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FURROW

The

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Patrick Hannon
Faith and Morals – Irish
Style

Kevin Egan
Let's Talk About It

Michael Peppard
Starving in the Pews

Todd A. Salzman
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Catholic Morals

Geraldine O'Dea
The People had Left the
Room

Eóin de Bháldraithe
The Catholic Church
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CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

The Editor and Staff of *The Furrow* wish readers
everywhere the blessings of the feast

The Furrow

A pastoral monthly founded 1950.

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

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

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Talking Faith and Morals

– Irish Style

Patrick Hannon

The debate about the Eighth Amendment prompts some reflections on the wider question of public discussion of moral and religious issues in the Republic of Ireland. By public discussion I mean in the first place that which takes place in the media: in opinion pieces in newspapers, current affairs programmes on radio and television, and of course in letters to the editor and blogs and tweets. One might include debate in the Dáil and Seanad and, stretching the term a bit, reports which influence government policy such as those of the Human Rights Commission and the Forum on patronage and pluralism in primary education.¹ What follows here is an assortment of remarks, from a standpoint within Catholic theology, the point of which is to suggest that our debates would benefit from an awareness of the experience of other societies, and of wider dimensions of the questions the debates address.

The debates that I have in mind are mainly those about issues at the intersection of law and morality, formerly considered under the rubric of church-state relations, nowadays often viewed in broader terms as concerning religion and society. Church-state relations was an appropriate paradigm when various recognizably Catholic influences on the Irish Constitution and laws came in question, and from a Catholic standpoint the Declaration on Religious Freedom provided a helpful framework within which to look at the issues. More recently however, with the influx of people who belong to religions other than Christian, and an increase in the number of citizens who profess no religious belief, the agenda is expanding to include questions about patronage and participation in the education system. And some attention is now given also to questions underlying specific issues, against a backdrop depicting tension and conflict between the forces of secularisation and religious interests.

¹ *Religion and Education: a Human Rights Perspective* (2011) and *Report of the Forum's Advisory Group* (2012)

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ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Debates such as these are to be expected in a society where there's cultural and religious heterogeneity, especially if one religion is or has been dominant, and it should be no surprise that they're happening here now. One could say that Irish society is as it were catching up with other societies of the former Western Christendom, engaging in discussions that are elsewhere long familiar. We haven't been well prepared for them, as is often remarked, in part owing to the absence of a tradition of public discourse about moral and religious matters, itself owing in part to the overwhelming dominance of Catholicism hitherto, and doubtless related to the absence until recently of theology in Irish universities. Irish political and social theorists within and outside the academy have important things to say, but the influence of their thinking isn't obvious. A consequence is that public discussion in Ireland rarely reflects an awareness of what other societies have been making of the same questions.

WHAT ARE THEY SAYING IN FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES?

Every society is different of course, and the contours of any society's debates are shaped by the context of their origin. Thus in France the background to current controversy about the wearing of the hijab in public by Moslem women includes the doctrine known as *laïcité*. This is a view of church-state relations whose roots are in Enlightenment thinking and the French Revolution, and which was developed in an era when not only was Catholicism the religion of the majority, but the so-called Alliance of Throne and Altar was promoted by those who wished to see the monarchy restored. Current theory and practice is founded on a 1905 law on the separation of church and state, and is generally regarded as stringent. In the United States, by contrast, there was at its inception a pluralism of religious belief and practice, and a consciousness, born of the experience of immigrants from England and mainland Europe, of the importance of limiting the sway of state power over conscience and the practice of religious faith. Given these disparate histories, approaches to questions of religious freedom are bound to differ as between the two societies, but not to the extent of preventing the inclusion in the UN Declaration of Human Rights of a strong affirmation of the right to freedom of religious belief and its expression.

So we might look at the fortunes of *laïcité*, and learn from the way its limitations are becoming apparent in France now, when Islam is the second most numerous religion. The more flexible conception embodied in the First Amendment of the US Constitution is proving not to be trouble-free either, though in that case one might wonder

whether its problems stem less from inherent shortcomings than from its being a casualty of the so-called culture wars. In which case it must surely serve as a warning to religious leaders to steer clear of political entanglement.

SOME PHILOSOPHICAL COMMONPLACES

Although philosophy appears to be no more highly regarded than theology among some of our prominent opinion-makers, it cannot but improve the quality of Irish society's debates if discutants take account of a few commonplaces of modern philosophy. One of these concerns the apparently deep-seated human propensity to interpret reality according to binary categories. In a binary view things are right or wrong, good or bad, black or white, 'religious' or 'secular'; the scare-quotes for this last pair hint at the difficulty of assigning a fixed meaning to either term, raising indeed the suggestion – with which a Christian theology can concur – that the pair aren't truly binary at all. And of course there's the classification into liberal and conservative, a staple of the currency of discourse about religion as about politics. Binary classifications have their place, but if employed inflexibly they lead to unhelpful polarizations.

The alternative is not a moral relativism. There *is* good and evil, right and wrong, black and white, truth and falsehood, and there are views and attitudes that can meaningfully be classed as conservative or liberal. But in actual experience, good and evil are often found together; our choices may have good and bad consequences, and motives are frequently mixed; there are shades of grey and there are other colours. And there is a spectrum of outlook in religion as in social affairs generally, and it's not unusual to find oneself drawn now toward one end, now toward the other, or even in both directions simultaneously. *Pace* Gilbert and Sullivan's Private Willis, it's unlikely that every little boy and girl that's born into this world alive is either a little liberal or else a little conservative. True, there are times – the present? – when societies and individuals seem to want the black-and-white; perhaps there is in everyone somewhere a fear of freedom, as Erich Fromm and others have contended.² But it's well to be wary of zealotry on the left or the right.

For of course public discussion of religion as of politics is too often hijacked by extremists. I don't mean people who feel strongly about the issues, and who are passionately committed to their views. Abortion and euthanasia for example are matters, literally, of life and death, and at stake in these and other debates about morality and law is a society's understanding of fundamental values: of life

2 See Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, Abingdon 2001; first published as *Escape from Freedom*, New York 1942.

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itself, of equality and personal freedoms, of all the values intrinsic to a common good. Apathy on the public's part would be unnatural and dangerous; advocacy and activism by interested groups is a sign of health. But debate too often tends to fundamentalisms, and intransigent ideologies that make only for bitterness and division. Respect for other viewpoints and an acknowledgement that people can differ in good faith shouldn't need to be argued for. And no, this is not anodyne; there's plenty of room for debate of the kind known nowadays as robust (O blessed word...).

On other matters also, commentary and interchange – and the utterances of politicians and those who influence policy-making – would be improved by an acquaintance with some of the debates that have taken place elsewhere. In discussion about the patronage of education, for example, one often meets the view that a key advantage of a secular system is that it's informed by a religious and philosophical 'neutrality', something that's thought to establish its superiority. But this appears to ignore a long-standing concern of philosophers, the resolution of which is widely agreed to be that there's no view from nowhere, to borrow the title of a work by a prominent Anglophone participant.³ This isn't an argument against the provision in appropriate circumstances of schools unconnected with a religion; only that the case for or against any system should not be made on specious grounds.

CATHOLICS IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A more general question already also thoroughly canvassed concerns religion's entitlement to be heard in the public square. 'Public square' is a metaphor that encompasses not just the literal public square as a venue for the exchange of ideas, but also the spaces occupied by institutions of the state, such as schools and courthouses and town halls and the like. In the US this question is associated especially with the work of the late John Rawls, and in Europe it's a particular interest of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Each had reservations about the admissibility in the public arena of religiously-premised arguments couched in religious language. But over time both moved to the conclusion that such argument is admissible, though any position advocated must be capable also of support in secular terms. Neither has ever contended for religion's exclusion.⁴

3 *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford 1989

4 Incidentally, a dialogue between Habermas and the then Cardinal Ratzinger, published in English translation as *The Dialectics of Secularisation* (San Francisco 2007) is a fine example of constructive debate between Christian theology and contemporary social and political philosophy. For another example of erudite and mutually respectful encounter see Umberto Eco and Carlo Maria Martini, *Belief or Non-belief: a Confrontation*, New York 2012.

Which brings us to Catholic church intervention in the public square in Ireland. Contenders for this or that point of view on, say, gay marriage or the law regarding abortion are likely to want religious leaders to back them. In Ireland there's usually pressure on the Catholic bishops to back movements and campaigns for socially conservative platforms. And on the whole the Conference and its leaders have supported these positions down the decades, from Conference statements in the aftermath of the McGee case in 1973 to Archbishop Eamon Martin's recent statement about the proposal to repeal the Eighth Amendment. Wisely, however, the Conference has repeatedly acknowledged that upholding a moral principle doesn't necessarily commit one to a particular view on whether or how the principle should be enshrined in law. And whilst reiterating Catholic teaching on the principle, and making their own legislative preference clear, they have continued to recognise that decisions about the law are for the conscience of the lawmaker and the voter. The fact is that the bishops cannot or ought not say otherwise; authority for this approach is arguably grounded in Jesus' injunction to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and its theological basis and essential distinctions and principles are found in Augustine and Aquinas, to mention only the most outstanding contributors to a centuries-long tradition of thought.

Whilst the Conference's entitlement to be heard in the square doesn't usually come in serious question, the influence of the bishops nowadays is jeopardized by a loss of credibility deriving from the abuse scandals and the failures of the church's institutional response; nor is it obvious how lost trust is to be regained. But a waning of episcopal influence was already evident before the scandals broke, as may be seen when one looks at the impact of their interventions in debates about law and morality throughout the seventies and eighties. For, apart from the divorce referendum of 1986, the view espoused by the bishops didn't prevail, and indeed there's reason to think that what counted in that case was public uncertainty about the implications of a divorce law for property and inheritance rights. In any case it may be timely now to consider how a Catholic church voice might best contribute to the business of the public square.

And some questions occur. It will always be the bishops' responsibility to teach the way of the Lord Jesus, and they can be expected to preach and witness to the core values of the Christian moral vision. The Irish Conference has spoken to a range of issues, not least in the field of social justice, but the preponderance of their interventions has concerned family morality and related issues. And it might be asked, in words of Pope Francis, whether

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it's necessary to talk about these issues all the time.⁵ And it might be asked whether it's always necessary or useful to comment on specific legislative proposals, and not only because most such interventions in past decades have failed to influence the outcome. Is there a case for saying that restraint in these areas could help the hearing of a prophetic word when such a word is called for?

MORE LESSONS FROM THE US AND FRANCE

Earlier I mentioned France and the United States as places where there's a history of vigorous discussion of church-state relations and the role of religion in society, the respective experiences of which can be instructive for us. It happens that both countries also provide illustrations of two different kinds of church intervention in the public forum in recent times, also perhaps instructive. Since 2007, in advance of the presidential election, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops have published a document entitled *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, a comprehensive account of the responsibilities of Catholics vis-a-vis the unfolding political scene. The substance of the statement has remained constant over the years but the document was updated in 2015 and an Introduction added, in the course of which occurs the following:

In this statement, we bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God's truth. We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election.⁶

Reception of the document however, both inside and outside the church and for some time now, has been attended by suspicion and scepticism. The reasons for this are various and complex, but it's fair to say that a key factor is the widespread impression that the US Conference has over the years become more and more obviously Republican in political sympathy. This isn't the place to evaluate the justice of that impression, but its mere existence is enough to show the vulnerability of moral authority and how easily it may be compromised.

A recent French intervention is faring better. This is a statement published in October by the Permanent Council of the Conference of Bishops of France, the title of which might be translated as

5 From his interview with Antonio Spadaro S.J., published in *America*, 30/9/2013

6 The latest version is found at USCCB.org, the Conference's website.

*On Recovering the Meaning of Politics.*⁷ They speak, the bishops say, out of love of country and because they are worried about the present situation. They do not claim to be specialists in politics but they do share the life of their fellow-citizens, and they listen to them, and they see what life for them is like. They are speaking out because Catholics must interest themselves in all that affects life in society and human dignity and the future of humankind.

The document presents a clear-eyed view of the state of the nation and the changes that have taken place during the past fifty years. It is blunt in its account of the dismal state of politics, and the failure of politicians to meet the challenges which the changed times have brought. But it notes too the potential for good that still exists, and the grounds for hope, and the Christian hope that can inspire believers to work with their fellow citizens in the building of a better world. What is needed is a new vision of politics, the bishops say, and this will require rethinking the social contract, and a recovery of the true meaning of the politician's vocation: the search for the common good, grounded in a real debate about shared values. The task ahead is not for those elected to political office alone; 'everyone, at his level, is responsible for the life and future of our society'.

Obviously a two-paragraph summary can't do justice to the French statement, but perhaps it gives hints of the reasons for its attractiveness. The bishops identify with the document's addressees; they are 'co-citizens', who share the fears and hopes of their fellows and want to join with their fellows in the search for a better way. They draw on their Catholic faith and hope, but not as though they have nothing to learn from other world-views. They don't hesitate to name evils, including the careerism, self-promotion, and corruption, of some elected politicians, but they manage not to sound as though they're judging from on high. And they continue to see reason to hope, though naively, or in a way that underestimates the challenges ahead.

Two of the oddest strictures to be heard from critics of Pope Francis is that he's loved by the media and that he appeals to people outside of the Catholic church. This can only mean, it seems, that his message is pandering to 'the spirit of the age', that he's accommodating the Gospel message to a secular culture that needs most of all to be challenged. It doesn't seem to occur to these critics that the appeal of Francis is the appeal of the Gospel itself: a message which tells of mercy and forgiveness and hope, and which in the telling invites its hearers to a transformation of life and of the world. Jesus gave a mission and mandate to his followers to

7 The document in French is available at www.eglise.catholique.fr/, website of the French Bishops' Conference.

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make the Good News known, and when the *episkopoi*, those whose ministry is to oversee, enter the public square, it's in service of that mandate and mission: a concept of their role which must inform the stance and style and content of what they say.

It is perhaps no accident that the *episkopoi* of the Catholic Church in France can speak more engagingly, as it seems, than do their counterparts in the United States. The principle of *laïcité*, for all its limitations – some of which are noticed in *On Recovering the Meaning of Politics* – has ensured a distance from politics and the institutions of state that must minimise the danger of attracting the verdict of partisanship that has come to dog Catholic bishops in the United States. It has also called for what is in a sense a more sophisticated mode of address, one which first listens, speaks from beside rather than above, accompanying rather than dictating the way. In these respects it's reminiscent of *Gaudium et spes* and the ways of Francis - and of course of the Word Incarnate.

Places and people. Its author, John Quinn, has given each writer, poet, historian, sculptor, artist, thinker and traveller, including me, what Seamus Heaney called 'room to rhyme'. From Skellig Rock to Ballyfin, from Tyrone to Westmeath and on to Galway and Monaghan, from Jerusalem and Wicklow to Warsaw and Tara, and from Ephesus to Anahorish Primary School, across and around our island north and south, and beyond, the stories of binding places and people and their profound and lasting influence on all the writers, seep through.

– MARIE-LOUISE O'DONNELL, *This Place Speaks to Me*, ed. John Quinn (Dublin: Veritas) p.11.

Let's Talk About It

Kevin Egan

The 'it' I proposed to talk about in this article is sexual orientation in the Catholic priesthood. When I mentioned to friends and colleagues I was planning to write this article I received different reactions. Those who were clerical and gay urged me to write saying that the topic needed to be brought out into the open. Lay persons on the other hand, were cautious. They pointed out that the subject matter was controversial and I would need to be careful. I take to heart the advice given by Raphael Gallagher: 'We should approach questions of sexual orientation with a serene awareness of our own lack of knowledge.'¹

Since the subject matter is controversial and deeply personal I need to declare at the outset my own stance and background. I am married and work as a psychotherapist and lecturer. I was an ordained Franciscan for over thirty years. During that time, I worked on the staff of *St John Vianney Seminary* in Pretoria, South Africa. I also spent a year on the staff of the Southdown Institute in Toronto treating priests and religious experiencing mental health problems.

In my formation years (1963-1971), the subject of sexual orientation was never talked about. I recall a fellow student giving me a novel of James Baldwin's to read. In hindsight, he was probably telling me more than that it was a novel worth reading. By the 1980s the situation changed somewhat. Father C, one of those interviewed in John Weaver's book, *Thirty-Three Good Men* describes estimates that 'well over half' his class were gay. The subject matter was never touched upon by the seminary authorities and only rarely by students. 'It was as if homosexuality would cease to exist if it wasn't discussed.'²

I encountered a different situation when I lived in a formation

1 Raphael Gallagher. 'The Great Silence.' *The Furrow* 2004, 135.

2 John A. Weaver. *Thirty-three Good Men: Celibacy, Obedience and Identity.* Dublin: Columba Press 2014 121

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house in the United States in the early 90s. As a heterosexual, I was in the minority. The culture of the house was different from what I had been used to; movies rather than sport was the preferred topic of conversation. Sexual orientation was acknowledged but not openly discussed. The candidates did not feel the need to hide their sexual orientation but I could see that some were struggling to integrate it into their religious identity. I returned to Ireland in 1993. I was asked to give a series of workshops on celibacy and sexuality in a seminary to a group preparing for diaconate. I addressed the topic of sexual orientation and posed the question: If you were gay would you feel safe disclosing your sexual orientation to others? The answer was always 'No' with one qualification, that they would consider making such a disclosure to their spiritual director. This response reflects the culture of fear that existed in many seminaries and houses of formation in the 60s, 70s and 80s where candidates spent a great deal of their energies 'hiding.' It impacted on gay candidates more than others. It was risky for candidates to acknowledge their sexual orientation and almost difficult for them to 'feel good about it.' On the other hand I have spoken with some gay priests who assured me that in the 90s their experience of acceptance and safety was more positive.

Since the 1970s there has not been the same decline in gay candidates entering the seminary as there has been in heterosexual candidates with the result that the ratio of gay to heterosexual seminarians has risen considerably. We have now reached a situation where in some countries in the Western world the majority of candidates may be gay. There has been a corresponding change among priests. The situation varies from country to country. Thomas G. Plante, reporting on the situation in the United States, reports that research from a variety of sources suggests that somewhere between 25% and 45% of priests are homosexual in orientation.³ He goes on to point out that since 5% of Americans may be homosexual, the proportion of priests who are homosexual is at least five times larger than the national average for men.

The growing acknowledgment of this development caused alarm bells to ring in the Vatican and other places. In November 2005 the Congregation for Catholic Education published an 'Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Admission to the Seminary and Holy Orders.' The document made it clear that candidates 'who practise homosexuality, who present profoundly deep-rooted homosexual tendencies or support

3 Thomas G. Plante 'Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: A Decade of Crisis 2002-2012' (Plante, Thomas G & McChesney, Kathleen L. eds.) Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger Pub. 2012, 200

so-called gay culture' could not be admitted to the seminary or ordained as priests. It goes on to say that spiritual directors and confessors have a duty to dissuade such persons from proceeding to ordination.⁴ Put yourself in the place of the spiritual directors and confessors. How are they to interpret the phrase 'deep-rooted homosexual tendencies'? What is the difference between deep-rooted homosexual tendencies and deep-rooted heterosexual tendencies? Could they not both be consistent with a high level of affective maturity where one's sexual orientation is integrated into the many dimensions of the self?⁵ The document reflects the ambivalent stance of Church authorities to homosexuals in the priesthood; they are there but they are not supposed to be there. This has its roots in the Catholic teaching that homosexual acts are 'intrinsically disordered'.

An honest response to the situation requires that this ambivalence be addressed. A case can be made for seminary rectors and presidents openly declaring that sexual orientation, homosexual or heterosexual, is not a barrier to ordination. The critical factor is whether candidates have the maturity to commit themselves to living a chaste celibate lifestyle and whether they have integrated their sexual orientation to support such a commitment. Of course, activities such as putting one's details on a gay website are incompatible with such a commitment, as is going on a heterosexual dating site.

The question can be asked: Are Catholics prejudiced against homosexuals? Research on this topic indicates that Catholics are more prejudiced towards homosexuals than they are towards black people. The explanation given is that while black people are tolerated by the religious subculture, homosexuality is condemned and so Catholics may feel justified to engage in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour.⁶ During the height of the sexual abuse crisis high ranking Vatican officials, notably Cardinal Bertone, tried to blame the crisis on the presence of homosexuals in the priesthood. There is a subtler prejudice that is much less obvious and for that reason we don't readily admit to. It is an assumption we make. When we learn that someone is homosexual we immediately assume that they are sexually active. We don't make a similar assumption with regard to heterosexuals. I have spoken with homosexuals committed to living a celibate lifestyle and they

4 Congregation for Catholic Education. *Vatican Instruction: Priesthood Candidates and Homosexuality*. Origins Vol 35, No 26. 2005, 431

5 Lief Noll. 'A Psychologist Response to the Vatican Instruction on Homosexuality.' *Human Development* Vol 27, No 1. Spring 2006, 11

6 Fulton, Aubyn S. Gorsuch, Richard L. & Maynard, Elizabeth A. 'Religious Orientation, Antihomosexual Sentiment and Fundamentalism Among Christians.' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1999, 30 (1) p. 15.

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find this assumption offensive. They can feel inhibited entering a discussion on sexual orientation because they are immediately put on the defensive. Gay clerics and religious report that they experience a growing acceptance of differences with regard to their sexual orientation from fellow clerics and religious. However, because there is a marked reluctance to discuss the issue, it has assumed the status of the elephant in the room. Some gay priests and religious were struck by the lack of awareness among fellow priests and religious regarding the *LGBT* people leading up to the marriage referendum. It is felt by these priests that many of the clergy and bishops have never sat down and had a really good heart to heart talk with men and women who are gay.

There is a widespread impression that the Catholic Church is unwelcoming to gay and lesbian persons. This impression is based on Church teaching and on occasions in the past when Church leadership failed to engage with this group. At one level the Church's practice seems contradictory. It condemns homosexual acts yet, it readily ordains gay men as deacons, priests and bishops in increasing numbers. Their orientation does not invalidate their ordination. The ambiguity I spoke about is evident in that the Church would seem to be reluctant to acknowledge this fact. What is the basis for that reluctance?

I was impressed recently by the statement coming from Archbishop Welby following the disclosure that the Bishop of Grantham, Nicholas Chamberlain, was in a longstanding celibate relationship. The statement reads: 'His appointment as bishop of Grantham was made on the basis of his skills and calling to serve the church – he lives within the bishops' guidelines and his sexuality is completely irrelevant to his office.'⁷ I can't imagine the Catholic Church in Ireland making such a statement. It lacks the clarity and freedom necessary to make it because it is still stuck in the ambivalence I referred to.

One's response to a problem is shaped by how one conceives the nature of the problem. Einstein is credited with saying that if he had one hour to save the world, he would spend fifty-five minutes defining the problem, and five minutes finding the solution.⁸ I expect that readers of this article are familiar with the recent concerns expressed about the presence of a gay sub-culture in seminaries. There is a danger that these concerns will give rise to a reactive response on the part of Church authorities while ignoring the wider question of the overall culture that prevails in the seminary itself. A healthy seminary culture is one that fosters an environment

⁷ *Guardian* 3/9/2016

⁸ Kegan, Robert & Laskow Lahey, Lisa. *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization*. Boston Mass.: Harvard Business School 2016, 220

conducive to the spiritual and psychological development of seminarians. The culture would seem to be problematic when fear and lack of trust begin to dominate. Legitimate differences with regard to sexual orientation, spirituality and understanding of priesthood do not seem to be respected. A healthy seminary environment provides a safe space where students can give and receive feedback from one another and their formators.

The Tablet gave the following headline to an article reporting on the steps taken by the trustees: *Maynooth introduces new measures to win back trust.*⁹ I find myself asking the question: the trust of whom? The wider Catholic population, benefactors and parents of seminarians or the level of trust in the fractured seminary community? If the seminary is to be fit for purpose the latter needs urgent attention. Mary McAleese told a summer school that Irish seminaries should be 'gay friendly.' I have a certain hesitancy about using that phrase because it can easily be misinterpreted where *friendly* could be misinterpreted to mean *favouring*. Seminaries should be welcoming of all sexual orientations and striving to create a community where differences are respected. I recall a discussion I had with the Rector William Slattery when I worked in the seminary in South Africa. I asked him about his philosophy for running a seminary. He told me his first option was to try and create a pastoral atmosphere where students were loved and accepted. If that didn't work, he would consider the second option of ruling by fear. This was during the apartheid years when prejudice was socially approved and institutionalized. Ours was a multi-racial seminary and not immune to the divisions and discrimination of the wider society. I am proud to say that the Rector was relatively successful in what he set out to do. I learned an important lesson then; a seminary is successful because of its culture.

PASTORAL INITIATIVES

For an organization with a significant proportion of gay men and women in leadership positions, I find it puzzling that in the Irish Catholic Church there is not more evidence of pastoral outreach to the gay and lesbian community. I wonder why this is the case. Has it to do with the reluctance of gay priests to be seen to be involved in this ministry? Are they afraid that such a step might be interpreted as a *coming out* on their part? My first experience of a pastoral reaching out to the gay community was in the mid-70s in Dublin. A group of priests and lay people organized a monthly Eucharist for gay people in a private oratory on a Sunday evening. A confrère was one of the organizers. I recall answering the phone one Sunday afternoon and the caller was David Norris. He was

9 *The Tablet*. 3/9/2016

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ringing up to wish the venture well. Another initiative I am aware of involved gay religious setting up a support group for people who wished to explore their Catholic and gay identity. While these pastoral initiatives are laudable, it is regrettable that the reflections and wisdom generated in such groups have not been taken up by the wider Catholic community. If this had happened, we would not be so disconnected as we are today.

COMING OUT

Let me state the obvious; there are different levels of coming out. Pastoral involvement is one of the ways chosen by gay priests and religious to come out. It has certain advantages in that the level of self-exposure is contained. In my experience the most favoured way is for a gay person to tell me details about their personal and professional life that indicate they might be gay, but I am left to draw my own conclusions. While I was in religious life this was a frequent occurrence. This indirect approach works well in relationship with friends and confrères but I have certain misgivings in regard to siblings, parents and family members. I recall a conversation with siblings of a gay priest who died without telling them the full story. Their sense of loss was added to by the fact that they had missed out on the opportunity to respond to a full disclosure if he had chosen to take that step. While coming out to friends can be a healing experience I believe that disclosure to parents or siblings has added potential for healing because of the nature of those relationships. With regard to seminarians, I would hope that before ordination day they would have found the courage to come out to at least one member of their family and experienced their acceptance. Sadly, one needs to allow for the fact that this outcome cannot always be guaranteed.

I have a distinct memory of a summer in the mid-80s when I received a phone-call from a confrere suggesting that we meet for a pint. He was home on holidays from the 'missions'. We met in a pub near Heuston Station. He told me that he considered me a friend and that he wanted to let me know he was gay before he went back to his mission. I was deeply touched by his self-disclosure and somewhat shocked as I didn't suspect it. I can't recall the details of my response. I would like to think that I ordered another pint for us both to celebrate a friendship sealed. Our paths never crossed again and he died some years later. On balance, it may be more appropriate to disclose when the relationship is a friendship rather than pastoral. I recall a conversation with a gay priest friend who described for me that loneliness he felt at not being able to disclose this significant dimension of himself to parishioners whom he had grown to know and love.

CELIBACY

I have purposely kept my focus on sexual orientation rather than on celibacy though both are intimately connected. A priest's ability to live a healthy and committed celibate lifestyle will largely depend on how well he is able to accept and feel good about his sexual orientation. Furthermore, it will depend on the quality of his support relationships as he lives out this commitment. Just as ambivalence marks the Church's stance to homosexuality, it also marks its stance to celibacy. John Weaver in his study already cited speaks of acceptance of celibacy among priests as best 'portrayed on a continuum, ranging from complete acceptance to total rejection, with most priests in the middle.'¹⁰ This would seem to indicate a high level of ambivalence among homosexual and heterosexual clergy regarding celibacy. The Amárach survey commissioned by the Association of Catholic Priests in 2012 found that 87 per cent of Irish Catholics believed that priests should be allowed to marry. This indicates a low level of support for mandatory celibacy among the laity. Incidentally, the same survey indicated that some 61 per cent of Catholics disagree with the Church's teaching on homosexuality.¹¹ These statistics indicate that among Catholics there is a marked difference between their personal views and the official Church's stance on homosexuality and compulsory celibacy. It is not surprising then that these differences should be reflected among the students in the national seminary. The seminary can't be understood in isolation from what is going on in society and the Church. The comments made in the wake of the controversy during the summer failed to appreciate this truth.

In the late 80s when I worked in the seminary in South Africa I was responsible for giving input to seminarians on living a celibate lifestyle. At the time, I thought I was doing a good job. Now I must admit that my reflections on living a chaste celibate life were based exclusively on a heterosexual perspective. Of course, I knew there were gay students in the seminary; however, their experience and concerns around living a chaste celibate life did not enter into my reckoning. I wonder did I at some level believe that they shouldn't be there?

I hope I have said enough to show that we cannot go on in our dioceses, religious communities and seminaries assuming that we don't have a significant number of brothers and sisters who are gay and lesbian. A failure to find creative ways of responding to this new and emerging development will mean that our claiming to be a community of brothers and sisters where all are cherished equally is in danger of becoming a charade. This has particular relevance

¹⁰ Weaver op.cit. 2014, 129

¹¹ *The Irish Times* 13/04/2012

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for seminaries and houses of formation. I consider the candidates there a 'protected species.' Staff need to pay particular attention to creating an environment that is accepting of the candidate in all the dimensions of his or her life. This means creating a space where it is safe for people to be themselves, to be vulnerable and to be challenged. All are learners and there are big issues to talk about.

Irish death-notices. Irish death notices are an interesting social study. I can recommend it to the twenty- and thirty-somethings. It might smarten them up a bit about the social history of Ireland. One can play a game of guessing what part of the country the deceased is from just by reading the surname. There aren't too many McGinleys in Kerry or McGillicuddys in Donegal. This is beginning to change with more social mobility, and the first exotic Eastern European names have made an appearance. A study of the dramatically different first names of the generations can be a fun exercise. Granny Teresa is often the mother of Paddy and Eileen but she's almost a dead cert to be the granny of Sharon and Karen, and maybe even the great-gran of Jack, Chloe and Sophie. Try it. It's uncanny.

— RITA LARKIN, *Death and the Irish*, ed. Salvador Ryan (Dublin: Wordwell Ltd.) p.264.

Starving in the Pews

Michael Peppard

Give or take, I've heard about two thousand sermons. Most are boring, many are dreadful, and some are spiritually harmful. Bad preaching starves the church.

I was raised in a mix of Catholic and Evangelical churches. When I turned 16 and got my licence, my parents let me choose. They meant choose between *their* two churches, but instead I chose to explore the rest of the churches of Denver. (In hindsight I was destined to become a religion professor.) Around south Denver, I heard sermons from Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Mormons, Unitarians, and not a few megachurches. Later I explored further north and heard Ethiopian Orthodox, Black Catholics, Latino Catholics, and the Denver Rescue Mission.

A few years later, I was a fieldwork researcher for a sociology of religion project in Indianapolis, where I focused on Pentecostal churches. I went on to study Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and a few other languages. I've studied rhetoric and homiletics, ancient and modern. I talk in front of people for a living. I have decent diction.

So much for my *bona fides*. But as a Catholic layperson, I've never preached one sermon, and I probably never will. I guess I'm an expert sermon critic.

From the pew, here's what I want to yell at every preacher in the pulpit: *You have no idea of the spiritual hunger out here*. Almost every sermon is a missed opportunity.

When you look out at your congregation, no matter how small, if there is anyone between the ages of 18 and 55 out there, you need to imagine what they did to get to that pew that day. They fought the pressures of their work schedule, which for most of them is out of their control. They pushed back against the busyness of their children's schedules. Perhaps they told their son or daughter that

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they'd need to be late to the soccer game because of church at 11:00, and that caused a fight not yet resolved. Perhaps their family had an argument that very morning about whether to go to church at all or make the drive to visit grandma instead.

And this is just a normal week, not to mention the ones where a job was lost, a friend imperilled, a roof leaked, a spouse hit bottom, a child pulled away, a parent fell ill, an injustice unrectified, a mortgage past due, a dream crushed, a business shuttered. This is not to mention the solitary soul that for indiscernible reasons just decided that day, after many years, to walk back through those doors and slip into the back pew. A still, small voice calling, a spirit welling up to new life within, waiting, hanging on every word from the pulpit, aching for a breath.

Then, moments later, strangled. The spirit quenched, the soul starved. The pew empty, the door shut.

For those who stay put, the mind wanders within minutes. Should have stayed home and worked on the roof. Could have avoided that fight with my son about soccer. Would have rather taken the day trip to visit those relatives. What will I eat for lunch.

Within minutes, you've lost us. But don't just take my word for it. A recent study from the Pew Research Centre demonstrates that the quality of sermons is the single most important factor in attracting people to church.

When they search for a new house of worship, a new Pew Research Center study shows, Americans look first and foremost for a place where they like the preaching and the tone set by the congregation's leaders. Fully 83% of Americans who have looked for a new place of worship say the quality of preaching played an important role in their choice of congregation.

The good news about preaching the good news is that you don't have to be a brilliant scholar or captivating orator to do it. The raw materials of the Bible and Christian history offer plenty to work with.

First, do no harm from the pulpit. Don't ask for money. Don't trivialize the moment by doing church announcements. Don't ever be misogynistic. In fact, never demean anyone from the pulpit.

Choose one reading to bring to life. As the long-time professor of homiletics at Yale Divinity School, David Bartlett, once said, 'A select few of the great sermons I've heard in my life were about multiple readings, but all of the worst sermons were.' If one of the day's readings tells a story, you're better off choosing that one. That's what we remember best from the readings we just heard.

Stick to the basics. *God loves us. Strive for justice. Ask for mercy,*

and grant it. Follow saintly examples. Tell a story or two. Activate our spiritual imaginations for those few minutes of the week.

Humour is high risk, not only because you're not funny, but also because you misread the mood of the congregation. Remember, we don't do this church stuff all week like you and don't need a humorous break from the numinous. We are spiritually hungry, and we can get comedy anytime we want.

We're not here to laugh, but to be challenged and comforted. Every sermon of every week should aspire to do both. Show forth the paradox of demandingness: churches which challenge their congregations with concrete, difficult demands of virtue, love, justice, and mercy are paradoxically more likely to retain their members and attract new ones. And then show how God comforts the fallen and afflicted – in other words, those holy souls in front of you.

Pastors, you claim to love Jesus. He commanded you to 'feed his sheep'! But week in and week out, we're starving.

'Abide with Me'. *Abide with me* is one of the most popular funeral hymns in the English-speaking world. It is said to have been a favourite of a wide range of people, from George V to Gandhi; it was played by the band on the deck as the *Titanic* was sinking, and Nurse Edith Cavell repeated its words as she faced her firing squad. The tune by W.H. Monk has influenced many composers, including Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Since 1927, this hymn has been sung at every FA Cup Final in Wembley. And it features in many movies, including the funeral scene in *The Full Monty*, and in modern literature, including George Orwell's *Burmese Days*.

– PATRICK COMERFORD, *Death and the Irish*, ed. Salvador Ryan (Dublin: Wordwell Ltd.) p.108.

Amoris Laetitia and Catholic Morals

Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler

On March 19 of this year, Pope Francis published his response to the two Synods on Marriage and Family of 2014 and 2015, his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (hereinafter, *AL*). In this essay we focus on the topic that governs the entire Exhortation, namely, the ancient Catholic doctrine on the authority and absolute inviolability of the informed personal conscience, and reflect on its meaning for ongoing Catholic moral life.

CONSCIENCE

Already in the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas established the authority and inviolability of conscience. ‘Anyone upon whom the ecclesiastical authorities, in ignorance of the true facts, imposes a demand that offends against his clear conscience, should perish in excommunication rather than violate his conscience.’ For any Catholic in search of the good and the true, no clearer statement on the authority and inviolability of personal conscience could be found. Seven hundred years later, the last hundred of which saw the rights of personal conscience ignored and/or suppressed in the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council’s *Gaudium et Spes* issued a clarion cry in its defence. ‘Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbour’ (*GS* 16). Its *Dignitatis Humanae* went further to assert the inviolability of conscience. ‘In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God for whom he was created. It follows that he is not to be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious’ (*DH* 3). In the 1960s, these were

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words seldom heard in Catholic magisterial circles, but they are words deeply rooted in the Catholic moral tradition.

Conscience comes at the end of a rational process which is a process of experience, understanding, judgment, decision. This process includes a natural grasp of the first principles of practical judgment and a gathering of as much evidence as possible, consciously weighing the evidence and its implications, and finally making as honest a judgment as possible that this action is to be done and that action is not. The final practical judgment of this process is called conscience and, since it is a judgment about what is good or evil, right or wrong, it is a *moral* process. A *moral* action is one that follows the practical judgment of conscience and an *immoral* action is one that goes against conscience. It is commonplace theologically to insist that, in order to be right and moral, conscience must be informed; that information is the gathering of the necessary evidence for a conscience-judgment we have just outlined.

Since conscience is a practical judgment that comes at the end of a deliberative process, it necessarily involves the virtue of prudence, by which right reason is applied to action. Aquinas locates prudence in the intellect, arguing that it discerns the first principles of morality, applies them to particular situations, and enables conscience to make practical judgments that this is the right thing to do on this occasion and with this good intention. Prudence, therefore, needs to know both the general principles of morality and the individual situation in which human moral action is to take place. Prudence is a *cardinal* virtue around which all other virtues pivot, integrating agents and their actions. Because prudence controls the judgments that precede the exercise of all other moral virtues, and must precede them if they are to be moral, Aquinas holds that no moral virtue can be possessed without prudence, since it is proper to moral virtue to make a right choice.

ERRONEOUS CONSCIENCE

Women and men, unfortunately, as Pope Francis points out, are weak (*AL*, 291) and every judgment, even the most prudential practical judgments of conscience, can be in error. That raises the question of the erroneous conscience and so, at this point, we need to introduce some important distinctions. Ethicists note that there are two poles in every moral judgment. It is always a free, rational human *person* who makes a judgment, and so one pole of the judgment is a personal, subjective pole; but every person makes a judgment about some objective reality, contraception, cohabitation or homosexual action, for instance, and so there is always also an objective pole. Persons arrive at their judgments either by

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following the rational process outlined above or by somehow short-changing that process. In the first case, the subject may arrive at a right moral understanding and conscience-judgment about the object; in the second case, the subject may arrive at an erroneous understanding and conscience judgment about the object. If a decision to act follows a right understanding and judgment about the object, then conscience is also said to be right; if it follows an erroneous understanding and judgment, then conscience is also said to be erroneous.

If the error of understanding and judgment can be ascribed to some moral fault, taking little trouble to find out what is true and good (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 16), for instance, or negligent failure to be sufficiently attentive to the necessary experience, to gather the necessary evidence, to engage in the necessary deliberation, to take the necessary advice, then the wrong understanding and the practical judgment of conscience flowing from it are both deemed to be culpable and cannot be morally followed. If the error cannot be ascribed to some personal fault, then both the understanding and the practical judgment of conscience flowing from it are deemed to be non-culpable and not only can but must be followed, even contrary to Church authority, as Aquinas argued. Persons are bound not only *to* conscience but also *for* conscience, that is, they must do all in their power to ensure that their conscience is right. Any negligence in the search for rightness is immoral. There is one final distinction to be added here. The morality of an action is largely controlled by the subject's intention. A good intention, giving alms to the poor *because* the poor need help and to help them is the right and Christian thing to do, results in a moral action. A bad intention, giving alms to the poor *because* I want to be seen and to be praised by men (Matt 6:2, 5; see Luke 18:10-14), will result in an immoral action.

A decision of right conscience is a complex process. It is an *individual* process, but far from an exclusively *individualistic* process. The Latin word *con-scientia* literally means knowledge together, perhaps better rendered as to know together. It suggests what human experience universally demonstrates, namely, that being in consultation with others is a surer way to come to right knowledge of moral truth and right moral judgment of what one ought to do or not do. This community-basis of the search for Catholic truth, conscience, and moral action builds a sure safeguard against both an isolating egoism and a subjective relativism that negates all universal truth. The community-basis of consciences has been part of the Christian tradition since Paul, who clearly believed in the inviolability and primacy of conscience (1 Cor 10:25-27; 2 Cor 1:12; 4:2; Rom 14, 23). Ethicist Bernard Häring

calls it ‘the reciprocity of consciences.’ It is within this reciprocity of consciences that Church authority functions, not indeed guaranteeing conscience (past errors preclude that simplistic claim) but informing it to a right practical judgment. We are instructed here by Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman’s famous comment to the Duke of Norfolk. ‘If I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem the right thing), I shall drink to the Pope if you please, still to conscience first and to the Pope afterwards.’

The Catholic faithful, the International Theological Commission recently teaches, have an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, which enables them to recognize and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and action, and to reject what is false. Banishing the notion of a strict separation between the teaching church and the learning church, the Second Vatican Council taught that all the baptized participate in their own proper way in the teaching office of Christ and that Christ fulfils his teaching office by means not only of the hierarchy but also the laity (*Lumen Gentium*, 35). The attainment of moral truth in the Catholic tradition involves a dialogical process in the communion-church between the hierarchy and the laity and, when that process has been conscientiously completed, every last member of the laity is finally ‘alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16) and has to make the practical judgment and decision of conscience that this is what *I* must believe or not believe, do or not do. Back to Newman’s dictum, and also to Aquinas’: conscience first and the Pope afterwards.

Having made an honest judgment and decision of conscience, no Catholic is ‘to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor ... is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious’ (*Religious Freedom*, 3) and, we might add, moral. Theologian Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, pointed out that ‘not everything that exists in the Church must for that reason be also a legitimate tradition.... There is a distorting as well as legitimate tradition.’ The long-standing adherence of the Church to teachings on the taking of interest on loans, on slavery, and on religious freedom are well-known examples of distorting traditions that it now rejects. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* places the Church’s teaching beyond doubt: Catholics have ‘the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions’ (n. 1782). A well-informed, and therefore well formed, conscience is the long-established Catholic way to choosing the true and the good.

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has to do is to obey the moral truth that is proposed to it. That is contrary to the Catholic teaching in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. ‘Imputability and responsibility for an action,’ it teaches, ‘can be diminished and even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors’ (1735). When speaking of masturbation, it clearly teaches that ‘to form an equitable judgment about the subject’s moral responsibility and to guide pastoral action, one must take into account the affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety, or other psychological or social factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability’ (2352). Any conscience decision must discern not only the moral truth proposed to it but also any and every relevant circumstance in which moral action is to take place. Pope Francis clearly teaches this in several different ways in *AL*.

Speaking of those in what he calls the ‘irregular situation’ of being divorced and remarried without annulment, he acknowledges that they ‘can find themselves in a variety of situations, which should not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for a suitable personal and pastoral discernment’ (*AL*, 298). In a footnote, he cites the Second Vatican Council’s judgment that if they take the option of living as brother and sister the Church offers them, ‘it often happens that faithfulness is endangered and the good of the children suffers’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51). For these reasons, the Pope continues, ‘a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in ‘irregular’ situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church’s teachings, ‘sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families’ (*AL*, 305). His argument, of course, applies not only to divorce and remarriage, about which he is specifically speaking, but also to every other personal moral situation. He applies it to the consideration of several irregular situations.

Traditionally in Catholic sexual ethics every sexual sin is a mortal sin. *AL* challenges that position. The Church, Francis argues, ‘possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations. Hence it can no longer simply be said that all those in any “irregular” situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace.’ Factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision (*AL*, 310). The *Catechism* teaches the same doctrine: ‘imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments’ such as ‘affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety or other psychological

or social factors' (1735 and 2352). Francis applies these teachings to the consideration of several 'irregular situations.'

A. Communion for the Divorced and Remarried without Annulment

The topic of sacramental communion for the divorced and remarried without annulment was the topic most hotly debated at the Synods and the topic about which the bishops were most divided. In their final document, by a margin of 187 yes to 72 no votes (72% yes), they proposed a 'logic of integration' for re-establishing the divorced and remarried into communion with the Church, including possible sacramental communion. On a vote of 178 yes and 80 no (69% yes), they agreed that full integration should depend on the divorced and remarried being 'subjectively certain in conscience' about their freedom to take sacramental communion, and, on a vote of 190 yes and 64 no (75% yes) that certain conscience should depend on an internal forum process accompanied by a priest or counsellor.

Francis takes those decisions of the Synods and argues that 'conversation with the priest, in the internal forum, contributes to the formation of a correct judgment on what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of the Church and what steps can be taken to re-establish it and make it grow.' To avoid any suspicion of laxity this discernment must include 'humility, discretion and love for the Church and her teaching, in a sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it' (*AL*, 300). Any conscience or internal forum judgment about divorce, remarriage without annulment, and partaking of communion, in other words, can be and must be a conscience-judgment made by the couple themselves after consultation with a priest-counsellor.

B. Contraception

The topic of contraception has divided opinion in the Catholic Church since the publication of Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. Its treatment in *AL* focuses on the situation in which a State imposes contraception on its citizens and Francis condemns that imposition as a gross violation of both individual and couple consciences. State intervention in birth policy challenges 'the upright consciences of spouses ... and the Church strongly rejects the forced State intervention in favour of contraception, sterilization, and even abortion' (*AL*, 42). Rather than citing the text from *Humanae Vitae* on the specific prohibition of artificial birth control, Francis chooses to highlight 'the need to respect the dignity of the person in morally assessing methods of regulating birth' (*AL*, 82, 222). Noticeably absent from the Exhortation is any

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reference to natural family planning or to the absolute inseparability of the unitive and procreative meanings of sexual intercourse so emphasized by Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* and so central to his banning of all artificial contraception.

Without specifically abrogating Paul VI's much-controverted teaching, Francis comes down on what to some is a new, but is really an old though recently magisterially-ignored Catholic principle of the absoluteness and inviolability of an informed conscience. Decision about family planning, Francis insists, 'fittingly takes place as the result of a consensual dialogue between the spouses' and the decision flows from an informed conscience 'which is "the most secret core and sanctuary of a person" where "each one is alone with God whose voice echoes in the depth of the heart"' (*AL*, 222). The Second Vatican Council taught that the married couple 'will make decisions [about the transmission of life] by common counsel and effort *The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God*' (*AL*, 222). This firm principle has always assumed a couple's accompaniment by a priest in their journey to an informed judgment of conscience, and Francis reinforces this in his decree that any internal forum solution should ultimately be the decision of the couple assisted by the counsel of a priest.

C. Cohabitation

The traditional approach to sex, marriage, and family in the contemporary Western world, including among a majority of Catholics, has largely collapsed. When the *Lineamenta* for the 2015 Synod on Marriage and Family was distributed, the first reaction of Catholic Marriage Care in England, charged with the marriage preparation of those wishing to marry in the Catholic Church, was that 'nearly all couples attending our marriage preparation courses are cohabiting, and many have children ... the couple asking to be married in the Church and not already living together is a rarity.' There are multiple reasons for such an approach to sex, marriage, and family, but they are not elaborated in *AL* and need not detain us here. Francis contents himself with the undisputed judgment that 'in some countries, *de facto* unions are very numerous, not only because of a rejection of values concerning the family and matrimony, but *primarily* because celebrating a marriage is considered too expensive in the social circumstances. As a result, material poverty drives people into *de facto* unions' (*AL*, 294).

Nowhere in his Exhortation does Francis condemn cohabitation in blanket fashion. In contradistinction to the *Final Report* from the Synods which condemns all cohabitation, he makes a distinction between 'cohabitation which totally excludes

any intention to marry' (AL, 53) and cohabitation dictated by 'cultural and contingent situations,' (AL, 294) like poverty, which requires a 'constructive response' that can lead to marriage when circumstances permit it. Borrowing from Jesus' treatment of the Samaritan woman and Saint John Paul II's 'law of gradualness,' he accepts the latter 'in the knowledge that the human being knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth' (AL, 295). The Church must never 'desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage, God's plan in all its grandeur.' Aware, however, of all the psychological, historical, cultural, and 'even biological' mitigating circumstances, she must also never desist from accompanying 'with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively appear' (AL, 307). Again the law of gradualness. The biblical Jesus leaves his followers with two commandments: first, the great commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 19:19; John 15:16), which is 'much more than all whole-burnt offerings and sacrifice' (Mark 12:33); second, the commandment, 'judge not that you be not judged' (Matt 7:1; Luke 6:37) (See AL, 306 and 308). The Catholic Church and Catholics in general, Francis argues, must heed these commandments even if, in his pregnant phrase, 'in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street' (AL, 308).

D. Homosexual Action

The final irregular situation Francis chooses to dwell on is the situation occasioned by the phenomenon of homosexuality. 'Every sign of unjust discrimination' is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence' (AL, 250). This specific proscription of *unjust discrimination* has left the door open for some to argue that *just discrimination* against homosexual persons is permitted, a conclusion that surely is contrary to the two commandments he so emphasizes 'love your neighbour as yourself' and 'judge not.' To the much-controverted questions of homosexual marriage, Francis gives an unequivocal answer. '*De facto* or *same-sex* unions ... may not simply be equated with marriage,' and 'there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family' (AL, 251). This judgment should be read as a positive claim for the benefits of heterosexual marriage and not just as a negative condemnation of same-sex unions.

The grand plan of AL is the rediscovery and renewal of the authentic meaning of Christian marriage and family, for 'the Christian proclamation on the family is good news indeed,' and 'the joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the

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Church' (*AL*, 1). It is unfortunate, however, that Francis did not choose to recognize the joy of genuine love experienced by same-sex couples and chose instead to contrast it with the joy of love experienced by opposite-sex couples. We wonder if, when he wrote his brief comments on same-sex unions in paragraphs 52 and 53, he had not yet thought about paragraph 314 where he asserts, correctly, that God 'dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory.' He cannot possibly be asserting that God dwells within the love of opposite-sex couples but not within the love of same-sex couples, for the universal and unchallenged Catholic position is the biblical position: 'God is love' and 'if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us' (1 John 4:8, 12). We judge that, despite the negative judgments about their unions, there is good news for gays and lesbians in Francis' Exhortation. That good news lies in two things that run throughout and colour the entire document, the theme of gradualness and the theme of the authority and inviolability of personal conscience.

The theme of gradualness applies to the extent that, as mutually-loving gay and lesbian couples demonstrate that their unions, whether called marriage or not, are as loving and *interpersonally* fruitful as heterosexual unions, Catholics and their Church will become as comfortable with them as with marriage between heterosexual couples. Indeed, there is extensive sociological evidence that the majority of Western Catholics are already comfortable with gay and lesbian marriages. Francis' judgment that 'adoption is a very generous way to become parents,' his exhortation encouraging those 'who cannot have children to expand their marital love to embrace those who lack a proper family situation,' and his further judgment that 'adopting a child is an act of love, offering the gift of a family to someone who has none' can all be applied to homosexual as well as heterosexual unions (*AL*, 179, 180). The common and uninformed perspective that asserts that gay and lesbian parents are bad for the proper development of their children is universally controverted by the scientific evidence that shows that the children of gay and lesbian parents fare as well as the children of heterosexual parents. As for conscience, the theme of the freedom and inviolability of an informed personal conscience applies as much to the decision of gays and lesbians to enter a loving union and to adopt children as it applies to any other conscience or internal forum decision.

CONCLUSION

There are, of course, other questions of interest in *AL*. There is Francis' ubiquitous emphasis on poverty and its effects, especially on the women and children in families worldwide. There is his judgment that Christian marriage demands that husband and wife

be equal in their marriages. ‘Every form of sexual submission,’ he argues, ‘must be clearly rejected. This includes all improper interpretations in the passage in the Letter to the Ephesians where Paul tells women to “be subject to your husbands”. This passage mirrors the cultural categories of the time,’ and therefore does not universally apply. But, ‘as Saint John Paul II wisely observed: Love excludes every kind of subjection whereby the wife might become the servant or the slave of her husband’ (AL, 156). The questions we have examined, however, are sufficient to answer the question: *Amoris Laetitia* and Catholic Morals: *Status Quo* or Development? The answer to that question, we suggest, is twofold: there is no change of Catholic moral *doctrine* but there is certainly organic development in the *interpretation* and *application* of that doctrine. There is no change in Catholic doctrine as it has existed since long before AL, for the absolute authority and inviolability of personal and informed conscience and the modifying impact of circumstances on ethical judgment have long been part of Catholic moral *doctrine*. There is, however, organic development in the *interpretation* and *application* of that doctrine, for Pope Francis has brought the long-established Catholic doctrines about the authority and inviolability of an informed conscience and about the modifying effect of circumstances on ethical judgments out of the shadows, where they have languished for several centuries, and has placed them squarely in the forefront of Catholic moral interpretation and practice.

Word Music. Aural sound and sound sense were born for me on those musky eiderdown days, behind the top window of my grandmother’s house on main street. Aural sound was to be my first introduction to theatre, to the arts and to the unbounding possibilities of radio and writing and teaching. It was my beginning and my understating of how my place spoke to me. It spoke to me through the music and melody and patterns and inflections and phraseology and emphasis and pitch and lift and fall of the word music of the human voice.

– MARIE-LOUISE O’DONNELL, *This Place Speaks to Me*, ed. John Quinn (Dublin: Veritas) p.10.

The People had Left the Room

– *Vatican II and the Decline of Religious Practice in Ireland*

Geraldine O’Dea

Fifty-one years ago, on 8 December 1965, Vatican II concluded with great ceremony. Such ceremony was justified as it represented a major effort by the Church to face the issues of the modern world. As such, it was a pastoral rather than dogmatic council at which doctrine was neither promulgated nor declared but it was aimed, in theory, at the human person who was perceived as increasingly alienated from the institutional church.

In the Republic of Ireland in the sixties, such a drift had started. In the middle of the twentieth century, Catholics numbered 94% of the population with a weekly Mass attendance of 91%. By 2012, the figures were 84% Catholic but with a weekly Mass attendance of 35% and the decline continues. Does this demographic represent an inevitable result of postmodern relativism or could Vatican II have done more to halt the decline? Did its efforts to face modern issues in fact reverberate in Ireland? Despite the attempt by the Council to maintain a Christocentric approach, did the people’s perspective of the Church as an institution rather than a community persist? What effect did the Council have on the Church in Ireland and the laity? Did it greatly affect the practice of religion or even, by encouraging the primacy of individual conscience, hasten the decline of practice? Or rather in fact, was the decline the result of the failure of the Church in Ireland to communicate adequately to the laity the new exegesis of scripture and tradition, the new dynamism and spirit of the Church looking to the modern world?

It would be impossible to describe in a short article the extent of the work of the Council which was spread over three years and produced finally sixteen documents. Though these documents cover a wide range of subjects at great length, relatively small numbers of the world’s laity became familiar with them. There was no equivalent to the ease of a click on Google or Vatican twitter feed in those days. The two documents that most concern lay people in the world are *Dignitatis Humanae*, On Religious Liberty and

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Gaudium et Spes, the Church in the Modern World. The keyword associated with the Council was *aggiornamento* – bringing up to date or modernising. It was the stated aim of the Council to speak to all the people and not to be a Council for just the clergy. Multiple changes were initiated in areas of direct concern to the laity – the use of the vernacular, the repositioning of altars, and considerable adjustments in religious practice and liturgy – all very much in line with the idea of *aggiornamento*. In fact, the Council expressed great enthusiasm for the participation of the laity.

Marriage and the ends thereof were discussed at length but finally a generous and gentle statement was drawn up and agreed recognising the ‘equal personal dignity that must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection’ and ignoring the previous held belief that marriage was – apart from the creation of children – a remedy for concupiscence. As Fr John W. O’Malley has pointed out in his book the use of the word ‘dignity’ pervades the text of *Gaudium et Spes*, ‘dignity of freedom, the dignity of conscience, the dignity of marriage, the dignity of human culture, and, finally, the dignity of the human person’¹.

However, the documents issued by the Council were chiefly concerned with the Church as an institution and the lives of the clergy. While acknowledging the changes in the world and religious practice, they appear to look more to historical and traditional precedents rather than taking adequate account of the global revolution in society happening as they debated. And Irish society was changing in the sixties as never before, more questioning, more critical of established institutions, not least the Church.

At the end of the fifties, the Republic of Ireland was a conservative and largely rural country, an island behind an island, and as such, subject to British influence and culture and heavily dependent on the British economy. Consequently, it was largely insulated from and ignorant of continental Europe: 60% of the population was rural – which fell to 50% by 1966 due to the flow of people to the cities and, not least, emigration. Parents seeing their children leaving the country for America and, in fewer cases, Australia, had little expectation of seeing them again. The cost of travel then precluded this. Agriculture was the major occupation with the majority of farms being less than fifty acres. In 1950, our living standard compared with that of the rest of Europe ranked us below Germany and only just above Italy, two countries economically devastated by WW2.

The great impetus to change in Ireland was economic planning introduced famously by Ken Whitaker, Secretary of the Department of Finance under the auspices of Seán Lemass in 1958. Since

1 *Op.cit.*, p.267

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WW2, the economy had stagnated under the protectionist policies of De Valera. Employment and emigration were high and in fact by 1961, the population had declined to a low of 2.7 million. There had been little drive for change such as had motivated Europe after WW2 and Ireland appeared isolated, insular in thought and action and, in the fifties, sunk in a recession with an alarming rate of emigration. With the publication of the five year plan, *Economic Development*, formulated by Ken Whitaker, the country lurched into the twentieth century. The concept of a planned economy was viewed with suspicion initially as having a Marxist tone but it quickly led to rapid advances in the social sciences, agriculture, education and finance to the point that the government through the civil service exerted more and more control over the country. Writing with some prescience in 1970, Professor Basil Chubb said: ‘it may well become more and more difficult for democracy to keep a toehold in the crevices between the great organizations of the public and private sectors’² – and, he might have added, the Church. Politically, the population was always engaged, though with local rather than international politics, and with the North and the border. But more than any other initiative in the sixties, what drove the societal revolution was the inauguration of television in 1962. In his address at RTE’s first broadcast, De Valera compared television to atomic energy and feared its influence would lead to decadence and disillusion in Irish society. Certainly the Late Late Show, first broadcast in 1962 had huge impact especially with its open approach to sex and sexuality in Ireland never before a topic for public discussion and could be deemed to have kick-started the sexual revolution in Ireland. Its challenge of societal norms led inevitably to clashes with the Church led by John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin from 1940-72. Fighting an almost rearguard action, a group of Catholics priests produced a series, *Radharc*, first broadcast in 1962. In that broadcast, described by Diarmaid Ferriter in his book, *Occasions of Sin*, the presenter, a priest, recounted the efforts being made in Glenties for the Tidy Towns competition where everyone cleaned and painted their houses as an act of religion³. The Corpus Christi procession in the town was also a particularly special occasion when shopkeepers replaced the merchandise in their shop windows with altars and the priest asked people to emulate the Blessed Virgin with tidiness and her other virtues. It is no surprise that the Late Late Show was literally explosive in communities such as this all over Ireland where civic and religious life were up to now intimately entwined.

2 *The Government and Politics of Ireland*, Oxford University Press, London, Stanford University Press, 1970

3 *Occasions of Sin*, Profile Books, 2009

ENTWINEMENT

In fact, 'entwined' is a conservative term for the overpowering role religion and religious events played in lives in the late fifties and pre-Vatican II days. All meetings and events started with 'Reverend Father, Ladies and Gentlemen' – because the parish priest was almost certainly there in the middle of the front row. Sunday Mass was a *sine qua non* and a grave mortal sin was the penalty for missing it: young people went from their Saturday night parties to one of the dawn Masses that existed then in Dublin. Lent was a serious business for children and adults alike and daily Mass the rule rather than the exception. Sacraments were treated with utmost reverence and never social occasions, apart from marriage which was always held early because of the requirement to fast from midnight before receiving the Eucharist. First Holy Communion was then also held early in the day often followed by a cup of tea and buns – and in some lucky areas, breakfast – after which the dress was removed and carefully packed away for the next sister. One received a few gifts such as a prayer book and, particularly, holy pictures which were collected and swapped like cigarette cards after the event! Confirmation was a staid school affair and rarely the occasion for any celebration. And of course, Confession was at least once a fortnight, a painful ritual particularly for teenagers who had quickly learnt that sex, and especially thoughts about sex, were the only sins and mortal sin was a reality. It was the clear assumption that every bride had the right to wear white such was the influence of religion and the fear of damnation clearly spelt out from the pulpits in the Ireland of the time.

The sixties in fact marked a watershed for clerical power and church state relations in the country. John Charles McQuaid involved himself and the Church in all aspects of Irish life, political, social and religious. He was routinely involved or consulted on impending legislation. His opposition on health matters is now well documented but he greatly feared that the provision of health care for all mothers would lead to abortion and birth control. Though in the sixties, strict censorship was ameliorated, he kept a close eye on films and books to assess their morality and complained, if he felt necessary, to the Department of Justice. His influence was so great that the government felt that opposing him would win them no friends among the largely conservative and tradition-bound citizens. Diarmaid Ferriter, in *Occasions of Sin*, relates that when Brian Lenihan initiated liberalisation of the censorship law he said that 'any major changes would have to be preceded by consultation with church authorities'⁴. McQuaid notoriously said to his diocesans on his return from the final session of Vatican 2,

4 *Occasions of Sin*, Profile Books, 2009, p.387

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‘no change will worry the tranquillity of your Christian lives’. He was wrong.

MAJOR CHANGE

There was in fact major change occurring in unstoppable fashion. Not only was change occurring in society particularly in the cities but so too in the Church’s relationship with the state. The issue of church-state separation was raised by several Fathers in the initial debates on the documents particularly in the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* and The Constitution on the Church in the World Today, *Gaudium et Spes*. Whereas the Council shied away from an outright declaration on the question of separation, it said that ‘the community and the Church are independent of each other, and are autonomous, each in its own field’⁵. Independence of the Church in the State is not separation and, as the documents make clear, freedom within the State and the Church’s transcendence to the world were the issues together with a recognition of the duality of the person who as Leo XIII said is ‘both citizen and Christian’. However, in 1972, an amendment to the Constitution was passed, following a referendum, which deleted recognition of the special position of the Catholic Church.

McQuaid had little enthusiasm for the Council. He did attend it faithfully but was slow to implement changes when he returned particularly in the liturgy and increased lay participation as he considered them of little moment though he seems to have enjoyed contacts he made through the ‘new’ ecumenism especially with like-minded prelates from other, chiefly, Protestant communities. Masses were now said in English and altars moved so the priest now faced the people – often a rather bewildered community who had little explained to them, upsetting their acceptance of practices they considered normative. The liturgy was altered, again with little or no explanation with the result that to many it all appeared to be a rather cosmetic exercise. The elderly pined for the old familiar rituals; the young had other distractions.

The post-war growth of global capitalism was making itself felt together with the neoliberal doctrine of individualism bolstering the egoism of the young now exposed to new meanings and values from contact with other cultures through the media, especially television. Relaxation of the censorship laws made new books, magazines and films available goading the integrity of social and cultural dialectics. As Neil Ormerod points out ‘the Church had a classicist understanding of culture as a normative ideal that it possessed and others must attain’⁶ and was now in

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, n.76

⁶ ‘The Times They are A-Changin’ in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* (David G. Schultenover, ed.) *Continuum*, NY, London, 2008

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conflict as tradition and mores came under attack. Further, the repeated emphasis in the documents from the Council, particularly *Gaudium et Spes*, on the ‘dignity of conscience and its freedom of choice’ [n.40] encouraged an independence of thought and action previously unthinkable. Conscience is to be the ultimate arbiter on moral choice – as indeed it always had been but never so clearly or repeatedly stated. The fact that the Council emphasised that a conscience should be informed by the Church’s teachings and guidance, was secondary to many who seized on the idea of the primacy of conscience itself. This had particular relevance to a burning issue at the time, that of birth control. Many expected that with the advent of the ‘pill’⁷ the ruling of the Church might change during the Council. The lack of a favourable ruling – and the subsequent issue of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 – led many to turn their back on Confession or to decide that their ‘conscience’ would not allow them to have more children – or not yet.

PRESERVING THE INSTITUTION

The recognition and the promise of a new way of being in the world, learning from the world, while being very much part of *Gaudium et Spes* was not broadcast to the people. Rather than looking for a ‘new way of being in the world’, the Church in Ireland seemed hardwired into preserving the institution of the Church rather than encouraging a sense of community and facing down the growing cult of individualism. This failure was a major contributory cause of the decline in church attendance. Coverage in the media was less than adequate but, vitally, the import and essence of what had happened at the Council was not transmitted from the altars in Ireland. Enthusiasm for lay participation in the parishes was patchy and slow to develop and female involvement, in particular, was only very gradually accepted – other than to clean the churches and arrange the flowers. Even in the late sixties, the idea of women coming into the sanctuary as ministers of the word was rejected in many churches. The idea that the Church could learn from a culture rather than insisting on forming that culture was almost revolutionary but was a concept that passed by the Church in Ireland for the most part. The language and tone of that document in particular, being pastoral and empirical rather than juridical, was not repeated from the altars here in the sixties – or even the seventies. Rather it seeped in as the Church played catch-up with a dwindling audience. The people had left the room.

7 The contraceptive pill, by preventing conception was not therefore an abortifacient.

The Catholic Church and Irish Violence

Eóin de Bháldraithe

As we prepare for the next papal visit in two years' time, it would be well to ask how much did we learn from the last one. The answer would have to be, 'Very little'.

Just a month before St John Paul came in 1979,

'eighteen soldiers are killed in an IRA bomb blast at Narrow Water near Warrenpoint, Co. Down. A 500 lb bomb planted in a lorry loaded with hay is detonated by the IRA as an army convoy drives past, killing six members of the Parachute Regiment. A second explosion in the same area damages a helicopter carrying members of a 'quick reaction force' from the Queen's Own Highlanders, killing twelve soldiers including the commanding officer.'¹

Archbishop Ryan of Dublin issued a statement referring to the 'killing', rather than the 'murder'. 'You see', said one senior Dublin priest to me, 'Ryan didn't come down in the last shower'.

At Drogheda, the Pope said: the situation here is unjust, but violence is not the way to resolve it. We need to get back to the teaching of Jesus. Violence is the way of hatred and fratricide. Peace is the way to justice. He quoted several times the words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew: 'All who take the sword, fall by the sword.' To the young people in Galway he proposed the 'particularly difficult' phrase: 'love your enemies'. These are not just his words but the very word of God. To this they were specially bound *as Catholics*. Those words take away hatred; young souls are caught up in this hatred and 'we cannot either counsel or assist them'. A constant theme of his was that murder is murder. We should not call it by any other name. He is convinced that the Irish were consumed by hatred. Our attitude 'bears the mark of destruction

1 Quoted from P. Bew and G. Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-99* (Dublin 1999) 135-36

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and the brand of Cain'. He called on the (Catholic) men of violence to renounce their campaign. He did not say that they were justified in any way. Rather, return to Christ and he will forgive you.²

It is easy to compare the official approach in Ireland as Bishop (later Cardinal) Cahal Daly, the principal spokesman, had published two volumes of his speeches on the troubles.³ His first outing was at the reburial of Roger Casement (1965). He claimed that the IRA violence of 1916 was 'just and necessary' but that of the current IRA was not. He even goes so far as to say that 'the heroism of both soldiers and civilians in that (1916) struggle wrote a glorious chapter in our history.' He kept up this theme for the next twenty years or so. Perhaps he endorsed 1916 too unthinkingly, not realising what he was letting himself in for.

Enda McDonagh says, 'The official and probably majority attitude in Church and state in the Republic of Ireland today is that 1916 and the subsequent war of independence was a good thing and effective but that the campaign of the new IRA cannot justly claim to be in that tradition and is doomed to be ineffective.'⁴ He goes on to show that it is nearly impossible to defend this view, but Daly hammered away defending it.

The bishop also allowed the view to circulate that he had written the Drogheda speech for the Pope. Certain parts of it are indeed in his style. Peace, he says, is the work of justice but he never says with the Pope that violence is the way of hatred. How could he, if 1916 was so noble? Among his more unfortunate contributions to this speech was the statement that the troubles were 'not a religious war'. Yet his predecessor, Cardinal Conway, was wont to say that they were not *primarily* religious. Even if they were only one percent religious, the churches were responsible for that much but Daly absolves himself completely. The sword-word is foreign to his vocabulary. The Pope's passionate words: violence is 'evil, a lie, it destroys what it claims to defend, it is a crime against our faith and humanity', are miles apart from those of Daly.

As Daly's thought deteriorated he eventually came to define murder as 'killing of the innocent' perhaps not realising that this allowed killing of the guilty.⁵ That was rather serious in a society where people take the law into their own hands. For example, the Kingsmills massacre (1976) was probably the most notorious sectarian killing of the whole campaign. There were some Catholics killed in the area a month previously, so 'republicans decided to

2 See my article: 'The Pope on Violence', *Doctrine and Life* 30 (1979) 634-55.

3 C.B. Daly, *Violence in Ireland and the Christian Conscience; Peace the Work of Justice* (Dublin 1973 & 1979).

4 E. McDonagh, *Gift and Call* (Dublin 1975) 150.

5 Daly, *Peace*, 84-85.

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respond with even more brutality.⁶ The IRA stopped a minibus and ordered the eleven Protestants to line up at the side. They called on the one Catholic present to 'walk down the road and not to look back'. They fired 136 shots at the Protestants aimed at the waist. The leader then gave orders to 'finish them off'. As one person went along shooting them in the head, he was deceived by Alan Black's bushy hair and the bullet just grazed his skull and so he survived to tell the tale.

On the previous day, five Catholics had been shot dead in the same area. A friend 'explained' to me that those ten were killed because it was certain that the group included four who were guilty of killing the Catholics. He was thus a faithful disciple of Daly.

We know now, however, that the killing of the Catholics had nothing to do with the massacre as the IRA had researched it most carefully for a long time. It is even known who led the murderers but he cannot be named yet for legal reasons. Their choice was particularly unfortunate as all the Protestants were from Bessbrook, a Quaker village, where the ideals of nonviolence and common ownership survive to a large extent.

After the visit Archbishop Ryan said that the papal teaching was nothing new; it was just the same as what the Irish bishops were saying all along. As we all do sometimes, he and Daly must have been hearing without listening!

Why it took another fifteen years for a ceasefire to emerge will be debated for the next thousand years and more. The clever response of the IRA is worth quoting:

'In all conscience we believe that force is by far the only means of removing the evil of the British presence in Ireland ... we know also that upon victory, the Church would have no difficulty in recognising us'.⁷ Who would dare say that they had this last thing wrong?

CHURCH TEACHING

Here I would like to offer a very brief history of Christian attitudes to violence. The Greek philosophers debated the matter but it is the ethics of Cicero that survived as the most authoritative. Jesus in his turn taught non-resistance, non-violence, what we call full pacifism.

The very early church law insisted that the homicidal violence of soldiers was incompatible with the Christian way of life. We know this from the Syrian and Ethiopic versions and the earliest

6 T. Harnden, *Bandit Country: The IRA & South Armagh* (London 1999) 133.

7 Bew and Gillespie, 137.

Roman version as far as we can reconstruct it.⁸ Roland Bainton in his history of Christian attitudes to war, shows how Augustine and especially Ambrose simply repeat the ideas of Cicero.⁹ The former insisted that one must love the enemy even while striking him down. He successfully urged Constantine to use the army to bring the Donatist heretics to heel and signalled other ‘just’ wars (about 410 AD).

When the Moslems rose some two hundred years later, they were at first regarded as heretics, that is, seriously in error but still Christian brothers and sisters.¹⁰ By the time of the first Crusade, the church had classified them as ‘infidels’ whom it was lawful to fight. The Pope himself was now allowed to initiate war and the main incentive he had to offer was the plenary indulgence which turned it into a penitential exercise. When the second Crusade was proclaimed, St Bernard made the theology more flexible. He dispensed people from Augustine’s love; rather should they say with the psalmist, ‘Lord, do I not hate those who hate you? I have hated them with a perfect hate’ (Psalm 139:21-22). It was not murder to kill a Muslim, it was the will of God. To die in battle was to go straight to heaven. He founded the Orders of Knights who believed passionately in this holy death. To our great surprise both Augustine and Bernard forbade killing in self defence as Jesus did to Peter.

After the Reformation, the church did not re-found the Orders of Knights and generally abandoned the theology of Crusades. One of the last was that of Gregory XIII to Ireland (1580). When a few decades later the church was trying to shed the crusading theology, the Jesuit Francisco Suarez was one of the main actors. It was still acceptable to attack heretics or non-Christians but he ruled out this option and, depending mainly on Cicero, laid down criteria for Christian princes attacking one another. This is still the bedrock of international law and the philosophical basis of the United Nations and its policy of self defence.¹¹

For Suarez pacifism was a heresy and so it remained till our own day. The credit for changing that goes to Thomas Merton and the influence of his Quaker mother. (Quakers of course are traditionally pacifist.) In 1983 the bishops of the USA wrote a pastoral, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and our Response*, which had

8 ‘The Church’s First Official Position – and its Withering Away’ in J-M. Hornus, *It is not Lawful for me to Fight: Early Christian Attitudes toward War, Violence, and the State* (Scottsdale PA: Herald 1980) 158-99.

9 RH Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (London 1961).

10 most notably St John of Damascus (Damascene); see S. Griffith, *The Church under the Shadow of the Mosque* (Oxford 2008).

11 During the conflict, Cardinal Basil Hume claimed that the Falklands were ‘ours’ and expelling the Argentinians was self defence.

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the effect of rendering the pacifist option acceptable inside the Catholic Church.

McDonagh says again, commenting on the theory that sometimes war is justified:

It may be that in special circumstances a holding operation is all that can be achieved and violence done to individuals or groups has to be forcibly restrained. Yet the individual Christian and the Christian community can only recognise this as a failure to release the divine saving gift.¹²

The last few words are his description of the Christian attitude. His 'holding operation' refers to the police function, sometimes called 'an interim ethic'. John Howard Yoder belonging to the Mennonites, another pacifist church, explains very clearly the difference between the police function and the aggressive role.¹³ So there are three possibilities today: there is the just war; there is the view that this is only an interim ethic and there is the full Christian doctrine of non-resistance.

It is reported that the present Pope would wish to write an encyclical on this theme of non-violence taking up the words of John Paul, 'Violence is a lie'.¹⁴ He could very well use his Irish mission to rehearse his theology on the matter. Certainly we need to hear those words again. John Paul returned to the theme again in Vienna 1983. He recalled the role of John Sobieski, his fellow countryman in raising the siege of Vienna. Yet there was no endorsement of the method. Rather,

We understand that *the language of arms is not the language of Jesus Christ* ... armed combat is, at best, an inevitable ill in which even Christians may be involved ... Christ turns every one of my enemies into a brother ... worthy of my love.

This is now official RC teaching, however much it is ignored. If the present Pope recalls us to that, it will be a great blessing.

IRISH CULTURAL ROOTS

Our attitude here is an inheritance from the European wars of religion; our thirty years of 'troubles' resembles the Thirty Years' War

¹² Mc Donagh, *Gift* 166.

¹³ J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Michigan 1972). The Mennonite church founded in 1527, ten years after Luther posted his theses, espoused non-violence. The Catholic authorities usually executed them by drowning in Switzerland and buried them alive in the Netherlands. To learn more just google *Schleitheim*, their basic confession.

¹⁴ *The Tablet*, 23 April 2016, 12.

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in Germany with the same proportion of people killed. Especially interesting is the discovery of 'the same plenary indulgence and remission of sins that those receive who fight against the Turks' offered to the Irish by Pope Gregory XII for fighting the heretics.¹⁵ This is the distant justification for the violence in Co. Cork after 1921. All Protestants were regarded as legitimate targets, whether they were actually involved or not. See Peter Hart, especially the chapter on, 'Taking it out on the Protestants'.¹⁶ This is a clear survival of the crusading ideal. Republicans cleverly claim that there is no sectarian dimension to their campaign. But it is just a new name adopted after the French Revolution to cover the same reality. For example Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin prayed for the Stuart Pretender *a bhrúfas an bruscar sin Lúithear is Sheáin* (who will crush the rubbish [that is the followers] of Luther and Jean [Calvin].)

Irish Catholic culture is still deeply marked by sectarianism leading to a toleration or even consecration of violence. I offer two examples. John Blowick, the founder of the Society and the Sisters of St Columban wrote as follows:

I am strongly of the opinion that the Rising of 1916 helped our work indirectly. I know for a fact that many of the young people of the country had been aroused into a state of heroism by the Rising of 1916 and by the manner in which the leaders met their death. I can affirm this from personal experience. And, accordingly, when we put our appeal before the young people of the country, it fell on a soil which was better prepared to receive it than if there never had been an Easter Week.¹⁷

The missionaries brought with them the limitations of the time and especially the opposition to Protestants who were regarded as competitors. Training priests in Latin was a serious handicap. The treatment of female missionaries left much to be desired. Despite their best efforts, they were identified with the western powers and merited the hatred of the locals. They looked on other religions as devil worship and were unready for the Vatican Council teaching on 'what is true and holy in those religions'. The control exercised by Propaganda was a major obstacle to change. This paragraph

15 J. Liechty, C. Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Dublin 2001) 75.

16 P. Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies* (Oxford 1998)

17 quoted from Brendan Fahey, 'Mayo and China: John Blowick, Missionary Priest'. E. McDonagh (ed.) *Survival or Salvation? A Second Mayo Book of Theology* (Dublin 1994) 150-59

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summarises the views of Neil Collins, their official biographer.¹⁸ Páraic Ó Murchú gives a graphic account of the crisis caused by Vatican II among his theologically illiterate brethren.¹⁹

Another indication is the mosaic of Patrick Pearse in Galway Cathedral. This is how it is described in an anonymous article on the internet.

Pearse was an educationalist which might have rated him a mention here but the mosaic is clearly a product of his canonisation following the blood sacrifice of 1916. The close identity between Irish nationalism/republicanism and the Catholic church (*pace* the odd excommunication here and there), capped by the blood sacrifice, earned Pearse a place of honour in the church's iconography.²⁰

These two examples show how close Catholic culture is to violence. As John Paul said, 'it bears the brand of Cain' and we have exported it.

Who will deliver us from the body of this death?

It may be a surprise that I would suggest ex-Pope Benedict XVI, but we need somebody of his theological calibre as the apologists of Irish nationalism are competent and clever. He would go before the present Pope like John the Baptist; otherwise the papal words might wash over our heads as they did the last time.

Early in 2006 the British Parliament legislated that if there was no agreement between the parties in Northern Ireland by 26 March, then the province would come under direct London/Dublin government. A few days beforehand Pope Benedict joined the international chorus urging agreement. He said that it would be a 'powerful Christian witness'. Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams finally sat down opposite one another at a diagonal table on the appointed day. *The Irish Catholic* presented the event the following week with Paisley and Adams pictured together under a large-print caption, 'A powerful Christian witness'. The new Executive was duly formed and Paisley became First Minister with Martin Mc Guinness as Deputy. The old man treated his deputy as if he were his own son for the year of their joint reign. This cemented the agreement and prepared the way for the more frayed relationship with Peter Robinson that would follow. If one were to invite Ratzinger here he would at least be able to explain why this is such

18 *The Splendid Cause: The Missionary Society of St Columban 1916-54* (Dublin 2009) especially 289-300.

19 *Misean Mhá Nuat chun an tSine* 1916-63 (FÁS 2003).

20 accessed 15 November 2015. To grasp the full extent of Pearse's dedication to the blood sacrifice, see S. Murphy, 'Dark Liturgy, Bloody Praxis: the 1916 Rising', *Studies* 105 (2016) 12-23.

a strong Christian witness, a theme which will be new and very new to most of us.

On the first anniversary *The Irish Times* editorialised as follows: ‘A powerful Christian witness to the world. Christians working out their problems in a very reconciliatory way ... witness to on-going problems of the Balkans and Middle East, both of which have religious components.’ Presidents Clinton and Obama have consistently emphasised this dimension.

One could suggest that Benedict visit Corrymeela in north Antrim. This community was founded by Ray Davey, a Presbyterian minister, in 1965 before the ‘troubles’ began. John Coakley reminded us of ‘the frequently invisible, self-effacing and unassuming work of teams of external facilitators that eventually led to the “stunning” success of the present settlement’ (*The Irish Times*, 11 July 2007). Those teams frequently met in Corrymeela during the darkest days.

It may be possible also for him to pray at the site of the Kingsmills massacre and meet the surviving Protestant. The incident occasioned a cartoon in Germany of gunmen ordering Jesus out of a minibus and asking if he were Catholic or Protestant. That shows clearly how the war was interpreted as religious outside Ireland, despite the denials of Daly and John Paul. Papa Ratzinger may even remember the cartoon.

We could also show him the huge iron gate at the bottom of Shankill Road, the ‘Peaceline’ and bring him to see the enormously high divider beside St Matthew’s Church in The Short Strand. There he could add his Christian voice to that of Obama urging people to dismantle the walls.

This is not to say that Benedict’s teaching will please everybody. It is well known that he differed from John Paul’s more radical pacifism. For us here this is a small point. The new Executive has a longstanding problem of how to deal with ‘The Past’. We need to stop extolling and even consecrating the violence.²¹ We need to shed the relics of the crusading mentality. Benedict could add his weight to the words Queen Elizabeth spoke to us while she was in Dublin Castle, ‘We bow to the past but we are not bound by it’.

Joseph Liechty, an American Mennonite and Cecelia Clegg, a Catholic nun, were joint authors of *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*²² which reflected the work done by Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI). This in turn led the Loyalists to accept the new policy of co-operation with Catholics, the leading politician being the deeply regretted David Ervine. The second chapter

21 see G. Daly (ed.) *The Church and the Rising* (Dublin 2016) for a whole range of churchmen endorsing 1916.

22 note 15 above.

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outlines the history of sectarianism telling the story of both sides. Catholics need to acknowledge the hurt we have caused in the past such as in the 1641 rebellion. The Protestants may be in denial about the actions of Cromwell in 1649, but if we criticise that we are just entering into the powerful river of sectarianism. Protestants remember 1641 as the Catholics stabbing them in the back and Cromwell in 1649 has an eternal place in Catholic mythology.²³ Benedict could teach us that we need to forgive our enemies even when they crucify us. Those two authors warn us that any attempt to strengthen the boundaries between the two communities is a sectarian act and to this theologians and historians are especially prone. They conclude by insisting that ‘benign apartheid’ will never be enough in Northern Ireland; we need full reconciliation. Some input from Benedict on those lines would lead us on a long way from where we are.

²³ *ibid.* 77.

Too close to death. This dislike of getting too close to death is reflected in the relatively low number of people who have made arrangements for what they would like to happen to them if they became terminally ill or died (Weafer 2014c). While just over half of Irish adults have seriously considered their views on organ donation and whether they would rather be buried or cremated, and around a third have drawn up a will, most Irish people have never seriously considered other important aspects of death, such as telling people where their important documents are, their views on life-prolonging treatment, what they would like at their funeral, their religious or cultural preferences, power of attorney, or advance care directives. In most cases, the proportion of people who had recorded instructions on these issues was typically less than 10%.

– JOHN A. WEAFFER, *Death and the Irish*, ed. Salvador Ryan (Dublin: Wordwell Ltd.) p.274.

Homilies for January (A)

Robert Fleck

Mary The Holy Mother of God

January 1

Num 6:22-27. Ps 66: 2-3, 5, 6, 8. R/v2. Gal 4:4-7. Lk 2:16-21

Mothers have an amazing vocation. They conceive a child. They nurture it within their body and then give birth. They rear the child for the first 18 or so years of its life. Then they begin to let go. The process of letting go had begun many years before. When they first left the child with grandparents to enjoy a night out on their own or more so when they first saw the young child off to school for the first time, they began the life long journey of saying good bye.

Even though they engaged with this coming and going in good faith there were times when it was more than difficult. Sickness in the child brings out a side of the mother's bonding with her child that puts a lioness or tigress to shame. No one rivals a mother caring for the child with cancer or any other ailment of modern living. How often we meet this in parish life!

Not only does this occur in dealing with a sick child. The mature couple of whom the husband is struck down with motor neurone disease finds the wife and mother caring for and feeding and dressing her husband as she did her children. The list is endless.

I bought a picture of Mother Teresa in the local parish centre in Newcastle recently. It was there for her canonisation. It is not a picture of a smiling joy-filled woman whom we would all recognise. Instead it is the face ploughed by years of working with the poorest of the poor. She is turning over her rosary beads one at a time. It is the picture of someone who knows suffering and is familiar with it. As she said herself it is the face of someone who is faithful not successful. She too knows the joys and sorrows of motherhood.

Another face of motherhood I have experienced recently was on a trip to London with the Legion of Mary. These pilgrims of faith, persisted in knocking doors and waiting for an answer long after I was on the way to the next block of houses. These women thirsted for contact with the needy and the immigrant and stranger.

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This is what we celebrate today. Mary is a mother. In the disturbing picture that is *The Passion* by Mel Gibson, some of the scenes between Jesus and his mother are pure tender love. The banter between them is worthy of any slick talker from one of our major cities. The contrast with the violence done to her Son is enormous. Mary is the Mother of the God who suffers and walks with us. How much he must have learnt sitting at her feet as a young one. Paul VI talked of the school that was and is Nazareth. We all have something to learn from this drama enacted daily in our parishes.

No wonder it is also the World Day of Peace. What we learn in the home is what we carry onto our streets. Let us learn the message of tenderness – a word so beloved of Pope Francis – and that Jesus was imbued with by his divinity and his humanity with Mary and Joseph. Mary is the mother of us all.

Feast of the Epiphany

January 6

Is 60:1-6. Ps 71:1-2, 7-8, 10-13. R/cf v 11. Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6,
Mt. 2: 1-12

I have a picture by Giotto of the Epiphany in my prayer room. It is dripping with gold and sparkle. Even Our Lady and St. Joseph are dressed in style. The poorest looking figure is that of the child Jesus. He is dressed with simple swaddling clothes and nothing else. Perhaps this is one of the key messages of the picture. It lives out what the last line of the psalm says: For he shall save the poor when they cry / And the needy who are helpless / He will have pity on the weak / And save the lives of the poor.

Amidst all the pretension of the picture with the wise men dressed in kingly attire and the simple but shining clothes of Mary and Joseph, this is the Saviour at work among them in his simplicity. He is virtually naked. This reminds me of the line from St. Bonaventure's defence of the Mendicant poverty of the Franciscans, *Nudum Christum nudus sequi* – nakedly to follow the naked Christ. I believe he took it from St. Jerome. Even in his childhood Jesus challenges us by his poverty, while we the Gentiles, represented by the Magi, strut around in our finery. The bright clothes of Our Lady and St. Joseph may be simple, but they the Jewish people have also something to learn from this child of theirs. Jesus is the real prophet in the picture. Like Ezechiel he questions our behaviour not by words but by symbols. He cannot speak but eloquently calls us to simplicity. The gifts of the Magi are almost irrelevant. The kingly crown of the figure kissing the child is discarded. True greatness is found in adoration of this child who holds out his hands in welcome for those who come from afar.

HOLILIES FOR JANUARY (A)

Accordingly what gifts can we offer or bring to this simple child? In the words of the carol we could bring a lamb, but in the early 21st century this may not be possible. We should respond by our personal encounter with the poor one. For some of us Christmas is over and the time for gifts has passed. But in some Mediterranean countries the feast of the Epiphany is the time for gifts. I remember being in Naples one Epiphany time and the streets, often dilapidated and running with water from the winter rain, full of people out getting gifts for their children in memory of the Befana, the old woman associated with Epiphany.

In our country Trócaire still runs its gift cards throughout the year. If we haven't received or given them at Christmas could we do so for the Epiphany? Perhaps there is little money left after the splashing out that is now Christmas? A recalling of the poverty of the child Jesus may jolt us all back to a deeper reality faced by so many of the world's population. It may revive in our so fleeting memories the words of Pope Francis, a poor church for a poor people.

The Baptism of the Lord

January 8

Is 42: 1-4, 6-7. Ps 28:1-4, 9-10. R/v11. Acts 10:34-28.

Mt 3: 13-17

If you were to choose a soup to depict John the Baptist or Jesus what would you choose? To my way of thinking John the Baptist would be a fine consommé, austere and delicate. Jesus on the other hand would be a substantial vegetable soup with eating and drinking in it.

Whatever your choice there can be no denying the contrast in the scriptures between these two people, one the last of the Old Testament prophets and the other the Son of God. John comes preaching a message of repentance and baptism by water. He is a creature of the desert. Jesus on the other hand while preaching a similar message of conversion engages with the sinner and the outcast. He is their special friend. He shares table fellowship with them especially in the gospel of Luke. Jesus is at home with people whoever they may be.

Despite the contrast with the figure of John and Jesus there is plenty to unite them. Today's feast shows us this union. They are together, perhaps for the first time since they greeted each other in the womb of their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary at the visitation. At least that is the story of the New Testament accounts. Now as John preaches and baptises, Jesus joins the queue. He is one with us, not in sin but in solidarity of mankind. Then it is his turn. There is a debate with John, but the Baptist gives in and baptises the Christ.

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Now the mission of Jesus begins. He takes over from where John is about to leave off because of his imprisonment. Their respective ministries are what unites them. They are proclaiming the good news.

Many children throughout the world will be preparing for baptism today. Will they be a new generation of baptised pagans or will they have this implicit faith awakened by us, the Church of believers? That is our responsibility. For this mission of ours which following John and Jesus carries on where they left off, we will need sustenance. We will need to read and absorb the scriptures, the various catechisms for our times and be fed by the living presence of the crucified and risen One in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. In so many ways in life we will deepen our encounter with Jesus who reveals the Father and by the power of the Holy Spirit sends us on our mission.

Yes today is a day of beginning and attempts at starting again. Jesus begins his mission. We begin again our baptismal mission of proclaiming the Christ among us as we engage with a hostile and uninterested world. This world has affected our faith. We need to be baptised by the Spirit not just John's baptism of water. We need to be purified by fire that is the Holy Spirit so that we can indeed offer the message in its purity. It is not just a message for priests and by priests. The whole Christian community is called by its baptism to take on the world not least of which are its own members being baptised today.

May we drink the soup which is John and Jesus as we listen to their meeting with each other. May we be converted ever more deeply to the mission of them both to proclaim the Good News.

Second Sunday of the Year

January 15

Is 49: 3, 5-6. Ps 39: 2, 4, 7-10. R/vv 8, 9. 1 Cor 1:1-3. Jn 1:29-34

There are two ways of becoming a migrant or refugee. The first possibility can be a free choice. For example to choose for religious or cultural or economic reasons to go to another country. We can say that the popes of recent times have been migrants. They have come from outside Italy and agreed for religious reasons to take up residence in Rome.

The second way is through unforeseen circumstances. These may be economic or cultural. Examples of these would be the disaster that is the Middle East and Syria in particular. People are trying to escape to Europe because of the war and the cultural collision between Isis and the other groups of people living there.

Pope Francis, a migrant himself has given particular attention to

this phenomenon of our times. In many ways it is not just of our times but it has become a searing problem for world governments particularly in the Mediterranean Basin. From what I can gather the Pope has taken to himself the responsibility with others of focusing attention on this problem for world peace.

In Ireland over the years we have had to face up to the fact of emigration of our young, largely for work in places like England and further afield. Whole villages have been affected in recent years. Even the GAA has had problems fielding parish teams, because the young have gone abroad.

We have also faced the phenomenon especially during the Celtic Tiger Years of an influx of immigrants from many countries into our own land. These have brought new energy as well as attendant issues of adapting on all sides to a new culture.

Even within our country there has been internal migration to the bigger cities such as Dublin. During the beginning of the Troubles in the North many Catholic families went south to escape the devastation of so many communities by violence.

Migration and refugees are simply part of modern living. The horror that is the sight of refugees trying to make it to Europe in primitive sailing boats is part of the media landscape.

What does the person of faith do and say in the face of all this? The first response must be practical. Can we help in any way by raising money and organising accommodation for those who come to our shores? It is not just a political response that is required. Attitudes must change. Can we accommodate the strangers who present themselves in so many guises, very different from ourselves? The challenge is ongoing.

The first reading today from the prophet Isaiah says to the people of Israel and to ourselves, 'I will make you the light of the nations.' This is the deeper challenge migration and refugees present to us. Can we engage with them in dialogue to help heal their traumatic wounds of body and soul? Without proselytising can we all be at peace with different cultures and religious expressions that so many of the refugees bring with them? Let us be the light of the world so that the salvation of God may reach not only to the ends of the earth but to the paths and byways of our own country.

Third Sunday of the Year

January 22

Is 8:23-9:3. Ps 26: 1, 4, 13-14. R/v1. 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17.

Mt 4:12-23

During a retreat as a young student for the priesthood I was with another young man who had been appointed novice master of

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his Order. He showed me a picture of the Annunciation by Fra Angelico that is to be found in San Marco Convent in Florence. He said to me that it captured just what prayer was all about. Our Lady was dressed in simple Dominican habit stooping forward to hear the word of the angel, the word of God being spoken to her. This picture of a listening woman has stayed with me over the years guiding my efforts at prayer.

It was also the beginning for me of looking out for other works of art which would speak to me about the ways of God with men. Another card I came across when I was preparing for ordination was the figure of the Lord reaching out to whomsoever and calling them to follow him. It was taken from a bigger picture by Duccio of the call of the apostles Peter and Andrew which was the other half of the picture. It has remained in my breviary over these years as a reminder of the constant call of Jesus to me in my own way to follow him. No doubt so many have similar holy reminders in their breviaries or prayer books or whatever.

This picture captures what the gospel of today is all about, the call of the first apostles. It reminds me of another saying by I think it was Dostoevsky, that the world will be saved by beauty. There are many types of beauty just as there are many different art forms. We can even say that there are as many forms of beauty as there are people. Some like Pope Benedict are clearly carriers of a sophisticated aestheticism. Mozart and profound thinking went hand in hand. Others like Pope Francis are bearers of a more earthy beauty. He appears to be more at home in a subway train in Buenos Aires going to work than in a European concert hall. All of us, pope or simple believer, have our own type of beauty.

As Jesus begins his mission, taking over from John the Baptist in Matthew's gospel, we ask him to show us his beauty as Lord and Saviour. May he do this by showing us the beauty of each individual we meet or come across at work or at home. We carry the light of our baptism in us. Yes we can be called into a darkness that is part of growing up and maturing as Christians. Some may even be called into a deep darkness where God is hidden from us. Eventually, either in this life or in the next we are called to walk in the light of Easter. The process of education which we experience as we grow is to light this fire that gives the light. It is also the beginning of Catholic Schools Week. May this at its best be a lighting of a fire which will lead us into the light. May that light show us the beauty of God's creation which will lead us to salvation. May we indeed be saved by beauty, the beauty of the resurrection which enlightens our world.

Fourth Sunday of the Year

January 29

Zeph: 2:3, 3:12-13. Ps 145: 7-10. R/Mt 5:3. 1 Cor 1:26-31

Mt 5:1-12

The week of prayer for Christian Unity has just ended with the feast of the conversion of St. Paul. It would be remiss of someone from the 'black north' to pass it by without saying something about inter-church life or ecumenism.

I belong to three groups of people who meet on various occasions of the month to pray with scripture and to discuss aspects of the Christian faith. A type of *lectio divina* characterises two of these groups. The members come from across the church divide. They bring their own charisms and light from these perspectives. The discussion and prayer takes on a different hue depending on who leads the session. Variety is the spice of life and of church life as well.

Again I have a piece of Irish art in my prayer room of a group of pilgrims rowing a boat with someone to guide them in the rear of the vessel. It is a scene of activity and coordinated energy. The title of the work is simply, 'strength in unity'. This is my symbol for all these people in the different inter-church groups I belong to. Quite simply put, it is better when we all work together. This does not mean an irenic, lifeless, dull unanimity. The discussions as I have hinted in some of the groups can be far from dull. We carry our own individual differences and those of our respective churches or ecclesial communities.

No doubt such groups are part of life in so many of our parishes and big cities these days. That they are also part of life in the north is important to state and to proclaim. Some have paid a heavy price for such activity. In a part of our country where religious life and faith have been a matter of life and death and in some occasions still are despite the tremendous progress achieved, we need such coming together to refuse to let the light of belief be extinguished from our land.

That this is a challenge that faces all of us north and south goes without saying. I remember as a young priest in the company of my father and aunt who was a member of the Columban sisters missionary order, saying that what the north needed was a good dose of secularism so that we could all start again. This is what is happening now in Ireland just as it did in mainland Europe many years ago. And it is hurting. On a recent television programme in the evening a young man in the audience talked of the 'rubbish' that was Christianity. Not one member of the audience or the presenter brought him to task for saying so. Again if this had been another religious tradition would they have got away with this?

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I believe that no one church can tackle this problem of secularism alone. Our very divisions prevent us from presenting a united front on what is essential. Strength does indeed come from unity.

When we read the Magna Charta that is the Beatitudes in today's gospel from Matthew we hear so many blessings on those who stand up for their faith. The north of our country has lived these out as in so many other places. We have met the poor in spirit; we know who the gentle are; we have wept with those who mourn; we have been strengthened by those who hunger and thirst for what is right; we are learning the message of mercy on a daily basis; there are not enough pure of heart or those who strive for peace; we know those who have been persecuted in the cause of right from all sides; to our shame we also know those who were abused and persecuted because they were on the side of Jesus. Those who will possess the kingdom of God are in our midst.

May we learn to be and do the beatitudes together because strength does come from unity and our country and world need it to be so. This is ecumenism in our times.

Going Home. Soon I must take my leave. Down the lane, back down the brae, left and then right, over the bridge and past Paddy Larry's. Tomorrow I will visit Oram school and tell the children of my love for Drumacon and the magical farm nestling among those wee hills. And on my way home to Galway I will stop at the cemetery in Castleblayney and pay my respects at the graves of those gentle souls, who in their time led honest and simple lives and to whom I will be forever indebted for their nurture and their love.

– JOHN QUINN, *This Place Speaks to Me*, (Dublin: Veritas) p.234.

News and Views

Empty Pews. A Personal Story of One Empty Space. *Ms. Maria Moran, Cooleycall Lodge, Baldwinstown, Bridgetown, Co. Wexford writes:*

Some months ago (*The Furrow*, July/August 2016) I made my personal struggle public. Sometimes, even though you know in your heart and soul what must be done, it can still feel challenging and this, for me, was one of those times. I realised the importance of not slipping out the back door and felt an obligation to hold my truth in the light of day. But I need not have feared and was rewarded greatly by a deepening sense of the 'Light of God' in my life. One of the ways this was made manifest was through the many letters, emails and phone calls I received from all of you. So many that I feel unable to write to each person individually. I apologise for that. The time, care and insight offered to me was such a gift as I began to seek a balance between the 'certainty and uncertainty' of my decision to leave the diocesan church. I miss the companionship found in attending church on a weekly basis and meeting my community in prayer on one hand and on the other I feel free of the heartbreak and dwindling sense of spirit that I had endured for too long.

Some realisations I have reached include the fact that God does not reside solely in the Church buildings ... as I had suspected he has not been held captive there! So many of you showed me that in what you wrote. The sacrament of love and kindness shown by you all was sustaining and nurturing ... manna from heaven! The reassurance of the solidarity that was expressed by so many of you who are also struggling, fostered my belief that the beginning of something new is indeed emerging. So many of you (both men and women) spoke so honestly out of your own experience of serving God in religious life; many priests described how, after a lifetime of serving on the missions worldwide in vibrant communities where active lay participation at liturgy was the norm, sadly came home to a very different reality of church in Ireland. The response from my lay peers ratified my own experience and helped to restore my sense of sanity, something for which I am very grateful. The good wishes, prayers and offers of support in many ways are much appreciated. I feel blessed indeed and very humbled by your generosity of spirit – thank you all. I am also indebted to *The Furrow* for publishing my

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article. This in itself and the response I received are an affirmation of the importance of breaking the silence of apparent compliance and for us all to speak honestly and openly. In this regard I look forward to reading future publications!

Call me naïve but (despite many of you warning me) I feel shocked that I did not get a single response, neither good nor bad, from the clergy within the diocesan Church in Ireland. That silence rings loud in my ears and saddens me greatly but perhaps confirms the belief that something new is being heralded.

Let us continue to pray for each other and to ‘stay awake’ in this time of much needed change and growth so that we can hear the ‘gentle whisper’ of the Lord in our lives.

Holy Communion – for Whom? *Fr. Aidan Carroll, 9 Hillcrest Manor, Templeogue, Dublin 6W writes:*

Fr Donal Dorr’s ‘Holy Communion – for Whom?’ (*The Furrow*, October 2016) raises some questions!

- Are we sure ‘The Parable of the Feast’ refers to the holy sacrifice of Calvary? What about the man who arrived with no wedding garment?
- Why no reference to the part in 1 Corinthians 11, which refers to unworthy reception of Holy Communion?
- Isn’t it important that we hold to the centuries old teaching that we believe in the real presence of Jesus and are free from serious sin?
- While no one is ‘expected to judge who may receive Holy Communion’ are not bishops and priests called to preach and teach deep reverence in its regard?
- Isn’t it true that many people actually come to the *event* and not to the *eucharist*?
- ‘It is not practical to forbid them from receiving’. Are not bishops and priests obliged to instruct and teach the sincere reception of Jesus?

Fr Dorr replies:

I welcome the comment of Fr. Carroll as a serious contribution to the reflection which I suggested in my article. I agree with several of the points in the comment. However, I note what seem to me to be two key words in the comment: the word ‘*unworthy*’ in his second question, and the word ‘*sincere*’ in his sixth. A central point of my article was that it does not seem to be possible in practice for priests

and Church authorities to make an on-the-spot judgement about which of those coming for communion are *unworthy* or which are sincere. We have to take account of the difference between, on the one hand, objective morality based on Church laws and rules, and, on the other hand, the personal conscience of each individual. That is a point which Pope Francis has been stressing quite a lot ever since he became pope. So I was suggesting that Church authorities might consider making a virtue of necessity by welcoming those who come with a sincere conscience.

The secularisation of death. Yet the secularisation of death – albeit of a non-enforced kind – is not entirely absent in Ireland either. The growth in popularity of secular humanist rites of passage in recent times attests to this. Although religion may not be entirely absent in such humanist services, the emphasis in these ceremonies is on disenchanting death by draining it of familiar religious-based elements such as clergy, church buildings and tradition-bound texts. For increasing numbers of atheists and non-religious people in Irish society, humanist services have obvious attractions. Even so, when their time has come, the majority of people in Ireland still opt for a church-based funeral. It may be that the ‘Catholic imagination’ – the bundle of images, symbols and texts that make up Catholic culture – continues to hold a difficult-to-discard appeal, even among former or lapsed Catholics, in the ritual marking of that most important of passages from this life to the other side of the grave.

– BRIAN CONWAY, *Death and the Irish*, ed. Salvador Ryan (Dublin: Wordwell Ltd.) p.279.

New Books

The Life of Dr. Thomas Hussey 1746-1803: Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. Liam Murphy. Dublin: Kingdom Books. Pp. 175. Price €20.00

The author of this fine book has been a distinguished high ranking civil servant in that most difficult of all government departments, Finance. Since his university years he has had a strong interest in and love for Irish history but his evident gifts as a writer had to be confined mainly to the drafting of budgets and financial forecasts, matters which would scare the life out of most of us. Since his retirement at a relatively young age historical research and writing has proved to be a joyful occupation for him and has been a gift of pleasure to his readers. I am happy to commend highly this excellent book on Thomas Hussey, scholar, serious priest, diplomat, servant of several nations, first president of Maynooth, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. It has been seriously researched, written with a suitable style, and brings to life a complex subject who was a highly respected figure in Ireland, England, Spain and other places. He became Bishop of Waterford and Lismore at a demanding and challenging time.

Thomas Hussey was a Meath man, born near Harristown in 1746, who left Ireland at the age of sixteen to enrol as a student for the priesthood in the English (not Irish) college at Seville in Spain. Like so many young Irishmen of his time he became European in his experiences and outlook. He was ordained priest in 1769, then took his doctorate in divinity from the University of Seville. He may possibly have heard of Waterford and Lismore for the first time during his young student days in Seville. The founder of the Irish college there had been Fr. Thomas White, Jesuit from Clonmel. Thomas and his brother Stephen, also a Jesuit, were both brilliant students in Spain. Thomas was founder of the Irish college in Salamanca in 1592, of the Irish college in Santiago in 1605, of Seville in 1612. Little would Hussey have thought, as he heard praise of the Whites, that one day he would be Bishop of the diocese in Ireland from which they came. Hussey himself clearly took to Spain and the Spanish authorities clearly thought well of him.

Shortly after his ordination and concluding studies he was given an unusual and quite unexpected appointment. He was appointed to be head chaplain to the Spanish Embassy in London. This was no sinecure assignment. It involved the holder in direct ambassadorial responsibilities and in representing the interests of Spain not just in London but in other major centres such as Paris, Berlin, Rome. Hussey became a well known figure in London circles. He was friend of statesmen such as the Duke of

Portland, Home Secretary, Lord Fitzwilliam who was to become Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1794-95, Lord Camden who was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1795-98. And there were literary figures such as the great Dr. Johnson and his biographer Boswell. Above all, Hussey became the closest of friends with the very special scholar/statesman Edmund Burke (1729-97). They admired each other, and Hussey held in high regard Burke's comments on his (Hussey's) statements and actions, particularly during the controversy which arose in connection with Hussey's famous pastoral letter when he was Bishop of Waterford and Lismore in 1797. Burke and Hussey discussed together in England the problem of educating Irish students for the priesthood in revolutionary Europe when many of the Irish colleges had to close. They both felt that the more lenient situation obtaining in Ireland at the time should be utilised to permit the creation of a national Seminary or, at least, the creation of provincial seminaries for the education and formation of priests for the home mission in Ireland. Hussey's name became strongly associated with the project of lobbying the British and Irish Governments to permit and subvent seminaries in Ireland.

The Irish Bishops were pleased to be involved. Hussey spent considerable time in Ireland in supporting the project. The eventual outcome was the establishment of Maynooth on 5 June 1795. Within three weeks its first President was chosen. There was a certain inevitability about the appointment of Thomas Hussey on 25 June 1795. The following day, 26 June, a Secretary to the Board of Trustees was chosen, Andrew Dunne, a Dublin priest. The following day again, 27 June, a Clonmel priest, Francis Power, was appointed Vice-president. On that same day a small crop of professors, the nucleus of the future Maynooth, was appointed. Several of them had been chosen by Hussey. Maurice Ahern, a Kerry priest (Theology), Thomas Clancy, O.F.M., from Leitrim (Sacred Scripture), André Darré, a French priest (Moral Theology), Justin Delort, a French priest, (Natural Philosophy), John Eustace, Kildare priest (Rhetoric), Mark Usher, Meath priest (Elocution). Maynooth College had begun and the ship was to be steered by Thomas Hussey. Every member of the little staff, including Hussey, had been educated on the continent of Europe.

Hussey, though pleased and proud to be so prominently involved in the big venture, did not reside much in the college during his two and a half years as President of Maynooth. He still held on to his former assignments such as head chaplain to the Spanish Embassy in London and also to his post as Head Chaplain to the Catholic soldiers in the armies of King George III. To further complicate matters he was appointed Bishop of Waterford and Lismore and was consecrated on 26 February 1797. Maynooth saw very little of him after the early days. Still he was reluctant to resign the presidency. In fact he was really compelled to do so by his fellow bishops on 17 January 1798 when he was succeeded by Peter Flood, parish priest of Edgeworthstown. Flood did not live long in the post. He died on 26 January 1803.

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Nor did Waterford see much of Hussey after his appointment as Bishop. He was Bishop for six years but he only spent one year in the diocese: a few months in the beginning and a few months at the end. He had issued a very forthright and undiplomatic pastoral letter to the clergy and laity of the diocese in late 1797 which was a stinging condemnation of the Government and of protestants' attempts at proselytism. It caused much criticism even from his fellow Catholic Bishops. Hussey had to go to London on business about his other responsibilities and he never returned until he was near death. Liam Murphy in a concise and balanced manner treats of this pastoral and of the undiplomatic language which Hussey used. He gives the entire pastoral in an Appendix. His final summation on the matter is appropriate:

Because of his character and personality and his long residence and experience abroad, Hussey took an individual stand. He can be praised for his courage and defiance but it is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that he acted in an imprudent fashion.

Hussey returned to Waterford in 1803. His health was in decline. He died after an early morning swim with his faithful Vicar General, Thomas Hearn on 11 July 1803 in Dunmore East, Co. Waterford.

The above remarks are sketchy and skeletal. For expansion and sound analysis of a very interesting churchman I am happy to recommend Liam Murphy's worthy and very readable book.

Waterford

MICHAEL G. OLDEN

All the Risings: Ireland 1014-1916. Kevin Kenna. Currach Press. Pp. 303. Price: €14.99

This book takes its inspiration from the words of the 1916 Proclamation which states: 'In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms.' While Pádraig Pearse and his fellow signatories never specified the six rebellions they had in mind, historians generally agree that they were referring to the Fenian Rising of 1867, the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848, Robert Emmet's Rising of 1803, the 1798 Rebellion, the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and the 1641 Rebellion.

Kenna's book culminates with a long chapter on the 1916 Rising. This is preceded by chapters dealing with the six risings mentioned above and, for good measure, a further two – the Nine Years' War of 1594-1603 and the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 – are included. While the notion of a constant flame of rebellion, kept alive over a thousand years, is one that would have chimed with many of the 1916 participants, it is not one

that fits easily with the complex historical contexts of these individual insurrections.

The Battle of Clontarf, for example, is characterized here as a valiant struggle of the Irish against the occupying force of the Vikings while most contemporary historians see it as a struggle for control of Dublin with Irish fighting alongside the Vikings of Dublin and some Scandinavians joining the forces of Brian Boru. The struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were often more concerned with the defence of property rights and religious freedoms than they were uprisings against foreign power. There were also conflicting motives and ideologies at play in the movements of United Irishmen, Young Irelanders and Fenians responsible for the risings from 1798 onwards. *All the Risings* avoids such nuances in favour of uncritical narrative and lacks a concluding chapter where some of the differences and similarities could be dissected and explored.

To be fair to the author, this book is not intended for professional historians or students of history and Kenna states at the outset that he has avoided undue detail in order to aid 'easy digestibility'. The book is well-produced, the writing bowls along at a good pace and the text is enlivened by many black and white maps and photographs and several extracts from poems and ballads.

The idea of staunch resistance and continuity of struggle was a vital element in the nationalism which developed in Ireland in the nineteenth century. Pearse drew inspiration from and frequently invoked the words of the heroes of the past and it was important to the men of 1916 to see their Rising as the culmination of a long-running and unstoppable drive for freedom. It could be argued that a hundred years on from 1916 it is time to put that particular myth to bed and engage instead with the complex and multi-faceted history of rebellion within Irish history.

College Carlow, St. Patrick's

MARGARET MURPHY

Globalization, Spirituality and Justice. Daniel G. Groody. Orbis Books. Pp. 304 Price: £23.99 (available from Alban Books, Edinburgh)

This is a book which seeks to articulate a global theology and spirituality. In that sense the author seeks to be truly Catholic, this is to say ecumenical, universal and planetary. To be Catholic is to relate to the human and non-human in a way that is growthful for oneself and nurturing for the other.

The author, Daniel C Groody, a Holy Cross priest and theologian at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, gives us an 'overview' of globalisation which will take in the world-wide-web, the opening of borders, the effects of free trade. He will also give us an 'underview' which will take in the poor and their struggles, and the rich as they defend their interests. Finally, he will give us an 'inner view' whose vantage point will be the human heart and what it treasures.

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With great skill, amplitude of vision and wide knowledge of his subject our author will walk us through chapters on biblical reflection, the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, Catholic Social Teaching, ecumenical dialogue with the major world religions, individuals and personalities which are icons of faith seeking justice, theological reflection in our contemporary world, Eucharistic worship and the challenge of justice to our spirituality.

The author will introduce us to five Biblical meta-narratives which will help us to organise for ourselves the material which our author wants to present. These are: Empire, the Poor, Yahweh, Idolatry and the Gospel. Overarching those five stories is another meta-narrative, the Passover. From the very beginning of this masterwork Groody roots our active and contemplative practice in the Trinity. At the core of who we are and what we do is our indwelling life in the Trinity. Our author is not worried about theological definitions but rather about lived experience. Following the Cappadocian Fathers he refers to our relationship with a triune communitary God with the traditional word, *perichoresis* which means 'dancing around'. The mode of our relationship is being engaged in a divine dance.

The perichoretic dynamic immanent in the Trinity is energised by love. We are born of that love; we have our roots in the Trinity. Even before God spoke as God does in Genesis, God related and there was life. Our God is a dancing God; the God Nietzsche yearned for.

Love bids us welcome (George Herbert) and invites us to dine and dance. We sit to eat the bread of life and drink the intoxicating wine of divine indwelling, of living in God who is love. The invitation to sit and eat is permanent, never withdrawn. One could wonder how our image of God would have developed if from the first days of the catechism our God was a God to be danced with instead of sacrificed to.

Our experience of God is lived today enmeshed in an ongoing process of globalisation. In 1980 Pope John Paul II at Puebla denounced the fact that in Latin America the rich were getting richer *at the cost* of the poor getting poorer. This zero sum game continues today when on our planet 1.5 billion people live on \$1.25/day or less, in extreme poverty. In contrast the rich have grown so rich that a global study by Oxfam concludes that 1% of the world's wealthiest own assets equivalent to those of the rest of the world's population. This situation defies the mercy of God and cries out for justice. Injustice is an insult to the holiness of God. Justice lies deep in our cultural and religious DNA. It wants the rivers to flow with it and living water to well up from each one of us and all of humankind.

This book is a tour de force of what it means to be a Church for the life of the world. It talks of Catholic Social Teaching, a Civilisation of Love and the common humanity we share with believers of other religions. It updates us on the Theology of Liberation and reflects at length on Eucharistic worship in a Spirit of justice and truth.

Groody has successfully described the agony of the world in which we live. His book celebrates those persons involved in the struggle for life

because God is a God of life. And it articulates spirituality imbued with justice and holiness, personal in its depth and global in its expanse.

Devon, England

FRANK REGAN

1916: The Church and the Rising. Ed. Greg Daly. Dublin: *The Irish Catholic*. Pp. 165. Price: €12.99

The 1916 Easter Rising which is now considered a pivotal moment in Ireland's struggle for independence continues to spark intense debate. This book addresses a key topic by exploring how Catholicism influenced, affected, supported and rejected the events of Easter Week. It opens with a brief account of the Rising and then delves into the topic under investigation. Chapter 2 builds on previously published material and draws on archival sources to enlighten on the motivation behind the rebels' actions prior to and during the Easter Rising. The argument is that education in Christian Brothers' schools, the Gaelic League and the Catholic religion were far greater influences for rebellion than the oppressive economic conditions propagated by Connolly's socialist movement, or even the historical grievances eschewed in the proclamation against wrongs committed by Britain against Ireland. Drawing on diary sources and witness statements from the Bureau of Military History the case is made that volunteers were deeply inspired by their faith. The evidence is their adherence to instruction from their leaders to 'go to confession'.

They made preparations for the Rising in tandem with their Catholic Easter devotions which led to packed churches across the country. Daly creates balance by highlighting that 'it is possible to overplay the Catholicism of the rebels' by referring to MacDonagh's complicated relationship to the church, and Clarke's anti-clericalism and suspicion of 'faith and fatherland' nationalism.

Noelle Dowling's piece on 'Archbishop Walsh in 1916' and chapter 3 generally provide insight from the perspective of priests who were caught up in the events, particularly those who ministered to the rebels, or those who attended to the wounded and dying. Dowling draws heavily from Monsignor Michael Curran's witness statement, to explore the dramatic happenings as understood by him and from inside the Archbishop's house. Interwoven into Msg. Curran's narrative is commentary on the looting in Dublin, the shooting of Francis Sheehy Skeffington and the execution of rebel leaders. Mags Gargan's chapter examines how those working in *The Irish Catholic* were affected by the Rising as their offices were located in the heart of the violence. The reaction by *The Irish Catholic* in the aftermath of the Easter Rising is honestly portrayed, and it mirrors that of many of the provincial newspapers and rural and urban councils in its condemnation of the 'traitorous and treacherous' actions of the rebels. Chapter 4 investigates the reaction of the bishops across Ireland to the

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Rising, providing us with a fascinating analysis of where they laid blame. This chapter clearly displays that there was as much anger amongst bishops and priests as was shown by the general public in the immediate aftermath, which evolved eventually into increased sympathy for the rebels.

While some topics in this book have already received attention, particularly the portion on women in the rising, Daly extends our knowledge of the events of Easter Week within the context of Catholic Church views, reaction and experience. It is an easy read that provides a reliable source for study, gives vivid accounts and personal recollections of priests in the immediate theatre of revolution, delivers an honest account of hierarchical reaction to the violence of Easter week, and whets the appetite for more on this fascinating topic. It is chock full of interesting photographs, colourful maps, and striking illustrations.

Carlow

ELAINE CALLINAN

Meeting God in Paul. Rowan Williams. London: SPCK. Pp. 96 + xv. Price: £8.99.

This work is based on a series of Lenten talks delivered in Canterbury by the author, an Emeritus Archbishop of Canterbury and now Master of Magdalene College in Cambridge. It is his stated purpose to bring the reader beyond the 'half-understood assumptions' about Paul that seem to write him off for many twenty-first century readers. Instead Williams seeks to capture the freshness of the adventure of moulding and shaping Christianity from the 'dangerous newness' of the Christ event and the shaping of our understanding of that newness in the way we pray.

The text is divided into an introduction and three chapters. In the first chapter, Williams examines the social world of Saint Paul, particularly the idea of 'citizenship' and slavery, in a Roman context, and the idea of election and belonging to God, in a Jewish context. On a more biographical level, he suggests that Paul may have been a widower, of precarious health, perhaps even to the point of disability, yet of a passionate and powerful disposition, even to the point of being manipulative and possessive. Interestingly, he is at pains to point out that Paul had no sense of preaching a religion, but rather his vision was of a new world order, particularly a new way of belonging to God and to others.

Williams develops some of Paul's ideas from that worldview of 'outsiders and insiders'. He demonstrates that the two ideas central to Paul's idea of the dangerous newness are 'welcome' and 'freedom'. God, in Christ, now welcomes all into a new 'insideness' and a new sense of belonging. God's interaction with the human race is no longer then to be based on social inclusion and exclusion but on the idea of an 'assembly of God', where everyone is free and delivered from slavery. Ironically, this

freedom comes from belonging to Christ and it is essentially the freedom to let God do God-like things, to be shaped by the ‘law of Christ’ which is as natural and as liberating as nature and the rhythm of the seasons. The metaphor of the Body, so central to Paul, illustrates the reciprocal belonging and the attitude of grateful interdependence that this freedom engenders.

From that necessarily comes a new vision of the universe and creation. If Christ’s Cross, in all its weakness and apparent repulsiveness, is the ‘image of God’, that necessitates a change in the way we think about God and about our own humanity. Discovering the glory that can shine through us will necessarily place us before the question of how we act so as to manifest that glory. In an interesting piece on the nature of the flesh/spirit image, Williams transforms this image from the usual misunderstanding of a degradation of humanity to a new understanding of how the flow of our material existence can be used positively to manifest a greater reality.

This is a deceptively simple book. While it is readable and clear, it also demonstrates a deep understanding that can only come from a lifetime of familiarity with the Pauline Corpus. A Lenten reading plan, which could be adapted to any time of the year, is offered, complete with some beautifully composed prayers and suggestions for further reading. This will be an asset to scholar and general reader alike and will, hopefully, serve its purpose of dispelling some of the prejudices that seem to colour certain attitudes to the Pauline texts.

Stradbally, Co. Laois

SEÁN MAHER

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