and less influence, are listened to less and less, priests' life choices and life style are seen increasingly as anachronistic, and what priests most want to offer, the Word of God, seems less and less heard. Worse still some priest feel shame, shame because of the child sexual abuse scandals and other Church scandals, and feel victimised by the attitude of many to these scandals. This sea change in the environment leaves some priests quite stressed and distressed, and needing support.

Priests seek conversation to discuss the challenges that are thrown up by their effort to live out faithfully their commitment to the celibate life, especially in a world that less and less values such a life style. For some the challenge is achieving a balance between healthy friendships and celibate living, for some it is about preservation or repair of boundaries, for some it is about integrating sexuality healthily, for some it is about dealing with the new challenges presented by the internet.

All the reasons for distress described here and many others like loneliness, hurts endured, compassion fatigue, loss of vitality, poor quality accommodation, financial worries, family worries generate pain and negative emotions and have led to a request for supportive conversation.

And there is always the tendency to handle stresses badly, to use comfort eating, excessive drinking, gambling, excessive absenteeism from work, isolating of oneself and excessive use of internet as ways of soothing pain and obtaining relief. These responses of course in time spawn a new layer of problems and these too have at various times been the trigger for some of the conversations that I have had.

…

FINDING SUPPORT

We can now turn to some consideration of what supports priests and assists them to go on in an effective way, and in a way that is satisfying for themselves. Support for priests can take very many forms and it is not within the scope of this article to consider them

all. I will touch on a few areas, which, given my ministry to priests seem to me very important and worth considering.

THE FOUNDATIONAL SUPPORT

When considering the issue of support of priests, especially support at the times of trouble, I am attracted by the 21st chapter of St John's Gospel.

In this narrative the final events of the earthly life of Jesus have taken place. The disciples had found the cost of discipleship far too great; they had abandoned and betrayed Jesus. They were floundering, confused, likely traumatised. They leave Jerusalem and head back to Galilee. Their ministry seems to them to be over, and a group of them are trying to pick up the pieces of their lives by returning to their trade – fishing. It is night time, the optimal time for fishing, but in John's gospel night is the time when dark and chaotic forces hold sway, which probably resonates with their states of mind. Interestingly they go to the work they were good at, but don't seem to make any headway. Is it that there are no fish or is a metaphor for the loss of competence and confidence they have suffered?

After a frustrating and fruitless night, they head to shore. Near land they see a stranger, who calls to them to throw the net once more. They do, and with a wonderful result.

It triggers John's memory. He recalls that when there was scarcity and Jesus was at hand, there was abundance. He remembers times when things looked impossible, but Jesus was present and the impossible became possible. He thought of times when all was dark and dangerous, and Jesus was there, and light overcame the darkness. Suddenly it clicks for John, the dark is lightening, the impossible is becoming possible, the scarcity is replaced by abundance here in the nets. It is because the Lord is with them. He is the stranger, his support is with them.

When I reflect on this passage the basic truth comes home again to me, the truth I was told again and again from the moment I entered the seminary, the basic truth that is so hard to get into my head. Our biggest support in ministry is the presence of the Lord, engagement with the Lord, daily interaction with him. In a word we must be people who pray constantly.

The American priest psychologist, Stephen Rossetti published a book in 2011 titled *Why Priests Are Happy*. The book is an account of a survey that he and his team at Catholic University in Washington undertook. In the wake of the scandals there had been a lot of speculation inside and outside the Church about the morale and state of mind of priests. The survey set out to find answers and 3,500 priests were questioned.

Put briefly it emerged that priests were indeed happy, that they were emotionally in a better place than other caring professionals, that they were experiencing better mental health and tested better when tested for burnout, although a worrying feature of the survey was the finding that a higher than average number of priests in the first decade after ordination were struggling.

The survey sought to identify factors that correlated with wellness in priests and a very significant finding was that 'priests who pray more, were less emotionally exhausted, less depressed, less lonely, better able to deal with stress, less obese, had better mental health scores and lower burn out scores'(Rosetti,2011).

The survey reported that 20% of the priests surveyed spent on average an hour per day in prayer, 20% prayed very little and 60% were somewhere in between. Best were the elderly and least good the middle aged.

The results of the survey would indicate that we priests must try to pray for one hour per day. Not only the celebration of Mass, but meditative praying and a slow reflective reading of the Divine Office might be included.

In addition to cultivating and maintaining this practice I believe that we also should cultivate the practice of constantly deepening our knowledge and love of Scripture, through private reading, attendance at short courses and using the scripture readings of the Sunday and weekday Liturgy consistently in our prayer.

A cursory reading of St Luke's Gospel shows us that the great support that Jesus drew on in his life and ministry, was that of engagement with his Father, all those times, at high and low moments when he was found alone in prayer

We ignore this support at our peril and it would be foolish to become involved in prescribing all sorts of other forms of support, however valuable, while ignoring what ought to be our foundational support.

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

From time to time an advertisement appears on television, which shows a mother trying to feed her toddler who is being rather uncooperative. She becomes tense and uneasy. Suddenly the child takes a spoonful of his cereal and lands it on to the face of his mother. For a second the camera lingers on her face. It registers pain, shock, annoyance, hurt, a whole kaleidoscope of emotions in a couple of seconds. This advertisement always reminds me of the work of Donald Winnicot a major figure in the world of psychoanalysis and psychiatry for much of the twentieth century, someone whose work is still influential. Winnicot devoted much of his life to studying the bonding between parents and children,

exploring how good attachments are formed and what damaged the attaching process.

He became very aware that in the course of relating with even a very small baby, mothers experience moments of pain, upset, shock and hurt like the mother in the advertisement. There are times when even the most loving mother might hate her child, feel like abandoning her little one, feel intensely angry at baby. Winnicot became fascinated by this and by what mothers did with these strong, negative feelings. He claimed that in her distress it was crucial that the mother had someone to turn to, someone who would listen to her, help her process the experience and regain her equilibrium. Typically such a support role is played by the father of the child. To use Winnicot's phrase he 'holds' the mother when she is vulnerable. If such holding is not available to a mother, if she just has to 'suck up' these difficult moments, it does not augur well for her emotional well being, the mother-baby relationship, and eventually for the well-being of baby. Winnicot noted that while usually the main 'holder' of a mother will be the father, others can play this role e.g. the mother's own mother or mother-in-law, her sister, or close friends. The crucial thing is that there is someone there for the mother.

As time passed, Winnicot became more and more convinced of all of this. Later in his career he came forward with the idea that there is a profound parallel between the mother/baby experience and the psychotherapist/client experience and indeed carers and those cared for.

Like mothers, carers – and priests are carers – are committed to those they care for, they love those they care for and want what is best for them, but those cared for can make a priest very angry, can hurt him, can exasperate him, can demean him and over time a priest can become fatigued, drained and end up 'going through the motions', rather than being emotionally engaged.

Carers like mothers – Winnicot claimed – need to be held. They must not just 'suck it up', they need opportunities to 'process these experiences' and so maintain equilibrium and maintain an emotional presence to those for whom they care.

It is as a result of contributions like Winnicot's that the practices known as supervision, mentoring and coaching, have entered the helping professions and have made such a difference.

All my experience, personal and professional, and everything I have seen over fifteen years in conversation with priests convinces me of the value of processes such as supervision, mentoring, coaching or my version – supportive conversation.

Priests can access this form of 'holding' support in three ways.

Most priests probably have access to it through having one, two

or more intimate friends, people they can say anything to, at any time and any place. Such intimates are vital.

Ideally that circle of intimates should include a fellow priest or two, and one or two lay-people, both male and female. Not all are lucky to have such a full range of intimate friends but it is vital to have at least one. The valuable friend is one with whom one can talk very regularly, even several times a week by phone or face to face, one to whom one can call unexpectedly and be received, one to whom one can say anything in confidence, one who can 'stand in your shoes', understand the situation, is sympathetic to one's life, one's values and commitments and yet does not 'buy into 'all one's assumptions and prejudices but through gentle questioning and comments can help one see a wider and more complex picture, and other sides of stories.

Such friendships are like gold, not just for priests but for every man and woman, and must be cherished, and not misused.

But there will be times when such friends are not able to help, or a priest is slow to confide because of embarrassment or conflicts of interest, or because the friend does not seem to be able to respond in ways that are helpful. Friends can lose their capacity to help when their thinking is too similar to that of the one who is troubled, or feel unable to challenge because left upset by what he or she has heard.

This is the time that it is necessary to have the kind of service that it has been my privilege to offer in Dublin. I believe that it should be the aim of our dioceses to develop such a service across the country. It should be the aim to have a panel of persons to whom priests could turn for confidential supportive conversation. Such a panel should be made up of people with recognised qualifications in one or other branch of psychotherapy, be appreciative of the priestly calling, have a depth of understanding of priestly ministry and not be prisoners of a lot of the conventional thinking about priests and priesthood that is common in our society today.

Such a panel should include priest-therapists if possible, as many priests do want to talk to an appropriately qualified fellow priest. But some prefer to talk to a lay person male or female. Some priests like to deal with someone near at hand, other are more interested in persons that are at a distance and will not be seeing them at the next diocesan event.

The difficulty of putting together such a panel should not be underestimated, but the creation and maintenance of such a panel would be a very valuable contribution.

It might also be worth noting that over the fifteen years that I have been offering supportive conversation there has been a gradual shift in emphasis. Initially all those who came to talk came

because they were struggling with a specific 'problem'. Now at least half of those I meet, come for what might be called supervision or mentoring, and men who initially made contact because of a problem, often returned seeking ongoing supervision.

Recently I asked one such person what he got from coming. He commented,

> I always go away with insights. I get feedback on how I am handling things. I feel affirmed and yet gently challenged. It is an opportunity to step back from the fray, step back from the busyness of my life. You could call it a good learning experience. It is very useful given the climate within which I minister today.

Another version of supportive conversation that I have offered is done in groups known as 'Reflective Ministry Groups'. Over the past six years I have facilitated such a group and more recently two more groups were formed. These groups meet eight times a year, are facilitated by two facilitators, both of whom have similar training, a Marist priest Fr Martin Daly and myself. Usually at a meeting a topic is discussed or an issue that is bothering a member of the group is raised. The facilitators try to help the group to think about the topic in deeper and different ways and think about how the way they think is affecting the situation. Recently commenting on the experience of the group meeting, one group wrote,

> Recently we discussed why we have been so loyal to the group and our meetings. It is hard to put into words. Put simply it is because we feel significantly better spirited as a result of attending. The meetings are very different from other meetings of priests. We are of all ages and generations yet the meetings are extremely safe, non-threatening, yet very deep. One goes home enlightened, seeing things in a new way and from new perspectives. One goes home restored, 'rebooted' and refreshed.

Such groups offer an important form of support to priests and in this context mention must be made of other types of support groups and fraternities for priests that operate throughout the country and have various emphases.

I have dwelt for a considerable length of time on the importance of having someone to talk to, be it informally or formally, one to one or in groups.

We must always be aware as priests that we might well be the 'someone' that another relies upon for support. This prompts the

question as to what kind of an influence I am. Does my presence make a difference for the better even in small ways, am I loyal, accessible, discreet, trustworthy and able to challenge without giving offence?

QUANTITY OF WORK

A crucial factor in the well-being of all workers is how they experience their work, in terms of how much work they must undertake, how satisfying or unsatisfying that work is, and how good a fit there is between the work and worker. Priests are no exception.

In the Irish Church of today the amount of work a priest is expected to do is a growing issue. Parishes that once had a parish priest and one or more curates, now are generally one man parishes, and in places three priests are caring for four separate parishes, now joined in a pastoral area. The number of Masses celebrated in parishes has often been cut back, but there is no decline in the number of funerals, work with schools, or parish administration. Some decrease has taken place in the number of weddings, but little in terms of baptisms and confirmations. The population of a parish has often increased, the expectations of the parishioners, and often of the priest himself have expanded. In some places pastors are becoming multi-parish pastors catering for two or more distinct parishes.

All of this builds up stress for individuals. But morale takes a particular dip when a priest finds himself, over a significant period of time, shouldering his own work and the work of a sick colleague; when a priest heavily burdened believes that others in his diocese have significantly lighter loads and nothing is done to support him with some assistance; or when a man finds he cannot have predictable time off, or his holidays are curtailed. Another setback to morale occurs when a priest finds himself becoming itinerant rather than resident, finds himself constantly moving from church to church on a Sunday with no time to linger, no time to talk, no time to build relationships, no time to be really present to parishioners.

Workload is a growing question and it triggers several major debates as to where solutions might lie. The resolution of these major debates are unlikely to occur in the immediate future, yet in the here and now efforts must be made to reduce stress and prevent new stresses. Each diocese will have to make its own plans, but for a beginning it would be valuable to attempt to see that there is reasonable equality in work load, that men are guaranteed a day off and holidays, and that clustering does not negatively affect the priest-people bond. This minimum requirement, calls for readiness

by people, priests and bishops to co operate, to talk together, to make sacrifices especially sacrifices of familiar routines, and to become creative in thinking and action.

QUALITY OF WORK

A separate but connected aspect of the work issue is the question of how satisfying and rewarding priests find their work.

All research into the workplace indicates that how the worker experiences his or her work is crucial for wellbeing. If their work is meaningful for them, if they feel that their work is significant and makes a real difference, the 'shelf life' of the worker is much longer.

When the worker experiences the opposite, he or she becomes dispirited, energy drops, standards fall, sick days multiply and the level of departures from that work force increases. But even in situations where workers are committed to their work and find it rewarding, over time vitality can drain away. This is often due to a growing sense that work done really doesn't make much of a difference when those served do not share the same goals as the worker e.g. a diabetes nurse who constantly sees a client who makes no effort to implement healthy patterns of living. Vitality can be sapped, when workers feel they do not have the necessary resources, and when the public at large do not seem to value the work done. Compassion fatigue is another dimension encountered at times by the once very committed worker. The worker has seen so much pain and suffering that she or he emotionally closes down.

Priests like all helping professionals need to have good work experiences to keep going in a vital and lively way.

But at the moment in Ireland there are factors in play which can be very dispiriting. Priests' work is generally very meaningful to them, but do priests really feel that they make a difference or that they make the kind of difference they want to make? Priests put huge effort into many things especially sacramental preparation, but what they are trying to bring about and what the participants are trying to bring about often do not concur. What priests value, what they have given their lives to promote, is less and less valued in society. Scandals and other upheavals in Church life do not help. When a priest encounters work overload, a sense of inequality in burden bearing, and a sense that what one is doing is perceived by the many as nice, fluffy, sentimental, but essentially meaningless and little to do with real life, he is very vulnerable.

But are there responses to such situations? It is my firm belief that there are. In this regard I draw upon my experiences in working with troubled and troublesome adolescents in a residential

care setting. That was a work for which there were not enough resources, not enough resources of money, staff, facilities, a work for which there was not great sympathy from the world outside, in fact at times hostility from neighbours. It was work that demanded lots of sacrifices from my colleagues and myself, a work in which one received many emotional knocks and bruises, and most of all a work in which one saw meagre progress and lots of relapsing, yet we were happy, contented and lively workers, where we could so easily have been discontented, exhausted and depleted.

What made the difference? Several factors. Firstly we believed that the more sapping and demanding the work with clients, the more we as a staff group had to enhance and enrich our teamwork, and our togetherness as a team. Great effort was put into building an effective team, who enjoyed each other and who worked to make one another shine. So even if the work was at times very unrewarding the company of the colleagues was always most rewarding.

Secondly we involved all in the organisation, in every decision of consequence e.g. what adolescent was admitted and discharged, who was employed, how money was spent and how the organisation was managed. There was a very high sense of involvement, of worker democracy and yet there were careful structures so that decisions could be made well, individual responsibilities respected, and elements balanced in a manner that ensured that the young people were always the priority. This work climate of course did not emerge overnight and had to be built patiently.

Thirdly it was believed that the way we thought determined what we could and could not do, so when there were difficulties there was always the effort to think differently about issues. This was not easily done and was achieved first by reading and discussion, then by inviting 'mentors' to come and observe the work, talk with the young people, staff and management, give feedback and help with dilemmas. Eventually we embraced training programmes outside the organisation which is how I came to study family therapy. These efforts to think differently and so act differently proved very effective in maintaining interest and vitality, and kept us in tune with the fundamental values that drew us into the work in the first place.

Fourthly we interpreted the behaviour that we encountered in the course of our work, especially behaviour that was unacceptable to us. We tried never to take such behaviour personally. We did not see it as a comment on us, but as most interesting, meaningful, and useful information about the young person or his family member. We were far more interested in the meaning of the behaviour than the fact of the behaviour. To interpret the behaviour required that

the behaviour had to be filtered through a lens, usually a lens different from the lens conventional wisdom might supply. We were constantly constructing and adjusting these lenses through study, training events, reading, and in-house discussion. This was not easy at first, but over time proved massively useful in developing effective work and maintaining staff vitality.

I believe that in our dioceses there is work to be done about how we manage our work, manage the way we respond to the climate within which we work, and the gap that secularisation is bringing about. I now wish to turn to one final area of vital support.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING CREATIVITY

As was seen earlier when reflecting on the issue of supporting priests, I take inspiration from the 21st chapter of St John's gospel. There is a second element in that narrative that I find striking. The disciples were in a bad place, their discipleship seemed to have reached an impasse and now their old trade skills seemed to have left them too. Then a new idea was given them; it came from what they thought to be a stranger, and the stranger standing on the shore had a different perspective on the lake. It probably was not easy, especially for seasoned fishermen to follow the prompts coming from a stranger, but they did and everything changed.

When times are difficult, when our efforts seem to yield nothing, especially when we are hurting and dispirited, one of the first casualties is our creativity. To move on we need our creativity rekindled. This can happen only by encountering difference, by coming in touch with different ideas, new ideas. If we make the effort to encounter the new and the strange, to engage with the new and strange and accept inspiration from the new and the strange we will find ourselves nourished.

I would like to see creativity-sustaining programmes available for priests and for Permanent Deacons, Lay Pastoral Workers, Parish Sisters and other Church personnel.

Given my experiences talking with scores of priests, I would wish such programmes to offer a setting within which a number of themes might be explored. It would be my hope that these explorations would make available new thinking for priests, would be very enriching, boost vitality and trigger new actions. Themes that might fruitfully be explored might include: hope, what it means and how it is generated and enacted; ministry in an inhospitable climate; teamwork – building resilient teams; coping with hurts and disappointments; partnering with parishioners; mentoring colleagues, skills needed; using mentoring; communicating; change and its management; living the celibate life; offering and receiving spiritual direction; dealing with difference; managing

conflict; coping with difficult personalities; living with risk; stress management.

In recommending creativity supporting processes I am not thinking of a traditional style course or workshop, but a carefully constructed process with participants engaged in every aspect from beginning to end, a process that would look at how we priests deal with all that has been itemised above, eliciting stories of success in those areas, and exploring how we might enrich what we do through drawing on the insights of participants and wisdoms available from the human and sacred sciences.

In such a process hopefully priests will encounter newness and strangeness, be encouraged to act on the new and the strange, and experience a new abundance of energy and creativity,

I have looked at four areas that can offer significant support to priests, Prayer, Supportive Conversation, Balanced and Meaningful Working Conditions, and Building Creativity. But there are many others which space does not allow for consideration here e.g. the priest's relationship with his own family; the housing situation within which priests dwell, the arrangement for elder and retired priests, support arrangements for newly ordained priests. All and still more are worthy of examination, I have chosen these four because I think they are particularly important at this time.

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FINAL COMMENT

As I said at the beginning, interest in the issue of support of priests fluctuates. In conclusion I would wish to make a few general observations on the issue of support

Support of priests is best understood, I believe, as a set of processes that enable a priest to be the best priest that he can be in his particular context. It involves as far as possible providing a context within which he can best do what he was ordained to do. For me this is an important starting point, because in everyday discourse 'support' is often taken to mean 'firefighting' negative situations, and so is connected in our minds with problems. It is at other times taken to mean words or gestures that affirm another, recognise another's contribution, excuse the activity of another, or back the other up. Undoubtedly affirmation, recognition, and back-up are important and constitute a contribution to support, but they are elements within a wider and deeper set of processes. They are parts of the story, not the full story.

Support is best considered a co-creation, a joint project involving the one being supported and others. The responsibility then for enabling a priest to be the best he can be rests on multiple parties,

the priest himself, his colleagues, his parishioners, his bishop, and the parish or diocese within which he works.

It is also important to realise that offering and accepting support is complex .On the surface, offering support might seem a delightful task. But it often is quite complicated. Support, though needed can often be interpreted by those to whom it is directed, as a 'put down', as invasion of privacy, an effort to control, or as an assault on independence. Equally, seeking support and/or accepting needed support is for some a challenge, which triggers resistance and vigorous opposition. Paradoxically persons very vocal in demanding support can sometimes be quite resistant to accepting it. And some needing support can be open to support, but solely on their terms, terms which those offering support realise are unrealistic or set to fail. All of this means that the business of offering support requires considerable skill and the task of seeking and accepting support is often not easy, and requires skills, skills of openness, flexibility, courage and trust.

There can also today be a tendency to medicalize and psychologize the issues of priests and those in the caring callings. Of course there are times when the support needed is psychiatric or psychological, but there are many situations where the support needed is of a different type, and medicalizing and psychologizing are best avoided

When considering support initiatives for priests, the 'system' within which an individual works, as well as the individual must be focused upon. The parish or the diocese as well as the priests must be considered.

Furthermore it must be realised that not all problems can be solved or dissolved. In these situations, support can mean burden sharing and enabling people to live with the lack of desired solutions.

Finally attempting to be the best priest I can be, does not mean being a perfect priest, or a flawless priest. It might be best described as being a good-enough priest.

As was remarked at the outset this reflection on the issue of supporting priests, is but one perspective, one shaped by my personal and professional experiences. I offer it in the hope that it might generate discussion and action, maybe very different actions from what I would initiate. I welcome responses to this article, comments and ideas. *psuibhne@hotmail.com*

Bringing it all Back Home
– *An untapped resource*

Dympna Mallon

The Vatican II image of the Church as the 'People of God' can be traced to the *Ressourcement* theology of Chenu, Congar, de Lubac, Philips and others, and the vision of the Church as *communio*. The Western Church has, however, remained essentially hierarchical, and not truly reflective of the universal Church, especially in Africa and other missionary territories. In such locations the establishment and development of Christian Churches was entirely dependent on engagement with the local people. In retrospect this engagement may have reflected the Church as the whole people of God, long before the *Ressourcement* theology developed or the Second Vatican Council gathered in Rome. This article will propose that the learning and experience of returned missionaries can offer a positive, even vital contribution to the development, within the Irish Church, of a *communio* which honours the rights and abilities of lay people.

THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD

The Church in Africa has depended on engagement with Africans since the continuous presence of missionaries dating back to the early parts of the 19th century. In the decades since, priests, religious, brothers and lay people have lived out their missionary vocation by working with Africans, equipping them to become parish leaders, Catechists, Ministers of the Word and Eucharist and in various development and educational programmes. Knowing that ownership by Africans of the indigenous churches was essential, missionaries, including SMA priests and brothers and OLA sisters first addressed the greatest needs of the people, and consequently built solid relationships and faith communities. While missionaries were not consciously applying *Communio* ecclesiology, nonetheless parish councils and lay leaders were the norm. Where primary evangelisation was the focus, people were trained and engaged as catechists, liturgical leaders and assistants; where the needs existed in social justice or developing of the local

Dympna Mallon is SMA Laity Coordinator, African Missions, Dromantine, 96 Glen Road, Newry, Co. Down.

infrastructure, lay people naturally assumed a share in the work and in shaping its direction. Building and construction, healthcare and education, farming and community development were the work of the missionary and the people – together; no other approach would have been realistic or practical.

LOCAL RESPONSES TO LOCAL NEEDS

The educational role of the missionary Church in Nigeria is a good example of the importance of recognising, understanding and responding to the concerns of the local people. Education had been an effective means to escape poverty and oppression in Ireland and Irish missionaries, principally SMA and Holy Ghost (CSSp,) shared its value in Africa. The Igbo people, traditionally located in the East of Nigeria had a deep desire for education. This was both because of their religious aspirations and for the advantage it would give them in pursuing the numerous employment opportunities within the colonial administration.

Missionary-run schools continued to emerge as a result, becoming, under Bishop Joseph Shanahan CSSp, a structured and organised schools network. These schools satisfied the Igbo thirst for knowledge, equipped them for employment, and enabled their spread right across Nigeria. Their basic education and fluency in English allowed the Igbo people to become teachers and Church leaders; their energy and initiative made them a real asset to the colonial establishment as well as the Catholic and Anglican missionaries, all of whom came to depend on them. The later development of Catholic Teacher Training Colleges was followed by an expansion of secondary schools. All built on the potential of education as a tool for evangelisation, particularly through the employment of graduates as teachers, often indentured for the first two years of employment as repayment for the cost of their training.

It was precisely because the Igbos desired and responded so rapidly to the provision of education that it was an effective tool of evangelisation, but the recognition of the needs and appetite of the local people and an appropriate response came from an understanding of and connection with those people by the missionaries.

COMMUNIO IN PRACTICE

The rapid expansion of such educational systems placed a substantial managerial and administrative burden on missionaries, limiting time for much pastoral work. In this context the role of lay people as catechists and parish leaders/assistants was not only beneficial, but actually critical. Although arising from necessity

rather than ideology, the existence of such working relationships and pastoral partnerships generated an inclusive Church community, a spreading of the Gospel by living its values; in short, *Communio* ecclesiology in practice. The authenticity and integrity of meeting peoples' needs – spiritual, physical and intellectual – enabled the missionaries to help to build an African Church which today is thriving. The merits of transferring missionary experience from Africa to a beleaguered Irish Church could be diminished by the clericalism and authoritarianism witnessed in Africa in recent years. Nonetheless the learning of missionaries retains an inherent value and that clerical mindset, increasingly a hallmark of the African Church, may yet be challenged by the deep sense of ownership and responsibility of ordinary Africans for their Church. Whatever the shortcomings, its genesis in small faith communities and effective relationships has produced an African Church which is still vibrant and growing, and in stark contrast to the Church many have found on their return to Ireland.

PREACH THE GOSPEL – USE WORDS IF NECESSARY

Missionaries have walked the path of challenging cultural practices and unconventional approaches, accepting those realities, and facilitating, against that background, an encounter with God's love which has spread across the African continent. The SMA have done so by honouring the vision of their founder, Bishop de Brésillac to reach out to the most abandoned and respond to the signs of the times. De Brésillac's vision for the establishment of an African Church was not radical in its structure; the SMA was a clerical Society from the outset. But he did recognise the need for an indigenous Church and clergy, respect for local culture and customs and the empowerment of the African believers. The SMA have pursued these values by working with people according to their needs and equipping them to be responsible for their own faith, rather than depend on the only priest for miles around. In that way they have, like other missionaries, lived the Gospel as well as taught it.

In Ireland today, some African realities, such as a shortage of priests, are more evident than anyone could have ever have imagined, and although the culture, social practices, language and history may be very different, perhaps the response needed is not. Much has been written since the election of Pope Francis on the burgeoning 'age of the laity' within the Church, as if to indicate it is something new. Reflection on the missionary experience might suggest a recognition of the role of the laity long ago, allowing missionaries to make a meaningful contribution in the current climate.

KEEPING THE HOME FIRES BURNING

Ireland is not Africa; it has been a Christian country for centuries but in recent years that Christian identity has become less obvious; the participation in and commitment of people to the Church is in decline. Society has changed dramatically and many feel the Church has failed to respond in a compassionate and non-judgemental way to the reality of their lives. Factors such as abuse scandals and safeguarding issues have only deepened the disillusionment. There is much work to be done, but there is still hope. The Gospel needs to be heard in Ireland more than ever, but new ways of communicating it are needed. Creativity and innovation are essential. Tried and tested methods of catechesis remain but it is time to explore other avenues. The potential still exists to reach people through conversations which are equal and respectful; through encouraging and supporting people to play their role in music and liturgy; by enabling and empowering people to express their faith through social justice and helping those most in need; and through inviting them to own the ongoing mission both here and in Africa. Such an invitation can come from those with the authenticity and integrity needed to issue it, those who have witnessed it for more than a century and a half in Africa and other places – the missionaries themselves.

READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Despite reduced numbers present in churches, many people, especially the young, care deeply about justice and rights, about protecting the weak and those with no voice, and about caring for the earth. This passion for justice is a language which is universal and intergenerational. It is reinforced by Pope Francis' invitation in *Laudato Si'* to hear 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' (*LS*49) in caring for 'our common home.' With a strong tradition of interaction with and empowerment of lay people, missionaries are ideally positioned to tap into that shared wisdom and, drawing on their African experience, to offer people new ways to express their faith by living out the Gospel values.

The last eighteen months have seen an international focus on two huge issues: climate change and displacement of peoples. Pope Francis has provided leadership on both issues both in word and deed, advocating compassion for the marginalised and the poor and care for the earth, who 'herself burdened and laid waste is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor' (*LS*2). Bodies such as the Global Catholic Climate Movement, Eco-Congregation Ireland, CAFOD, Trocáire, Christian Aid, Goal, and Concern are all providing practical ways for people of faith to express their care and concern, to move from charity to justice in their response to

the needs of the earth and the poorest of her peoples. Demanding climate justice and adequate support for refugees are perhaps unlikely and unconventional ways by which to promote the Gospel and mission. Yet these are the issues with which more and more people are engaging, instinctively recognising that the future of families, communities, eco-systems and the whole of creation depend on their response. The Irish Church must read the signs of these times and recognise within itself an untapped resource. It must encourage and support missionaries, with all their experience and wisdom, to do what they have always done: to initiate real dialogue with lay people as their partners, to facilitate them to feel the 'cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' and to respond together in new and creative ways.

Diminishing psychic gap. In Ireland, in previous decades, there was an emotional, psychic gap between parents and children, men and women, teachers and pupils, lecturers and students, bosses and workers, doctors and patients, priests and laity, and so forth. These relationships were more formal, with greater limitations and constraints in the way they addressed each other and about what could be said and done between them. The diminishing psychic gap between people was reflected in the places where they met, in the nature of their talk, in their gestures and their touches. These cultural transformations were linked to an increased demand and expectation to be open and frank and to express feelings and emotions. This involved learning new skills in relation to what can be said to whom, when, and where. It involved new forms of communication and trust.

– Tom Inglis, *Meaning of Life in Contemporary Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) p.187.

Holy Communion – For Whom?

Donal Dorr

One of most quoted statements of Pope Francis came in his first major document, *Evangelii Gaudium*. He said:

> The Eucharist … is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. … Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems (*EG* 47).

This statement is usually invoked by those who argue that Protestants in mixed marriages and divorced people who have remarried should be permitted to receive Catholic Holy Communion. In this article I want to suggest that, in line with the approach of Pope Francis, there is a sound biblical and theological basis for Catholic Church authorities to take a wider perspective and to make a more extensive change in the rules governing shared Holy Communion.

We are frequently reminded that the Eucharist represents the summit and source of Christian life; and that it represents the unity of the Christian community of believers. That is true, but perhaps it may not be the whole truth. Following the inspiration of Pope Francis, should we not add two further equally important points? Firstly, the Eucharist can also be a very powerful instrument of reconciliation, a means of promoting and deepening the unity of believers. And, secondly, it can be a truly effective means by which the Christian community fulfils its missionary task of drawing others to have an experience of God's presence and of communion with others.

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

One of the parables of Jesus provides us with a powerful image of Holy Communion. It is the story of the man who prepared a great banquet for his friends (Luke 14:16-24). When those who had first been invited made excuses, the man who was providing the feast insisted on bringing in the most unlikely guests, including the poor,

Donal Dorr is a priest-member of St Patrick's Missionary Society, Kiltegan. Address: 21 Leeson Park, Dublin 6.

the blind, and the lame 'from the streets and the lanes.' No doubt many of these latecomers had at first little or no understanding of why they were being brought in, and no sense of communion with the other guests. It was the organizer of the banquet who welcomed them, made them feel at home, and created a sense of communion between these unlikely guests and the man's own family.

This parable of Jesus gives us a real insight into the central meaning of the Christian Eucharist. It is that Jesus who invites us to share in his banquet of Holy Communion is not content just to nourish those of us who call ourselves his friends. He wishes also to call in even the most unlikely guests.

At the banquet of the Eucharist, just as at the feast in Jesus' story, it is essential that there be a core-group who hold in place the full meaning of what is taking place. But around this inner group there is room for others who may at first be not so sure about the purpose of the feast and may perhaps be quite surprised to find themselves welcomed to share in the banquet. There may even be others who do not share the Catholic faith in the Eucharist, but who come as respectful visitors, attracted by the sacredness of the event, and willing to share in some degree in the sense of communion of the group with each other and with God.

This situation is in fact a quite accurate account of what frequently happens at present. Nowadays, when we celebrate weddings or funerals, quite a lot of the people in the congregation are not practising Christians. It is likely that some of them are not even fully believing Christians. Nevertheless, very many of them come to Communion, and it is not practical to forbid them from doing so. Why not see this tolerance not just as a practical necessity but as a positive opportunity to awaken the dormant faith of these people?

Some of those who receive Communion may not be Christian believers at all but may be people who are searching for some spiritual meaning in their lives. As they receive the Host alongside their friends they may find it spiritually nourishing and may experience real communion with the rest of the congregation and with God. Why should we forbid them from doing so – even if that could be done without causing disruption? Could we not see their action as providing a great opportunity for them to foster whatever sense of communion they already have with others and with God? After all, the purpose of the Eucharist is to create and nourish communion in the people of God.

Of course, some of those who are in the church at this time and who come up to receive the Host, may have come in idle curiosity. Their lack of faith and lack of communion with the rest of the group means that for them there is no Eucharist, no Holy Communion.

PRESERVING THE MEANING

As I have already said, what needs to be protected at all costs, is the fundamental meaning of the Eucharist. At each and every Catholic Eucharist this central meaning must be 'held' by an inner core of believers who *are* the Church at this moment, because they are in communion with God and each other in faith, in hope, and in love. If we were ever to reach a point where there was no such inner core of believers, then the meaning of the Eucharist would have been compromised. The presence of this core group is 'the bottom line' – it is what ensures that the basic meaning is not lost or watered down.

The participation of 'visitors' from other Churches, or of people who are less sure of their faith in the mystery that is being celebrated, does not necessarily undermine or erode the meaning of our Catholic Eucharist – provided the inner core-group do not allow the presence of 'guests' to dilute their own belief. On the contrary, the Eucharistic faith of the core-group of believers could in this case take on a missionary character, inviting others to a firmer or more explicit faith and to a deeper communion with God, with Jesus, and with each other. Eucharistic openness would then be a very effective way of inviting people on the margins of the Church to share with us the rich Christian symbols which may speak to their minds and touch their hearts.

The meaning and experience of Holy Communion is carried, not primarily in the doctrinal statements of our Church or other Churches, but in the hearts and minds of those who take part in it. It is not practical to use any doctrinal Church statements as a standard for judging who is allowed to share in our Eucharist. Why should Catholic Church leaders – or the celebrant of the Mass – have to take on the onus of trying to weigh up the authenticity of the faith or goodwill of those who come as 'visitors' to share in our Eucharist? I am not for a moment suggesting that the issue of the faith of the visitor is irrelevant. But is it *our* task, or the task of our authorities, to make the judgement? The parable of the wedding-feast seems to indicate that we may invite all and sundry to come and share the feast, and then leave it to God to judge whose wedding-garment is adequate.

The connection between the unity of the Church and sharing in the Eucharist is not a strictly logical one. It belongs rather to the symbolic sphere: the fact that we receive Communion together symbolises the unity of Christians. But in fact, our own unity within the Catholic Church is a very imperfect and fragile one – and this is true both at the global level and at the local level. Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated, all of us who take part are people weak in faith, wounded by sin, and prone to further sin. Nevertheless,

apart from the exceptional case of excommunication, we are not forbidden to share in the mystery even though our faith is inadequate and our communion with each other is far from perfect.

PRUDENTIAL PASTORAL DECISIONS

The Eucharist is such a sacred celebration that Church authorities have always tried to ensure that those who take part in it do so with respect and reverence. For this reason, in the early Church even the catechumens were asked to leave the celebration before the community moved on to the most solemn part of the Mass. But this rule was changed for good pastoral reasons: Church authorities realized that those who were not yet baptised could be spiritually nourished by being present at all of the ritual – and that this would not lessen people's respect for the Eucharist.

Such changes in the past suggest that nowadays there may be an equally good pastoral case for an adaptation of the rules about receiving Holy Communion. I suggest that it would be helpful for Church authorities and the Christian community to engage in a serious pastoral reflection on three questions:

- How should we bear witness in our Eucharist to our commitment to going out 'to the streets and the lanes' to invite the unlikely people to God's banquet? How can our Eucharist make visible not just the present (imperfect) unity of Christians but also the fact that it is 'a pledge of future glory' including the glory of the perfect unity which Christ promised?
- In our present-day pluralist situation, where it is difficult to know who is a full Christian believer, is it possible or appropriate to expect the celebrant or the community to judge who may receive Holy Communion?
- How best can we avoid the danger that a more open policy concerning reception of Communion would lessen respect for the sacrament?

It would be unfortunate and quite wrong if this kind of pastoral reflection were left to be done privately by individual priests or members of the community. The reflection should be authorized by the Church authorities, and any decision to change the rules for the reception of Communion should be made officially, rather than in a haphazard manner. However, I stress the point that this reflection should be a *pastoral* one – based not on an abstract theology but on a theology which is related to the actual experience of what is happening in our churches today.

Since Vatican II there has been a major change in the Catholic approach to sharing prayer and religious ceremonies with people

of other Churches and religions. No serious Catholic leader or theologian would now claim that it is wrong to allow Christians from other Churches, or non-Christians, to be actively and prayerfully present at a Catholic Eucharist (apart from receiving Communion). Once we have conceded that such joint worship is a good thing, it is a matter not of doctrine or principle but rather of 'prudential wisdom' where we draw the line about the extent of such participation. Even at present that line is drawn in different places in different countries – and this reinforces the point that the issue is one of prudence rather than of principle.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

This suggested change is not at all as radical as it may seem at first sight. In fact it is quite similar to what frequently happens in practice in our Church. At present there is no rule which excludes those Catholics whose personal understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist may be vague or even quite inadequate. Why then should we exclude those whose Church or religion may profess on their behalf an understanding of Eucharist which is different (to a greater or lesser extent) from our official teaching? The non-Catholic individuals who come to our Eucharist may have only a quite vague idea of the official Eucharistic doctrine of their own Church. Their faith in the Eucharist may actually be more authentic than that of some Catholics. Perhaps the parable of the banquet invites us to realise that the more crucial issue is the degree to which they and we open ourselves here and now to experience a real communion with each other and with God, and the extent to which we together seek to deepen that communion.

It is quite likely that many of the readers of this article will have at times experienced how participation in a prayerful Eucharist has in fact nourished the spirituality of people who had been on, or beyond, the margins of the Catholic Church. My own experience as a missionary priest is that some of the most missionary actions I have undertaken have been occasional celebrations of the Eucharist. I am thinking especially of occasions when I took part in workshops or retreats, in which we sought guidance and direction in life, and at times had a palpable sense of the presence of the Spirit. Some of the participants were practising Christians and others were more 'on the margins' – or perhaps beyond them.

Quite frequently, the high point of these events was a Eucharist in which the participants celebrated the gifts of God and came to appreciate the gracious and mysterious purposes of God at work in their own lives and in the wider world. It would have been quite unrealistic and insensitive on such occasions to have interrogated the participants about their belief or theology of the Eucharist prior

to the celebration. And I am pretty sure that in many cases the actual celebration brought them to have a more authentic experience of communion, and a more rich faith in the Eucharist. So the sharing in Holy Communion had a missionary effect, nourishing a Eucharistic faith that may have been dormant, underdeveloped, or merely embryonic.

A thin web. One of the main findings of the study was how little not just the Catholic Church but religion in general was part of the cultural repertoires of the everyday lives of the people I interviewed. There were few indications that God was in their minds and hearts and on their lips, that religion provided them with either a model or explanation of life, or that it was a model for how they should live their lives. Very few respondents mentioned God or religion until we reached the end section of the interview when I asked them specific questions about their religious beliefs and practices. When I asked them how they decided what was right or wrong, very few mentioned religion or the teachings of the church or the Bible. When I asked those who had suffered a major illness, tragedy, or death, how they got through their ordeal, only a few mentioned religion. Being Catholic is, then, a cultural ingredient that many participants used to facilitate and create meaning with each other, to mark major life transitions, to celebrate, and to mourn. For many, being Catholic seems to be a vague, thin web of meaning within which other webs of meaning are spun: it was less of an ideological conviction and more of a learnt, habitual way of being in the world.

– Tom Inglis, *Meaning of Life in Contemporary Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) p.188.

Your Son a Priest?

Joe McDonald

There was a time in this country when the news that a member of the family was going of to become a priest was greeted with excitement, joy and pride. That day is gone. We live in a changed, and rapidly changing, world. Irish society moves further away from the Church, and this may well prove to be a good thing not only for society but for the Church as well. The Church will survive. This is not said in an arrogant or triumphalist way but from the perspective that the Church will endure because it is rooted in Christ. That said, it will emerge as a very different Church. It will be interesting to see what the role of the priest will be in that new reality. What is more pressing at the moment is a question in relation to the promotion of vocations today. Put bluntly is it right that we continue to invite young men to priesthood? If the answer to this question, no matter how tentative it is, is yes, then it raises another question, and that is, what precisely are we inviting these men into? I mean this both, in terms of formation, and in terms of ministry, or working life?

Even as recently as ten years ago the idea of a call to priesthood may still have passed the 'respect' test whatever about the 'relevance' one. In other words many young people would have said, whilst they may not consider the vocation, or be convinced of its relevance, they retained some residual respect for it. Passing the 'respect' test today may not prove so straightforward. It is true there remains much respect for individual priests on the ground. Many will acknowledge great work done in schools and hospitals. Most people see the extraordinary contribution made by the Church in the area of social justice and we remain justifiably proud of our missionary outreach.

However, to dispute that there is a crisis is surely to be in denial. There is in fact a serious crisis in the Church and most specifically in the Irish Church. This crisis manifests itself in rapidly dwindling Mass attendance, the widespread rejection of core Church teaching, and a complete dearth of vocations. Part of our trouble is a 'crisis within the crisis' in terms of leadership. This is not to deny that

Joe McDonald is a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin. Address: No. 2 Presbytery, 148A Blackditch Road, Dublin 10.

we have gifted, intelligent and perhaps even holy men within the episcopate. I have genuine respect, and even affection for a number of them. Sadly I find it hard to find a prophet among them, and consequently the seldom time we hear from them we do not hear a prophetic edge to their voice. I wonder about the criteria for the appointment of our bishops. Surely two core values are essential, that of having a deep personal relationship with Jesus, and to be able to speak in a dynamic and attractive way as inspired by God's Holy Spirit. However the leadership crisis is for another day, and our main focus here is the priesthood.

Whilst acknowledging much that is good within the serving priesthood this is not the full picture. The reality is we are failing to attract candidates for priesthood. We need to have the courage to ask why this is so. There are those who point out some 'signs of hope'. I think we need to be careful here. This may well be a dangerous illusion. There is the emergence of a 'restorationist' model of Church. It harks back, unhealthily, to the past, and is often over zealous in its use of the law and more often than not lacks compassion. The two million young people gathered in Kraków both inspire and give me hope. Is this about the love of Jesus? I have no doubt it is, and it also reflects a real spiritual hunger, but is it a vote of confidence in the institutional church? I am not so sure. It would be easy here to slip into the unhelpful quagmire of debate around conservatism and liberalism. This has the seeds of schism. It not only divides us, it rips us apart. Are the bigger collar and the cassock a reliable measure of the priest? People do not fall for the cool, hip Fr. Trendy, yet many of them are frightened and suspicious of 'Father' in full battle dress. Surely we are a magnanimous-enough Church comfortably to accommodate, nay embrace, the priest who values collar, cassock and incense and the priest who presents in open-neck shirt, sandals and wearing a Taizé Cross in his lapel. Surely the measure of the priest is deeper than this? What is at the heart of priesthood? I propose five core values of priesthood today. 1. A profound, unique personal relationship with the Jesus we meet in the Gospels. 2. A knowledge of and comfort with one's own identity, including, and specifically, one's sexuality. 3. An ability to relate. 4. A clear appreciation of ministry, the life of the priest, as service. 5. To be the prophetic voice, creative and courageous in passionately proclaiming the Kingdom of God and its values, in a way that does not compromise the Gospel truth but mirrors the compassion of Jesus.

– It is not possible to have a profound relationship with the Jesus of the Gospels unless we spend substantial periods in his presence every week. This is essentially silent, wordless.

– This self-knowledge regarding one's identity requires hard work. I am shaped by parents and siblings, where and when I grew up, and key life experiences. As a priest I need to know my sexual identity. I need to know my orientation and my drive, and whatever about befriending all this, at the very least that I am not enslaved by it.
– Essential to priesthood is the ability to relate to all kinds of people. To do this healthily we need to be aware of our own fears and prejudices. Perhaps we need to identify our latent racism or homophobia and be resolved with the necessary help to ensure it does not damage our ministry.
– True ministry is service, and yet much of our behaviour betrays something quite different. The enemy here is clericalism, in its broadest sense. This includes behaving as if priesthood is an élite but is also very much about the scourge of ambition within clergy.
– This represents the great deficiency in priesthood today. It appears to me that this deficiency is directly related to clericalism and to a lesser degree to how we choose people for leadership.

Clearly if we accept the above then it has ramifications for those training for priesthood. Perhaps we should consider a freeze on inviting candidates for priesthood for two or three years? This would allow us time and space to address some of the above. Surely parents and families can be forgiven for having some unease if a loved one was to declare an interest in priestly life? If our faith communities are not producing priests then we must look again at our communities. Is it not time we questioned the integrity of promoting vocations? Do we deserve vocations at the moment? Are those who have the courage and generosity to try it as a possible way of life, the better for the experience? Are they more self-aware, freer and happier? Or are they left crushed, dealing with a legacy of rejection? Is there any after-care? Let us not scapegoat the seminary in this. This is about the faith community. Maybe if we listened to the whisper of the Spirit we might see the body of work we need to do. Perhaps a little repentance, and a little more reform might in fact see some renewal, particularly in the area of vocations to the priesthood.

Homilies for November (C)

Isabelle Smyth

All Saints *November 1*
Rv 7: 2-4, 9-14, Ps 24: 1-6, R/cf v.6. 1 Jn 3: 1-3, Mt 5: 1-12

Today and tomorrow when we commemorate all the Faithful Departed, and on the coming two Sundays, the Scriptures present us with a challenge and an opportunity not to be missed. Ours is the task of opening up the subject upon which few people wish to dwell – the question mark over what follows death.

Many Catholics have a favourite canonised saint. Many have a dear departed relative or friend who, they believe, has joined the ranks of the saints. But when a family is visited by death, the unknown carries questions. The one we love may linger, or may leave us suddenly, perhaps very tragically. Words like 'she is at peace at last' or 'he will have a great reward' may bring comfort, as we spend time with the bereaved. But people hunger for more insight than that.

It is impossible to speak knowingly about what is profoundly unknowable! All I know about life after death is known by faith. I am what I believe. As Christians, perhaps we are defined more than any other way by the particular quality of our belief in life after death. We bet our lives on the Resurrection!

At this liturgical time, we are challenged to explore this belief. We have been promised something better to come – unlimited happiness that will never end. This new existence is beyond time and space. We cannot even imagine it, since everything we experience and understand now is confined by time and space.

That is why St. Paul, drawing on Isaiah and Jeremiah, tells us that the things prepared for those who love God are 'what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' (cf 1 Cor 2: 9).

In his vision, John saw 'an immense crowd, beyond hope of counting, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language.'

Isabelle Smyth is Writer in Residence, Medical Missionary of Mary, Réalt na Mara, 11 Rosemount Terrace, Booterstown, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.

Who may join them? People who long to see the face of God, the psalm responds.

In these times, fundamentalists brainwash young people into strapping on explosives and sacrificing their lives for a cause. Others end their lives to escape despair. In today's Gospel, the Beatitudes, one by one, give us a map for the journey that will take us surely to the place of unlimited happiness that we are promised.

But, people will ask, what faces those who appear to be blatantly unloving, destructive, led astray, even brutally murderous? I cannot solve that conundrum but I believe God can. We place them in the care of our loving God whose Mercy we have been celebrating all this year.

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time *November 6*
2 Mc 7: 1-2, 9-14, Ps 17: 1, 5-6, 8, 15 R/v.15, 2 Th 2: 16- 3: 5

From what I read, scholars have some difficulty in assessing the two books of Maccabees. Obviously much learned thought has gone into the decision to include these writings in the Catholic Bible while omitted by other Christians. I am not a fan of horror movies. I am too squeamish even to dwell on horrific news stories. And so the torture of the seven brothers, captured with their mother, is not something upon which I am drawn to reflect.

Today's first reading skips several of the verses with the gory bits – perhaps to spare us. It avoids the verse where the mother encourages her sons to bravery. Living in the 2nd century BCE, these young men did not know Christ. But they were convinced of a life after death.

The author of Maccabees, I read, was concerned more with religious intention than with historical precision. That's o.k. with me. I let the heroic courage of the seven brothers challenge me. With the psalmist I ask myself have my steps been steadfast, have my feet faltered.

Looking towards life after death, our hope is stirred up: 'Lord, when your glory appears, my joy will be full'.

But that requires faith! St. Paul reveals to the Thessalonians something of his own struggles. He asks for their prayers. Not everyone has faith, he reminds them. Paul explains that faith is a gift. It is something that needs to be strengthened. It is something that needs to be shared.

In the Gospel, St. Luke brings us back to the question of life after death. The story this time is of an imaginary family of seven brothers. In accordance with the Law of Moses, as each of them died, the next oldest married the woman who was widowed.

Presumably she had no say in the matter! But, in the shorter version, we can actually skip the story of the seven brothers and cut to the chase. The point of this Gospel teaching is not about the widow or the brothers – it is about the inescapable question of life after death. We listen as Jesus speaks.

The issues most people prefer to avoid discussing cannot be sidelined: Dying. Death. Grief. Funeral arrangements. And the essential pastoral question that can be answered only by faith: what follows for the one we have lost?

Perhaps the story of the mother and brothers in Maccabees can help us unwrap the gift of faith we have received.

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time *November 13*
Mal 3: 19-20, Ps 98: 5-9, 2 Th: 3, 7-12, Lk 21: 5-19

The name Malachi means 'my messenger'. The true name of the author of this prophecy is probably unknown. It was written after the Jewish people had returned from exile. After some time, they lost their zeal and, as a community, had begun to drift. Malachi's prophecy is aimed at reawakening them. While it can sound abrasive, it also contains the enticing promise that 'there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.'

Today is called Prisoners' Sunday. We think of all the different kinds of imprisonment endured in today's world. Many are held on remand for endless years without a fair trial. Others are imprisoned on false accusations. Many live under regimes where religion is suppressed, or where gender bias inflicts disproportionate blame. Millions of adults and children are held in bondage as victims of human trafficking – hundreds of them here in Ireland. We allow Malachi to challenge us, as a community, not to drift into complacency about these issues of justice. We have to work hard against injustice so that those 'healing rays' may reach us.

The Psalm reinforces this call. The Lord comes to rule the world with justice and the peoples with equity. As a Christian community, are we doing all we can to make ready the way?

Like last Sunday, we return to St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. Paul rightly stresses the value and importance of work. But he says if you don't work you don't deserve to eat! We wonder did he ever hear of the problem of unemployment? The injustice of zero hour contracts came after his time. People forced to live in refugee camps across the world, or those in 'direct provision' on our own doorstep, cannot work. Those of us who can work need to share the fruit of our labours with them. Even without employment or in retirement, with reasonable health we

can contribute through voluntary work to those less fortunate. Today's Gospel depicts several scenarios which are nothing short of terrifying. 'Neither must you be perturbed when you hear of wars and insurrections.' 'There will be great earthquakes, plagues and famines in various places…' Without mentioning the threat of terrorism, Jesus is telling his followers that insecurity is the name of the game of life. Patient endurance is called for.

Facing such storms where is our anchor? In what ground are we rooted? As a community of faith, are we there for one another when trouble is brewing? How can we assure the young and the elderly not to 'be afraid'?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe *November 20*
2 Sm 5: 1-3, Ps 122: 3-5, Col 1: 12-20, Lk 23, 35-43

Today's celebration brings our liturgical year to a close. The Scripture readings are full of language around kingship – a concept that is subject to mixed understanding in our times. In the story of David's anointing as king, we note that he was chosen to shepherd his people before being their commander – a king with the smell of the sheep upon him! The concept of kingship in our religious tradition needs to be constantly stripped of the worldly, power-hungry models so often known to history.

St. Paul's letter to the Colossians throws light on the right understanding of the concept in the Christian tradition. This kingdom is the place where we arrive when we have been rescued from the power of darkness. It is a place where we find love. It is a place of forgiveness.

We can contemplate for a long time the passage where Paul writes eloquently on the attributes of the beloved Son, through whom we have been rescued from darkness. He is the image of the invisible God … he is the one who made peace through shedding his blood on the Cross.

In the Gospel, notions of worldly kingship are fully shattered. We behold our King crucified, bleeding, bullied. 'The soldiers made fun of him'. It is the thief, hanging on the next cross, who opens our eyes to our royal inheritance: 'Jesus, remember me when you enter upon your reign'. And we hear the reply: 'I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise'.

The theme of the Kingdom of God was developed at different periods throughout the entire Bible. But perhaps in the short time available during Mass, it is more relevant to focus on the emphasis placed by the Second Vatican Council on the Church at the service of the Kingdom. It is worth re-reading the second chapter of St.

John Paul II's encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, which gives a very helpful insight into this theme. In Par. 15 he writes:

> The kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another. Jesus sums up the whole Law, focusing it on the commandment of love (cf. Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28). Before leaving his disciples, he gives them a 'new commandment': 'Love one another; even as I have loved you' (Jn 13:34; cf. 15:12)… The kingdom's nature, therefore, is one of communion among all human beings - with one another and with God.

First Sunday of Advent (A) *November 27*
Is 2: 1-5, Ps 122, 1-9, Rm 13: 11-14, Mt 24: 37-44

This time of year I think of the story of the Magi and try to learn from their long trek about perseverance on life's journey. I read again the lines of TS Eliot: 'A cold coming we had of it, just the worst time of the year for a journey…' Looking back in old age, the wise man of the poem affirms that – difficult though it was – he would do it again. However, 'we returned to our places, these Kingdoms, but no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation…'

Can we prepare to celebrate the Birth of Christ without grasping the fact that this event was the end of the old dispensation? We like the prophecy 'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.' But are we stirred by these words to work for a lasting peace?

As we recite the psalm today, 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem… may peace be within your walls', do we understand the big difference between desiring peace and seeking peace?

St. Paul says 'It is now the hour for you to wake from sleep... let us cast off deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.' What would that 'armour of light' look like in our world today?

Last April in Rome, an unprecedented Conference on 'Nonviolence and Just Peace' was organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International. It noted:

> We live in a time of tremendous suffering, widespread trauma and fear linked to militarization, economic injustice, climate change and myriads of specific forms of violence. In this context of normalized and systemic violence, those of us who stand in the Christian tradition are called to recognize the centrality of active non-violence to the vision and message of Jesus; to the

life and practice of the Catholic Church; and to our long-term vocation of healing and reconciling both people and the planet.

Have we parishioners who would take time to study the full proceedings of this challenging Conference – which invites our parish to endorse its concluding document?* Would our Confirmation group take up the message Pope Francis sent to that Conference?

In the Gospel reading Matthew tells us to stay awake. The coming of the Lord we are invited to ponder today is not the infant birth at Bethlehem. It is the moment when God will intervene in each of our lives personally, separating us from our nearest co-worker, breaking through our defences. It is then that our God-relationship will be truly tested. Advent gives us time to make ourselves ready.

* https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/final-statement-an-appeal-to-the-catholic-church-to-re-commit-to-the-centrality-of-gospel-nonviolence/

Spoonfed. However, what Donal Murphy's quest reveals is the absence among disenchanted Catholics of any desire to search for new ways of being religious. Indeed it would seem that there is little attempt by most Irish Catholics to stimulate and invigorate their religious beliefs and practices. It may be that the church's domination of the religious field for so long has led to a form of religious disability. The laity were, for so long, spoonfed their religious beliefs and values by the church, that there is little desire or appetite to seek out new ways of being religious.

– Tom Inglis, *Meaning of Life in Contemporary Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) p.149.

Document

The Bishops' Conference announce complementary legislation bringing the new Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form and Pastoral guidelines into effect on the First Sunday of Advent, 27 November 2016.

The attached word document with the relevant canon, the complementary norm and a commentary written by The Reverend Fintan Gavin, JCD, Vice-Chancellor Archdiocese of Dublin, Chancellery, Archbishop's House, Drumcondra, Dublin 9 is presented below.

COMPLEMENTARY NORM WITH REGARD TO CANON 1067 AND THE INVESTIGATION OF FREEDOM TO MARRY AND OF THE CAPACITY FOR MARRIAGE

Canon 1067. The Bishops' Conference is to lay down norms concerning the questions to be asked of the parties, and concerning the publication of marriage banns or other appropriate means of enquiry to be carried out as a prerequisite for marriage. When he has carefully observed these norms the parish priest may proceed to assist at a marriage.

COMPLEMENTARY NORM

In accordance with the prescriptions of canon 1067, the Irish Episcopal Conference hereby decrees that the revised Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form along with the norms and guidelines outlined in the Pastoral Guidelines booklet come into force on the First Sunday of Advent, 27 November 2016.

COMMENTARY ON THE COMPLEMENTARY NORM

Canon 1067 states that each Bishops' Conference is to lay down the norms concerning the questions to be asked of the parties in order to make sure nothing stands in the way of a valid and lawful celebration of marriage (cf. canon 1066).

This is usually done by way of a Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form. Its purpose is to ascertain the freedom of the parties from impediments; their ability to give free consent, their capacity to marry; their understanding of the obligations and rights of marriage; and

their capacity to undertake those obligations and exercise those rights.[1] The new Pastoral Guidelines summarise its purpose in the following way:

> The Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form is the record, by the priest/ deacon, of his enquiry into the freedom of the couple to marry, their understanding of Christian marriage, and their capacity to enter the Sacrament of Marriage.[2]

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference set up a working group to look at a revision of the Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form and the accompanying Pastoral Guidelines which had been introduced in 1991. It was felt that, given the changes that had taken place since their introduction, it was an opportune time to look at them with a view to seeing how they meet the pastoral needs today in supporting priests and deacons as they prepare couples for marriage.

The working group consulted with dioceses throughout the country and integrated the results of their consultation into a new draft Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form which was then piloted in a number of parishes in all four Ecclesiastical Provinces. Taking account of the feedback received from the piloting, the Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form was further revised. The group then set about revising the Pastoral Guidelines which accompany the Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form.

In June 2014 the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference approved the New Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form and the accompanying Pastoral Guidelines in accordance with canon 1067 with this decree. This was then sent to the Holy See in Rome for the necessary *recognitio* which it received in May 2015.

The New Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form is more compact, with the removal of some areas of repetition and rarely-used sections. While many elements are the same there are changes which take account of the experience of using the existing Form and Pastoral Guidelines over the past twenty five years; the cultural changes within society in general and specifically of the couples who approach the Church requesting marriage. Couples are getting married at a later age and come to marriage with a less clear idea of what Christian marriage is. Therefore, there is the vital necessity to confirm as early as possible that a couple are free to marry and the new guidelines emphasise the requirement for the early completion

1 'Cf. L.A. Robitaille, 'Commentary on Canons 1063-1072, Pastoral Care and Those Things Which Must Proceed the Celebration of Marriages' in J.P. Beal, J.A. Coriden, T.J. Green, (ed.), New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, New York, 2000, p. 1265.

2 The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Pre-Nuptial Enquiry, Pastoral Guidelines*, Dublin pp. 7-8.

of Section A, which establishes the freedom of each party to marry in the Catholic Church. This early completion of Section A should help structure the pastoral engagement as well as discover, at an early date, impediments should they exist.

There is also an emphasis on the requirement of a proper marriage preparation programme from within the Church community and approved by the Diocesan Bishop.

The new Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form introduces new ways of establishing the freedom of couples to marry. As well as the traditional Letters of Freedom, a Statement of Freedom to Marry can be used, signed by a parent or sibling who attests to the person's freedom to marry. A Sworn Affidavit can also be used.

The Pastoral Guidelines explain why the preferred option for the place of marriage is the parish church and state clearly that no marriages are to take place in hotels or other such venues.[3]

The New Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form and the accompanying guidelines provide innovations and restate important areas which priests and deacons need to bear in mind as they prepare couples for marriage. They are an important pastoral aid and are to be welcomed as a support in this vital area of pastoral ministry.

In accordance with the prescriptions of canon 1067, the Irish Episcopal Conference has decreed that the revised Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form along with the norms and guidelines outlined in the Pastoral Guidelines booklet come into effect on the First Sunday of Advent, 27 November 2016.

In preparation for this, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference has arranged for in-service training days to take place in all four of the Ecclesiastical Provinces for priests and deacons involved in preparing couples for marriage.

3 The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Pre-Nuptial Enquiry, Pastoral Guidelines*, Dublin p. 10.

New Books

A Holy Yet Sinful Church – Three Twentieth-Century Moments in a Developing Theology. Jeanmarie Gribaudo. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press. Pp. 223. Price; $22.95

A paradox with which those of us of faith must engage on a daily basis is the reality of a Church which must of itself always be holy because it is uniquely the gift of God, and yet will also inevitably be sinful as it is peopled exclusively by a sinful humanity. Those who wish to defame the Church will emphasise its sinfulness. Those who are in denial about the reality of human sinfulness will see only the holiness and the glory. We must live with both.

In *A Holy Yet Sinful Church* Sr Jeanmarie Gribaudo provides us a theological *tour de force*, as she examines this paradox through the powerful lens of three facets of Roman Catholic theology in the twentieth century. (I am not certain that 'moments' is in fact the right word.) First there is a review of some of the great pre-conciliar theologians as they explored the enigma of holiness and sinfulness within the Body of Christ. Secondly, there is an in-depth treatment of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* and its remarkable explication of the nature of the Church. Finally there is a briefer examination of Pope John Paul II's millennial programme, including his perspectives on pardon, and his own call for forgiveness. It should be noted that these three areas are not regarded as wholly selfcontained. We read of the influence of the pre-conciliar theologians on *Lumen Gentium*, and of the influence of both on the millennial programme. It might also be noted, however, that each of the sections makes for a more than valuable study in its own right.

As a primer on the character of pre-conciliar theology, *A Holy Yet Sinful Church* would have its own value. Clearly, we are dealing only with a few particular aspects of the writings of some of these theological giants (and it can only be so, as the theologians in question include Congar, de Lubac, Rahner, and von Balthasar). Nevertheless, we are drawn into the nature of their theological methods, and Sr Gribaudo writes with an admirable clarity and precision. The lengthiest of these expositions (and for this reader the most fascinating) is the section of 'Henri de Lubac and Paradox'. Skilfully, we are led from the disparate contributions of these writers on to Vatican II and how the Council chose to deal with matters of ecclesiology, influenced (although not always explicitly) by these theologians.

Sr Gribaudo does however also include a section on the direct role

of those of the pre-conciliar theologians who attended the Council in its proceedings.

Lumen Gentium still exerts its own fascination, not only for Roman Catholics but also for the wider Christian Church. Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere that *Lumen Gentium* and the less celebrated but highly significant *Nostro aetate* have both immense if sometimes subliminal influence on other Christian traditions in the latter part of the twentieth century. The section of the book on *Lumen Gentium* is extremely useful, not only as an exposition of the contents of the document itself, but in linking its thinking with that of the theologians that Sr Gribaudo has been examining. She suggests (as of course have others) that Vatican II witnessed an important attitudinal change for all Catholic theology, in that the Church – now officially – shed at least something of its neo-scholastic cocoon.

The relationship of the pre-conciliar writers and *Lumen Gentium* with the thinking of Pope John Paul II as he sought to carry the Catholic Church into a new millennium is inevitably the most speculative aspect of *A Holy Yet Sinful Church,* but none the less fascinating for that. More than a decade and a half later, many are unsure as to how to understand John Paul II's 'day of pardon' in March 2000, as he sought forgiveness from the world for the sins of the Church. Sr Gribaudo places the Pope's thinking firmly into a context of the methodology of the pre-conciliar theologians and Vatican II, in tackling the conundrum of a sinfulness inherent in that which is also intrinsically holy, the Church. She makes a convincing case.

A Holy Yet Sinful Church is certainly a demanding read, but it also extremely well-written, and the author lightens the load considerably by bringing to vibrant life the different writers she is interrogating. She also succeeds fully in drawing together her different 'moments' with both conviction and aplomb.

Armagh + Richard Clarke

A Dream Unfolds. The Story of Nano Nagle. Noela Fox. Dublin: Columba Press. Pp. 190. Price: €9.99.

A Dream Unfolds is a welcome addition to the literature on the life of Venerable Nano Nagle. It is written in an informal style (the blurb calls it a novel) and the story is told in a way that holds the attention of the reader right through. Noela Fox is an Australian Presentation sister and has an obvious admiration for the Irishwoman who founded her Congregation. She has a remarkable gift for creating credible dialogue, so much so that one can imagine it easily translating into a stage production, such as a school play, without much need for alteration. The story of Nano's life is dramatic in itself, moving from a childhood in the lovely surroundings of the Blackwater valley to boarding school in Europe, then from the

ballrooms of pre-Revolution Paris to the squalor and misery of the lanes and alleyways of Cork. The character of Nano is consistently drawn through all this, as is her place as a member of the Nagle family, one that was under constant threat of serious persecution because of their religion and their support of the Stuarts. (Evelyn Bolster's *History of the Diocese of Cork* details some of the more frightening episodes.) The difficulty in writing a book like *A Dream Unfolds* is that it spans more than half a century and while the law as written did not change much, the situation on the ground was in a constant state of flux. There are a few unlikely scenarios in the book. It is unlikely that having succeeded in getting Nano out of Ireland in order to avail her of schooling on the continent (something forbidden to Catholics) the family would dare to bring her back and forth on visits home. The same can be said of the picture of Nano employing 'carpenters, masons and thatchers' to renovate a cabin in Cove Lane to serve as her first school. The caution, even secrecy, she had to observe would be more in keeping with the tradition that she started her work in a room at the back of a bread shop. However, as her ministry around the city of Cork spanned over thirty years, conditions varied widely and what was unthinkable at the beginning would not necessarily remain so. But the uncertainty never ended. Towards the end of her life, she managed to build a convent for her new sisterhood, but when the time came to move in, she tells us herself that they rose before three in the morning and 'stole like thieves' into their new home. This was a mere four years before her death. Catholic Emancipation did not become law for another forty-five years.

The last page of the book, which is in the nature of an Epilogue, briefly treats of the expansion of the Presentation Order after Nano Nagle's death. The text have been expanded somewhat to include a mention of a further unfolding of the dream in the acknowledged influence of Nano's spirit on later founders and foundresses such as Edmund Rice and Margaret Aylward.

This book, by its nature, is likely to have a limited readership, which is a pity. Nano Nagle made two major contributions to Irish society. She brought to Ireland the Ursuline sisters with their long tradition of educating all classes of society and then founded a new Sisterhood whose hallmark was discrimination in favour of the poor. This combination ensured the future of Catholic education for girls. Because of the missionary nature of Irish spirituality, Nano's work had and still has a worldwide influence. A Dutchwoman who settled in Ireland a few years ago had two reactions to the story of Nano Nagle. The first was a very expressive 'Wow!' The second was a question: 'Why is she not better known to Irish people?' The answer to that question was the lack of relevant reading material. Noela Fox's book could prove to be an excellent solution to that problem.

Dungarvan, Co. Waterford ASSUMPTA O'NEILL

Remembering God's Mercy – Redeem the Past and Free Yourself from Painful Memories. Dawn Eden. Indiana: Ave Maria Press. Pp. 141. Price £9.99.

Dawn Eden was born into a Jewish family in New York and in later life underwent conversion which led her to be initiated into the Catholic Church in her thirties. She has written extensively on the subject of spiritual healing and is the author of *My Peace I Give to You*, which uses the lives of the saints to engage with the topic of sexual abuse. In this new book she explores the lives and writings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Peter Faber and Pope Francis as she focuses again on the theme of spiritual healing. The book is rooted in a strong commitment to Divine Mercy and the healing of memory. It is a very personal account and the author presents the essence of the book through various personal stories and encounters. It is immediately accessible and many readers will be familiar with aspects of the Jesuit spirituality explored in the pages. It is a well written and well researched little book with plenty of footnotes which could be explored as further reading on the topic in this Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Maynooth JOHN PAUL SHERIDAN

The Taliban Revival: *Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier.* Hassan Abbas. New Haven and London. Yale University Press. Pp. 296. Price: $22.00.

Talk of the Afghan Taliban conjures up images of turbaned, opium induced Kalashnikov waving, heavily bearded, fanatical men and subservient and severely shrouded women secreted away in domestic dens, deprived of rights and devoid of any personal autonomy. And with good reason. It is also of course a caricature and like all caricatures it both distorts and reflects. Distorts and reflects but does not inform or illuminate. And that is the task that the distinguished Pakistani-American academic, Hassan Abbas, Chair of the Department of Regional and Analytical Studies at the *National Defense* (my emphasis) University in Washington does so well in his book *The Taliban Revival*.

Of course the *The National Defense* bit sets off the alarm bells. This is surely yet another demonization of Islam and an all too barely disguised apology for the imperialism of his adopted country. Wrong. His illumination does not extend to justification or excuse, nor does it minimise the destructive force that was unleashed in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas Eve 1979 that eventually took the country into a spiral of violence that has resulted in so many dead. Dead and deadened by incessant violence.

It's a tough task. Writing for a Western audience that is. And in particular writing for an American audience. Particularly about the Taliban. After all

what's to be said other than they are a bunch of ignorant Western-hating terrorists hell-bent on the destruction of western civilization? Scumbags of the worst sort, in modern western parlance. We like our adversaries served up to us in easily disposable sound-bytes. And we're generally not too keen on historical context or any other context for that matter. The last refuge for apologists for terrorists the apologists for war tell us. But Abbas does context oh so well.

The Taliban did not emerge out of nowhere. Nothing comes from nothing, to paraphrase King Lear in his infamous rebuke to his daughter Cordelia. Try again! The Taliban genesis is rooted in Cold War imperialism and the cack-handedness of the Soviet empire that sought to bolster what nobody realised at the time, not least the Soviet apparatchiks themselves, was the beginning of the end of its (and their) existence.

Originating in Pashtun, an area that straddles the Afghan-Pakistan border and home to the largest tribally organised group in the world today, estimated between 40-45 million people, the Taliban emerged in the 1990s, Abbas tells us, initially with a focus on stabilizing the war-torn land of Afghanistan. And has Afghanistan known war! The British (twice): then the Soviets and still the Americans. Not to mention their own interminable internal conflicts. An instability fed by neighbouring Pakistan from where a crude distortion of Islam was co-opted for political gain. Mainstream Islam with 'its soft and egalitarian essence' was squeezed marking the end of Pakistan's founding father Mohammad Au Jinnah's dream of a 'tolerant secular and pluralist polity' and the 'rise of sectarianism and misguided religious fervour'. The 'zealots' had taken over.

But first the Soviets had to be dealt with and towards that end the West would sup with anyone who would help undermine what US President Ronald Reagan characterized as 'this evil empire'. Once the US-reviled Soviet empire was defeated, the West disengaged and any prospect of nation-building was lost. Chaos ensued. Leaving the hard-pressed, poverty-stricken, disenchanted Afghans vacuous and rudderless.

In an attempt to provide the residents of Pashtun with some security, a group of youngsters with rudimentary Islamic credentials, 'Talibs' (literally 'seekers of knowledge') in local madrasas or seminaries, set up checkpoints near the city of Kandahar in an effort to stem the violence and extortion. As their influence spread, the war-weary public embraced the Taliban in the hope of a fresh start, but they never signed up to their dogmatic and misogynistic version of sharia law.

Brutality in the name of religion is, of course, nothing new. And is not just a function of Islam. Christianity has its own hang-its-head-in-shame moments as well. The Spanish inquisition. The destruction of the Aztec and Inca civilisations. Perhaps more recently here in Ireland the institutionalisation of poor children and their subsequent abuse. The incarceration of unmarried women and the sale of their children. And then the thousands holed up in psychiatric institutions.

But in this compelling and insightful book Abbas reminds us that all of this is made possible by the collusion of self-serving leaders of state

and those who invoke God or Allah, Jesus or the Prophet Mohammed, Peace be upon Him, in service of their own narrow sectional interests. If truth is the first casualty of war, the manipulation of religions like 'the egalitarian and spiritual precepts of the great religion of Islam' along with the distortion of other great religions are not far behind.

In chronicling the rise and revival of the Taliban, Abbas demonstrates that such manipulation shows no sign of slackening.

Cork PEADAR KING

Where is God in Suffering? Brendan Purcell. Dublin: Veritas. Pp.160. Price €12.99.

A chat with Brendan Purcell or listening to him on the radio or television is always lively. You may or may not agree with him but there's no denying that his perspectives and insights, examples and stories, seasoned with good humour, get you thinking. It's clear that over the years as a senior UCD lecturer, a priest and friend to many, he has distilled great stores of wisdom from his wide reading and pastoral experience. His new book, *Where is God in Suffering?* provides the reader with a wonderful opportunity to hear Brendan on a fascinating topic with the benefit of being able to spend time mulling over the points raised and examples given.

The idea of the book emerged after Brendan spoke on the Marian Finucane programme in response to Stephen Fry's comment on the Gay Byrne RTÉ programme '*The Meaning of Life'*, that if he were passing through the pearly gates he would denounce God for allowing the innocent to suffer. The question of suffering and more particularly innocent suffering, is one that many, especially in recent centuries, have asked. Brendan refers, for instance, to his conversation with the controversial philosopher Prof. Peter Singer in St. Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne on this topic in the context of a debate on the role of reason in faith and unbelief.

Brendan Purcell is very aware that suffering is not something we can cure with theoretical discussions alone. While offering a range of speculative considerations on issues such as natural disasters, animal suffering and the enigma of a good God allowing children to suffer, Brendan notes that Pope Francis speaks of suffering as 'a path' to be lived, not to be explained away. So he writes,

> I'm inviting you, the reader, to come along that path with me, conscious that I have no glib solution to offer, but also conscious that others who have travelled that path before us can help us along the way; perhaps they can lead us towards a few hilltops where we can see a little further ahead, if not beyond our suffering, at least towards a horizon from where it may become a little more bearable (p. 14).

The book leads us in a camino of inspiration and hope. True to form, Brendan directs us towards a lively exploration of the mind and heart as he weaves in and out of references to philosophers and saints, the experiences of suffering in people that have inspired him, and not least his own encounters with suffering both personal and those of our times. The reader hears Brendan in every page, and that also guarantees a chuckle here and there, even in the context of insightful and touching observations. He guides the reader all the way to the point of encountering the mystery of Jesus on the Cross who cries out 'why?'. Jesus' cry of 'forsakenness' is a voice of suffering that Brendan believes everyone – Christian and non-Christian, believer and non-believer alike – can respond to.

As well as providing a deeply satisfying and accessible read, the book is a treasure trove for those who have to prepare homilies or teach religion. It abounds with references, citations and stories. Among those referred to are: Victor Frankl, Etty Hillesum, Bishop Robert Barron, Blessed Chiara Luce Badano, Eric Voegelin, GK Chesterton, James MacMillan, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Martin Buber, Flannery O'Connor, Thomas Aquinas, David Walsh, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Chiara Lubich, Albert Camus, Popes John Paul, Benedict and Francis. As well as these, there are references to many others, perhaps not so well known, but whose experience and words have left a mark on Brendan and those who knew them. His chapter on Job is excellent.

Brendan, now living, ministering and teaching philosophy in Sydney, offers us a key to the book: 'If there's a common thread running through this little book, it's that suffering is addressed to us as persons, and that we – and those affected by it – may be somehow able to grow as persons by the courage and love it demands of us' (p. 16).

This deeply personal work is more than a book. It is a communion of soul offered by Brendan Purcell. I highly recommend it.

Limerick + Brendan Leahy

Pets. There is a long history of the relation between human beings and pets and, in particular, how some animals moved from fulfilling particular chores and tasks to becoming objects of affection. It is this emotional connection between human beings and pet animals that makes them significant in understanding webs of meaning. Pets are a source of company and solace. They provide occasions of joy and long-term happiness and can instil a sense of well-being.

– Tom Inglis, *Meaning of Life in Contemporary Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) p.174.

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