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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

October 2025
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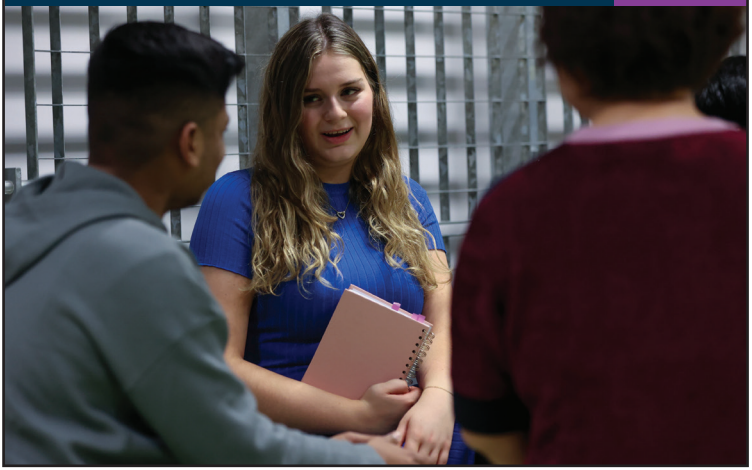

Volume 76
Number 10
October 2025

The Furrow

ISSN 0016-3120

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.

Editor: Pádraig Corkery, St Patrick's College, Maynooth. E-mail: editor.furrow@spcm.ie (for editorial enquiries, typescripts etc).
Rates: Single Copy (€6.00 (including VAT) and postage: Rep of Ireland €2.45/Elsewhere €3.50) *Annual Subscription:* Republic of Ireland (€100.00) Northern Ireland and Great Britain Stg75.00. Foreign: €120/$115/Stg95. Student rate will stay the same. *Online rate:* Republic of Ireland €75.00/Northern Ireland and Great Britan: Stg70.00/€75.00. Foreign €90/$106/Stg £84. Please follow this link: https://thefurrow.ie/register/
Subscriptions are payable in advance to the Secretary, The Furrow, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Telephone (01) 7083741; (Codes: National 01; International +353-1). E-mail: furrow.office@spcm.ie Website: www.thefurrow.ie. Subscriptions can be paid by cheque or online through The Furrow website.

Single articles can be purchased and downloaded from our website: www.thefurrow.ie.

Back numbers and advertising rates available from the Secretary.

The Furrow's bank is the Allied Irish Bank, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Bank Giro Code No. 93–32–01.

Back issues of The Furrow are available on microfilm from: ProQuest Information & Learning Co., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, U.S.A., and JSTOR.

The Furrow is published by The Furrow Trust and edited at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. The views expressed in its pages are in no way attributable to the College authorities. The Furrow is printed in the Republic of Ireland at Naas Printing Ltd., Naas, Co. Kildare.

Intercession for Priests

+ Eamon Martin

Three weeks ago I was honoured to celebrate Mass at the tomb of Saint John Vianney in the French town of Ars where he served for more than 40 years. My pilgrimage there was to mark the Jubilee of Hope and the centenary of the canonisation in 1925 of the saintly Curé of Ars.

In the Basilica I prayed for the priests I have known over the years. I thanked God for the dedication and quiet commitment of so many good priests throughout Ireland; I remembered my classmates and the priests who inspired my own vocation, and I prayed especially for priests who are sick, struggling, or out of ministry.

As I have gotten older, I've come to realise how important it is to pray for priests. It's understandable that people are more used to asking priests to pray for them, and might not realise how much we priests are ourselves in great need of prayer: that we might be conformed more and more fully to Christ.

I discovered that there is a separate chapel in Ars which houses the heart of Saint John Vianney. He described priesthood as "the love of the heart of Jesus" and said that "to be a missionary, is to let your heart overflow." So, in that chapel I prayed "heart to heart" with the saintly Curé of Ars and "heart to heart" with Jesus, that my own priestly heart would be completely open in love for God and for the people I serve.

Not far from Ars is the shrine of Paray-Le-Monial where, 350 years ago this year, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque had her visions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, burning with love. Saint Margaret Mary described the flames overflowing and radiating out from His wounded heart, to bring love, healing, conversion and compassion into the world.

Our late Holy Father, Pope Francis, emphasised this strongly in his final encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, on the human and divine love of

Archbishop Eamon Martin is Archbishop of Armagh, Apostolic Administrator of Dromore and Primate of All Ireland. This is the text of his homily at the Mass for the 50th National Day of Intercession for Priests at Ireland's International Eucharistic and Marian Shine, Knock, Co Mayo.

the heart of Jesus. He writes, "I ask our Lord Jesus Christ to grant that his Sacred Heart may continue to pour forth the streams of living water that can heal the hurt we have caused, strengthen our ability to love and serve others, and inspire us to journey together towards a just and fraternal world of solidarity" (220).

Sister Briege McKenna told me recently that 20 years ago she, and Father Kevin Scallon, were invited by the Holy See and others to give an international priests retreat in Ars and Paray-Le-Monial, on the theme of "priesthood, the love of the heart of Jesus". By then Sister Briege and Father Kevin had an international reputation for facilitating retreats and intercession for priests. Back in 1976, in those challenging years for the priesthood following the Second Vatican Council, they felt called to bring their charisms to the cause of prayer for priests. And the first intercession for priests was held at All Hallows in Dublin with just a small number gathered. Thanks be to God for the tremendous fruits of their work over fifty years. It has become such an abundant source of grace, encouragement and strength for thousands of priests all over the world.

Father Kevin - God rest his soul - often said that their mission was inspired by two words from scripture. *Firstly*, from Luke's gospel chapter 22, those words of Jesus to Simon Peter: "Simon, behold Satan desired to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

And *secondly*, those verses from *Hebrews,* chapter 5:

"In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears … and is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always loves to make intercession for them."

Father Kevin said that the retreat in Ars back in 2005 was the most important retreat that they were ever asked to give, and it was blessed by an extraordinary outpouring of God's grace. More than one thousand priests and bishops attended. One of the most important aspects of the Retreat was prayer of healing for the priesthood, and for that purpose the entire group was bussed off on a day pilgrimage of reparation to the shrine of the Sacred Heart in Paray-Le-Monial.

One of the great gifts of the "intercession for priests" is that Father Kevin and Sister Briege were able to open up safe and sacred spaces where priests could have a personal encounter with the Risen Christ, who first called them. In those spaces they were able to deepen their love for Christ and consequently for the gift of their priesthood. That grace often came about because the priest found himself open to receiving personal forgiveness and healing.

In facilitating such spaces - as Sister Briege and Father Pablo

continue to do all around the world today - the "intercession" has gifted precious moments for the sacramental grace of Holy Orders to be renewed in the lives of priests.

We priests tend to be caught up in a multitude of demands and distractions. In recent times, like many others, we have become vulnerable to isolation and loneliness, and sometimes to unhealthy or harmful influences that can steal away the joy of our vocation. And we priests are not the best at accepting when we need help and support or finding guides and mentors to accompany us spiritually, pastorally, intellectually and especially in our personal human development. Equally, we are sometimes slow to find moments for rest and renewal, and spaces where we can cultivate interior silence, centre ourselves on our Lord Jesus Christ, to hear and understand what is God's will for us at this particular moment, to renew the joy of our ordination and to pour out gratitude to God for calling us to this wonderful ministry.

One of the greatest challenges we face as priests is to "be good news" for the world. To be "the love of the heart of Jesus" for others and to radiate that love in the world. How easy it is for us priests, especially when we see our priesthood undermined or attacked, to forget that we share in the great commission given by the Risen Christ to His apostles: "go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News".

There are many times when we feel our brokenness, our woundedness, our need for God, especially when we learn that some of our brother priests have committed awful sins and crimes of abuse. Not only has abuse caused immense damage and trauma to the lives of victims and their families, but it has also broken the heart and spirit of many priests, damaged priestly fraternity and credibility, and that precious trust between us and our people.

In these times, especially, we need to be open to God's healing love within us, to know that we are loved and understood by God, despite all of our weaknesses and faults. And we need prayers, and intercession, not just as individual priests called by God, but also for the priesthood itself. I find it helpful to pray with those words of Saint Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4:

> "*We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us. We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; we have been persecuted, but never deserted; knocked down, but never killed; always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body*."

In his reflection for the 50th Jubilee of Intercession for Priests, Father Jack Finnegan remembers the late Father Kevin once presenting a challenge, that priests would be "ordinary mystics" in everyday life.

In my own life I've found that, above all else, people want us priests to be prayerful, steeped in the Word of God, and able to celebrate the sacraments faithfully and reverently. Our greatest privilege is to be able to celebrate the Eucharist for our people and for ourselves. That is because in this troubled, confused, and often empty and superficial world, people quite simply want us to be men of God, who can point them to the Transcendent, and lift up their hearts and minds to the beauty and truth of God.

On behalf of everyone here today, and all those watching over webcam, on behalf of the bishops of Ireland, I thank God today for calling Sister Briege, Father Kevin, Father Pablo, and all who have supported and facilitated the "intercession for priests" over 50 golden years. And thank you, Father Kevin, Sister Briege, Father Pablo, for saying 'yes' and giving so generously to this special mission for the priesthood. You have made a real difference.

The "intercession" has helped to remind us priests that priesthood is not like other jobs or professions because it is subsumed into our whole being. Our priesthood is not our own. It is a share in the priesthood of Christ. It is a partaking in the love of the heart of Jesus. The "intercession" has been a tremendous gift from the Lord to encourage, affirm and strengthen the faith of priests here in Ireland and all over the world. Thank you God. Thank you, "intercession." Amen.

‘A Million Reasons’
Marking 50 Years of Boards of Management in Irish Catholic Primary Education.

Rory D’Arcy

I met him on the last day the two-teacher country school opened its doors in 2009. The hall was full of neighbours, a low tide of voices moving around old photographs, roll books, maps with frayed edges.

“Sad day,” I said, not really expecting a reply.

“That’s for sure,” he answered, hand resting on a display cabinet like it was an old friend. “I was here from the start.”

He meant the first Board of Management in 1975 – then every board since. Thirty-four years of showing up, reading minutes, taking calls, unlocking doors, and, when needed, quietly calling the plumber. “It was my way of helping,” he said. “A good school means a lot.”

He was my neighbour. But he also stood for thousands like him – parents, teachers, parishioners – who have given their evenings and weekends to keep local schools alive. When we add it all up across five decades and thousands of schools, we get a figure that startles the imagination: well over a million cumulative years of voluntary service to Catholic primary education in Ireland. A million reasons, then, to pause and take stock.

A TURNING POINT WITH A LONG BACKSTORY

Boards of Management were established in October 1975, but they didn’t appear out of thin air. They were the fruit of a long

Rory D’Arcy is an educator and writer with extensive experience in Catholic school leadership and governance. Having served in various roles across the Irish primary education sector, he brings a deep understanding of the intersection between faith, community, and educational policy. His work frequently examines the lived realities of Catholic education and the ways in which mission, governance, and local culture influence school life.

conversation between Church and State, accelerated by social and economic change, and nourished by the fresh air of Vatican II. Until then, governance in Catholic schools leaned heavily on clerical authority: the patron – usually a bishop or a religious order—held the reins, and lay involvement was limited.

The 1960s changed the tempo. The *Investment in Education* report (1965) put numbers on what many families already knew: opportunity was uneven and too often determined by geography and class. At the same time, Ireland's economy needed a better-educated population, which spurred reforms like free secondary education (1967), the establishment of Regional Technical Colleges (1970), and a revised primary curriculum (1971). Meanwhile, the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) called the Church to a more participatory style of life and governance. *Gravissimum Educationis (1965)* affirmed parents as the primary educators; *Lumen Gentium* (*1964)* recovered the baptismal dignity and responsibility of the laity; and the whole conciliar spirit nudged the Church away from clericalism towards shared mission.

So, when Boards of Management were introduced, they were both a practical response and a theological moment. For the first time, governance included not only the patron's nominees but parents, teachers (including the principal), and later, members of the wider community – a small circle around a table that, in its composition, told a bigger story about the Church and society learning to act together.

Today, almost 2,800 Catholic primary schools continue under this model. A typical Board has eight members: two nominated by the patron, two by the parents, two teacher representatives (one being the principal), and two from the community. The arrangement is imperfect – what human system isn't? – but it has proven resilient. It has also embedded a conviction in Irish Catholic life: *local voices matter*.

Subsidiarity is one of those words that risks sounding abstract until you've watched it happen in a school classroom on a wet Tuesday evening. In Catholic social teaching, subsidiarity simply means that decisions should be taken at the most local level competent to make them, in service of the common good. It's not a plea for chaos, but for responsibility close to the ground.

Boards of Management are examples of subsidiarity in action. They translate encyclicals and constitutions into budgets, policies, recruitment panels, enrolment conversations, and the occasional pastoral crisis. They make choices shaped by the concrete life of a community – its families, its staff, its children – while staying anchored to the mission and ethos of Catholic education.

This is more than good governance. It is *faith in action*. From

Rerum Novarum (1891) and *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929) to the Constitution’s insistence that parents are primary educators, from the shared synodal discernment of the early Church in Acts 15 to Pope Francis’s call in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) for a Church that listens and walks with her people – Boards embody that long arc. They make the Church’s talk of participation credible at a local level.

WHAT BOARDS CARRY - AND WHAT CARRIES BOARDS

Let’s be candid: the responsibilities have grown heavier. The Department’s own inspectors have wondered whether volunteer boards can realistically carry out complex compliance tasks across thousands of schools. Principals, through the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) and elsewhere, have named the pressures that come when governance, employment law, safeguarding, finance, building projects, and community expectations all converge on a small group of volunteers.

These are not idle concerns. They ask us to reckon with a paradox: the very local, voluntary character that makes Boards precious can also make them vulnerable to overload. The answer, though, is not to professionalise Boards into something unrecognisable, nor to centralise decisions so far from the classroom that they lose proportion and pastoral sense. The answer is investment and accompaniment: training that is real and regular; access to diocesan and national hubs that share resources; mentoring for new members; and recognition that keeps morale high.

What carries Boards is what they carry: *a vision*. They hold together education and evangelisation, pastoral care and academic excellence, the needs of families and the dignity of staff, the call to inclusion and fidelity to a Catholic identity that is both confident and open. This is work of the Spirit as much as administration, and it deserves to be named as such.

THE GENEALOGY BEHIND THE DATES

If we only told this story as a timeline – 1950s classrooms, 1960s reforms, 1975 Boards – we’d miss something. Governance is never just a sequence of policy decisions; it’s a genealogy of ideas. For most of the twentieth century, Irish schooling grew within a theocentric paradigm: the Church stewarded education, often shouldering tasks the State couldn’t afford or didn’t prioritise. Religious orders staffed schools at enormous personal cost; parishes built and maintained buildings; patrons oversaw ethos and appointments. The arrangement had deficits – limited lay

voice chief among them – but it was animated by a conviction that education was a moral and spiritual good, not merely a public service.

When the ground shifted in the 1960s and 70s, it wasn't a repudiation of that inheritance but a reframing. Lay people were not simply recipients of ecclesial benevolence; they were protagonists. Parents weren't advisory extras; they were primary educators. Teachers weren't functionaries; they were co-ministers in a shared mission. Boards of Management crystallised that reframing into a structure: a small, mixed group at the heart of each school, charged with decisions that matter.

THE PRESENT LANDSCAPE: DIVERSITY, CHOICE, AND CATHOLICITY

Ireland is not the Ireland of 1975. Demographics have changed; religious practice has changed; the ecology of belief has changed. Families ask – rightly – for choice in schooling; the State works to widen that choice; and Catholic patrons are discerning where and how to serve with integrity in a pluralist society. In this landscape, Boards can feel pulled in many directions: how to be faithfully Catholic and genuinely welcoming; how to hold an ethos and honour diversity; how to teach religion deeply while building shared civic virtues. To paraphrase Cardinal Hickey – 'we do not educate children because they are Catholic, but because we are'.

The answer is not a formula but a *practice* – of listening, hospitality, clarity, and courage. Catholic schools serve best when they are unmistakably themselves and unmistakably for others: rooted in the Gospel, confident in a sacramental vision of life, and eager to collaborate for the flourishing of every child. Boards, by their make-up and mandate, are the place where that practice is learned and renewed. They are where *ethos becomes policy and policy becomes culture.*

DANIEL O'CONNELL AND THE BOARD MEETING

Anniversaries invite us to look both sideways and back. The 250th anniversary of Daniel O'Connell's birth sits beside our fifty years of Boards and whispers a connection. O'Connell believed in mass participation, in the moral force of ordinary people organised for the common good. Substitute the monster meetings for school halls and you glimpse the continuity**:** civic energy flowing through local structures.

Boards of Management are not political campaigns, of course. But they are a school of citizenship – people learning to disagree well, to keep confidences, to balance budgets and consciences, to

choose leaders, to care for the vulnerable, and to do all of that together. In a time when democratic trust is fragile, the humble disciplines of a Board meeting are not small things. They are a quiet antidote to polarisation.

JUBILEE: PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Pope Francis invited the Church to live this Jubilee Year as pilgrims of hope. Pilgrims travel light, listen carefully, and move with purpose. Boards can model that pilgrim spirit. They can travel lighter by sharing resources across schools and dioceses; listen more deeply by building rhythms of consultation with parents, pupils, and staff; and move with purpose by setting a short list of priorities that are truly mission-critical.

Imagine a Jubilee-year renewal at every level:

- In schools: an evening of gratitude where current and former Board members are named and blessed; pupils presenting “What makes our school ours”; staff and parents drafting three hopes for the next five years.
- In parishes: a Sunday dedicated to Catholic education, with homilies on learning as a work of mercy; a display of school history and achievement; invitations to consider Board service.
- In dioceses: commissioning liturgies for Boards; shared training days on governance, ethos, safeguarding, and inclusion; a mentoring scheme pairing experienced chairs with new ones.
- Nationally: a practical “Board Hub” with templates, webinars, case studies, and a helpline; a database to facilitate communication; targeted funding for legal and HR support where needed.

All of this would say something simple but powerful: *we see you – and we’re with you.*

THE GAA TEST (AND WHY IT MATTERS)

There’s a familiar comparison that helps people grasp the scale of this undertaking. The GAA has more than 1,700 clubs in the Republic; Catholic primary schools number around 2,800. In many parishes there might be one GAA club serving multiple schools, but each school has its own Board. That is a remarkable spread of local leadership – wider even than Ireland’s best-loved community organisation.

Why does that matter? Because it means Boards are one of the last and largest networks of voluntary, place-rooted governance

we have. If we weaken them by neglect or by ill-judged professionalisation, we don't just risk school governance; we risk thinning the muscle of civil society itself.

"We need help" is not failure

When a Board says, "We need support," that is not evidence the model is broken. It is evidence that volunteers are honest about the demands placed on them. Compliance will not get easier; expectations will not shrink; finance will not become less complex. The answer is to match vocation with skill.

What might that look like over the next five years?

1. Formation that forms: not just rule-books but formation in Catholic identity, in the spirituality of governance, in the ethics of decision-making.
2. Templates that breathe: model policies that are robust but adaptable, so Boards spend less time reinventing wheels and more time addressing local realities.
3. Mentoring and succession: pairing new chairs with experienced ones; encouraging younger parents and diverse voices to step forward; building a culture of orderly handover.
4. Recognition that isn't token: annual blessings and public thanks where appropriate – signals that the Church values this labour of love.

None of this replaces responsibility at local level. It *enables it*.

Critique has its place. Inspectors' reports and principals' submissions have highlighted gaps that Boards can't wish away. But there is a difference between critique that sharpens and critique that shrivels. The former helps Boards focus; the latter discourages the very people we need to recruit. A constructive stance sounds like this: *You are essential. Here are the areas to strengthen. Here are the tools. Here is our help. Let's go again.*

That stance aligns with the Church at her best – truthful and encouraging, realistic and hopeful.

The texture of a meeting

If you have never sat through a Board meeting, you might imagine it as a marathon of policy acronyms. Sometimes it is. More often, it has a human texture: a principal carrying news of a family illness; a treasurer explaining why the heating bill ate the contingency; a patron's nominee gently reminding everyone what Catholic education is for. There is prayer at the start and, if we remember, gratitude at the end. There is the small relief when a thorny issue

finds a path through. There is the greater relief when, after a difficult appointment process, a gifted teacher says yes.

This is the level at which mission happens – not in sweeping statements nor in crisis headlines, but in ordinary people taking ordinary decisions with extraordinary care.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL “OURS”

Every school, whatever its patronage, has a fingerprint. In a Catholic school, that fingerprint includes sacrament and scripture, a habit of prayer, a horizon wider than exam results, and a conviction that every child is a someone before they are an achiever. But it also includes the peculiarities of place: the old field where the sports day happens, the mural the sixth class repaints, the hall that doubles as a parish venue. Boards are custodians of that “ours,” the stewards of memory and possibility.

Inviting pupils into that stewardship – asking them, “What makes our school ours?” – is a beautiful Jubilee project. Their answers will be practical and profound: “Mrs X always knows when we’re worried.” “The crib is the best thing we make.” “We play with everyone.” Ethos, in other words, becomes visible in the ordinary.

GUARDING AGAINST TWO DISTORTIONS

Two distortions threaten the next chapter. The *first* is managerialism without mission – the drift towards seeing Boards only as risk managers and compliance officers. Necessary tasks, yes, but not the heart. The *second* is piety without competence – a warm sense of serving the Church without the training and follow-through that service requires. The remedy is to keep mission and professionalism together. We can pray and read accounts; we can host liturgies and write policies; we can talk about mercy and make a fair, lawful decision in a grievance.

If we wanted a short list of national moves with real leverage, it might be these:

- *A funded Board Support Hub*: one-stop access to updated templates, case libraries, micro-learning videos, and a triage helpline.
- *Accredited micro-credentials*: short, stackable modules in governance, safeguarding, finance, appointment processes, and Catholic identity – recognised across dioceses.
- *Chair’s Circle*: quarterly online round-tables for Board chairs to share dilemmas and solutions; annual in-person gatherings for deeper formation.

- *Data with dignity*: a national (GDPR-compliant) register of Board members to improve communication, track training, and recognise service.
- *Public thanksgiving*: a national "Boards' Sunday" each year, with blessings and stories from schools across the country.

These are not luxuries. They are infrastructure for vocation.

LOOKING BACK, WALKING ON

Fifty years after 1975, we can say this without boasting: the Boards model has served Ireland well. It rooted governance where it belongs – close to children, families, staff, and parish life – while holding a line of accountability to patrons and to the State. It absorbed social change without losing its soul. It created a vast, quiet culture of service that has kept doors open, lights on, standards high, and hearts soft.

And we can say this without flinching: the next fifty years will require fresh courage. We will need to recruit more widely and younger. We will need to accompany Boards better. We will need to hold our Catholic identity with humility and clarity, never as a fence to keep people out but as a garden to invite people into. We will need to remember that the measure of our governance is not how tidy our paperwork is (important though that is), but how the most vulnerable child in the school is treated on a hard day.

CONCLUSION: A MILLION REASONS, ONE HOPE

Back to my neighbour at the display cabinet on that closing day in 2009. He didn't ask for thanks, and I'm not sure he would have enjoyed it if it came too loudly. But the Church should thank him anyway, and all the quiet servants like him. Because boards do more than meet; they mediate hope – between the ideals we profess and the lives children lead.

As the Church marks a Jubilee and the nation remembers O'Connell, we could do worse than learn from that combination: a *pilgrim heart* and a *civic imagination*. Let's honour the past, equip the present, and invest in the future – so that when someone stands at another school display in another fifty years, they can say, with justified pride:

We were there from the start. We stayed. We served. And it meant a lot.

A million reasons indeed.

Reflection: Friendship and Prayer

Johanna Merry

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1834) once used the analogy, 'sheltering tree' to describe friendship.[1] Not all relationships can be regarded as a friendship, nor can 'acquaintance' be interchanged for 'friend'. I am of the view that *friend* is not a random or reckless term but is singularly assigned to persons for whom we gladly lavish our time and patience; a friendship is born as these persons grow to matter to each other over time. Some friends enter our lives and stay for a short period, others occasional or are outgrown, while others can be perennial. We also know of the devastation that can be left behind when friendships go wrong.

In addition, human friendships may mirror friendship with God/*Other* as expressed through the entangled relationship of prayer.[2] Reflecting further might help us to cherish even more the friends we currently have and deepen our relationship with God/*Other*.

Scripture is replete with friendships. In a considered moment Jesus elevated his relationship with his disciples to that of friends (John 15. 15). We can look to Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1. 16) as an inspiring archetype of enduring female friendship. We see Jesus moved to tears at the death of his close friend Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha (John 11. 1-12), and then Jesus leaning on John, the beloved disciple, to care for his mother in the filial exchange from the cross.

A closer look at our friendships can reveal distinct patterns or signatures**.** For example, one may only make contact when a need arises, utility-centred on what we can do for them and vice versa. Other friendships are intermittent yet manage to take up where the relationship left off in a seamless reunion. There are friends who look out for us, 'have our backs,' and are first on site when a problem or crisis occurs … out of sight until the next crisis. Others

1 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Youth and Age." The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, edited by E.H. Coleridge, Oxford UP, 1912.

2 Johanna Merry, "Prayer: An Entangled Relationship." *The Furrow*, April 2025, 192 -197.

Johanna has a background in clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, pastoral theology and Ignatian Spirituality. She works as a Human Resource Consultant for religious congregations and dioceses with an interest in Pastoral Mediation.

gift us with unwavering support and mindfulness, rarely expecting returns. Seasonal friends past and present might include people we were at school with, work colleagues, or join with on community and voluntary projects.

We also know that friends relate with one another through a hierarchy of levels: soul companion, close confidant, and mentor at the top through to more random acquaintances, including those we greet but keep at a measured distance. As we grow older our circle of friends can shrink; time naturally distils and retains those friends who really *matter*.

Experience tells us that friendships tend to thrive when we can receive and rejoice in each other's flourishing and enjoy ample freedom to be oneself rather than pressed unduly into each other's expectations. Were we to choose desirable traits in persons who matter to us (and we do select), then trust, empathy, reliability, respect, capacity for fun and laughter are likely to be high on the list.

However, though we may wish otherwise, there can be no perfect friend. Although all of us are flawed and found lacking in many ways, nonetheless human friendships can serve as checks and balances in evaluating my person more realistically. Through friendship we await the gaze of the other to fund each other's identity, to co-create one another and so re-create ourselves. The same can be said of our God-relationship (Ps 139).

Friendship, be it human or divine, can also awaken dynamics of hate, as well as love, opening me up to surpass the perimeters of my bounded self, making room for other/*Other,* lest I fold in on myself or become lost in dark places.[3] Intimacy is a risk we all must take if we are to be wholly alive. Merton frequently implied that to overlook God as a companion is to risk a consumptive indulgence with one's preciousness. Might those we call 'friends' be part of God's design to endow us with the capacity to see the deeper beauty beyond the visible?

MASTER CLASS

Born out of his imagination, Antoine de Saint Exupéry penned the novella *The Little Prince*[4] in 1943*,* a story about the search for friendship and understanding. In a moment of lamenting his own sad existence, of wanting a friend, an unexpected encounter with a fox proved a revelation for the little prince [83-84]. Through this unique relationship with the fox, the prince gained the most

3 Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection. Columbia University Press, New York. 1982.

4 Antoine de Saint Exupéry, *The Little Prince.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1943.

unconventional masterclass on friendship.[5] I explore five aspects of that masterclass [78 – 88] which invite deeper reflection on friendship.

Taming: In a brisk interchange between the little prince and the fox, the fox gazed at the little prince for a long time, then pleaded: "Please – tame me!" [83], proposing to the little prince: "If you want a friend tame me …" [84]. Not understanding what this taming meant, the fox explains: "to establish ties" [80]. What followed was the masterclass on growing in intimacy: "First you will sit down a little distance from me … I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye …and you will say nothing … words are the source of misunderstandings. … but you will sit a little closer to me, every day…" [84]. The fox goes on to detail the importance of observing 'proper rites' to strengthen ties. Eventually, the fox and the little prince established a bond of friendship breaching the rigid confines of their own fixed worlds and provided a vent for exchange with the wider outside world.

Responsibility: The fox insists that "you become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed" [88]. Responsibility means that we care for each other and for the common good rather than self-interested opportunism or calculating personal cost. Joseph Rivera regards it in this way: my concern for myself is intrinsic to my care and concern for the other – and I assume this posture towards the other.[6] If recklessly abandoned, re-wilding can take a long, long time, if ever!

Mutual need: The fox added: "… we shall need each other …" [80- 83]. The idea of 'needing each other' can be off-putting and conjures the uncomfortable sense of being dependent or co-dependent. But it need not be so. Rivera opines "I need you to gaze at 'me' for me to know *who I am*. *Who I am* is lived in the light of the other."[7] In this sense we are held together by a recurring back and forth movement outward toward the other and inward toward me, a movement that seeks to enhance the intrinsic nature of each. "We remain *separate but together."*[8]

Unique: the fox asserted: "To me you will be unique in all the world … to you I shall be unique in all the world" [80]. "One only understands the things one tames" [83]. Uniqueness is not obvious in each individual at first but discovered and refined over time through deepening encounters. "… your slightest look easily

5 See Johanna Merry, "The Little Prince: Story of Friendship and Healing." *Intercom,* April 2023, 24-25.

6 Rivera, Joseph. Whom Do I Love when I Love Myself? The Challenge of Narcissism. *Philosophies* 2025, *10* (1*),6.*

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

will unclose me though I have closed myself as fingers, you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens … her first rose…"[9]

Vulnerable: When the hour of departure drew near – the fox said to the little prince: "I shall cry" [86]. They each cast blame on the other for having tamed each other, disputing that taming the other has done no good at all. When we risk establishing ties with others, we inevitably submit to being vulnerable to pain and loss - the ephemeral nature of our life.

Either way, losing a friend - be it through distance, desertion, or death - hollows out the heart. However, when we allow our hearts to soften enough to weep a little, we are gifted with a deeper awareness and compassion for the human condition which makes it possible for us to encounter, receive, and relate to others with a spirit of benevolence.

Absence also bestows clarity to what we cherish most in our friends, bringing its own strange comfort. As they parted, the fox gifted the little prince with the present of a secret – "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye" [87]. And so it happens that it is this secret that fastens us in relationship with true friends. With their perspectives somewhat changed, the fox and little prince parted company.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Scripture abounds with recurring themes of God's initiative-taking gestures of seeking to tame us and fasten the bond of friendship. For example, at times of doubt God steps forward and reminds us: "I called you by name, you are mine." (Isa 43. 5); a reliability beyond compare is the parental reassurance of a maternal God: "I will never forget you." (Isa 49. 15-17). And take the playful, spirited invitation**: "**Come now my love, my lovely one, come with me …" (Song of Solomon 2. 2-16). So, how do we respond to God's invitation to establish ties with us?

Fidelity to prayer through dedicated time and space, being alone with God, (celibate space) strengthens the shared bonds. That God longs for our return and sets out to search for us is a wholesome thought … warm delight rather than being riddled with guilt at our lapses.

Ties with God, not unlike human friendships, can resemble a gossamer thread - strong but fragile. All have experience of feeling disconnected and bereft particularly in dark times when God seems absent or 'out of reach'. Times too when God hides his face in

9 Cummings, E.E. "some where i have never travelled, gladly beyond." *Complete Poems 1904 – 1962.* Edited by George J. Firmage, New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1923.

passing and leaves us in the cleft of the rock (Exod 33. 22); Jesus withdraws from his disciples in Gethsemane to be alone with his Father (Matt 26. 36- 46).

What follows is my reflection on selected aspects of the friendship between the little prince and the fox that could offer a pathway to deepening our friendship with God.

RITE AND RITUALS

Rites are the actions we take to make *inner readiness* for 'special moments' e.g. family gatherings or memorialising birthdays, anniversaries etc. Rites make one day different from the other. Rituals, on the other hand, are the actions we take to make *outer readiness* for special moments.

Prayer is one such rite for special moments of encounter with God … God with me as an act of friendship. Recall the rite of Jesus who habitually went up the mountain early in the morning to pray. The fox elucidates on this practice of a fixed routine: "If I know you are coming, I get happy in the hour before – otherwise if you come just any time I would never know at what hour my heart would be ready to greet you" [84]. Further, rite of prayer not only helps to deepen trust in the good intention of the *Other:* "My plans to prosper you and not harm you …" (Jer 29. 11) but also has the benefits of remaining as an anchor that gives stability to our disposition, allowing for its graces to permeate the day. Invariably it makes my interactions with others noticeably different in the moment, enabling others to be their best selves.

As in human friendships, the random injection of change or something new and different can invigorate our friendship with God. Rites and rituals can become stale, fatigued, lacking depth or surprise. They can be refreshed in imaginative ways, for example, by drawing on the rhythms of the Christian liturgical calendar, advent/epiphany, lent; or the seasonal cycle of the Celtic Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane, and Lughnasa. Or varying modes of prayer, including dance, drama, art, poetry, mime and so on, can make that welcome difference.

SELF-DISCLOSURE

Though strangers at first, in a moving conversation, the little prince and the fox gradually exchanged intimate details of their individual lives and struggles [84 -87]. In this way, they grew to know and understand each other in a deeply personal way which secured them in relationship; lives enlarged and enlivened. Can the same be said of our encounter with God?

Below are a few prompts which invite deeper reflection on our encounter with God.

- *Preference:* Striving to elect to lean unequivocally towards the side of God who first chose us (John 15. 16), over and above competing or seductive demands in our day-to-day living.
- *Silence:* Enables focussing on the human-divine preference without distractions. Not just the absence of noise but striving to cultivate the habit of interior stillness and detachment from worldly concerns which can make possible a deeper at-one-ness with the in-dwelling Presence (St Teresa of Avila) that underpins our way of living.
- *Prayer of quiet:* Presupposes a state of interior stillness described above. Striving to place myself in full view of the Benevolent One, long enough to allow that Loving gaze to penetrate me and open me outward to channel God's gaze to the wider world.
- *Mature belonging:* Striving to surrender as 'I am' to a God who accepts in me all that I have rejected in myself. Mature belonging invites a type of *obedience* to loving self and God/*Other* through trials, joys, sorrows, and exhilarating discoveries in the shared adventure of friendship. All the while, assured of a God who desires my wholeness.
- *Responsive:* Striving to embody an inner elegance that is less resistant, rather, supple enough to submit to the potter's wheel (Jer 18. 1-6). Or bendable enough to stretch out our hands and assent to being taken where we do not wish to go (John 21). Either way, we are pushed out to the edges or into the depths of our being where the feminine spirit of God waits for us.

FINAL REMARKS

Human and divine friendships can draw us back from retreating into oneself. We need the generous gift of the gaze of other/*Other* to progress in true knowledge according to the image of the One who created us if we are to be wholly alive (Col 3.10).

As such friendship is an encounter with the divine presence in each other (incarnational – *Imago Dei*) and becoming loyal to that association. Gibran implied *let there be no purpose in friendship save* the *deepening of the spirit*.[10]

Inevitably, true friendships invite us to "run the risk of weeping a little" [99] our hearts torn open enough to understand "But the eyes are blind. One must look with the heart …" [97].

10 Gibran, Kahil. *The Prophet*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972. 65.

Nothing can match the treasure of common memories, of trials endured together, of quarrels and reconciliations, of secrets exchanged, of fun and laughter and generous emotions shared between friends. Antoine de Saint Exupéry muses that friends remind us that *all grownups were once children - although few of them remember it.*

What an unmatched friend we have in God, our Eternal friend, faithful even when we are unfaithful (2 Tim 2. 13).

(In memory of Cathy – RIP).

Both … And …

As a historical religion, Christianity is rooted in the particularity of Jesus, his Judaism, outlook and culture, and in the expressions of his followers in expressing their belief in him as the Christ. But Christianity is also an eschatological religion that sees itself as presenting a message resonant for all humanity both today and tomorrow. In its liturgy it must seek a balance between two poles.

– Ethna Regan and Alan J. Kearns (eds), *Critical Questions in Contemporary Theology*, Peter Lang, 2024, p. 65.

The language of our liturgy: do we take account of an environment of speaking and listening?

Thomas O'Loughlin

ON THE BANKS OF THE LIFFEY

In early December 2024 Storm Darragh struck. A few days later , a friend teaching English as a foreign language in Dublin – *note the location* – told me this story. Seeking to encourage her students to converse with native speakers, 'the locals,' she suggested they use the storm as the opening gambit to engage people on the bus in conversation. Next day she asked how they had got on. One student burst into tears saying that the Irish are too unfriendly, indeed too rude, to talk! The teacher asked what happened. The student had said to the man next to her on the bus: 'Aren't we having awful weather?' He replied: 'Don't talk to me!' Here the conversation ended, and the student was so offended that she got off the bus and cried. Why are Dubliners so rude? In this story, in print, you have no guide to the tone of voice used, where the emphasis fell, nor any hint about facial or bodily expression as the man said: 'Don't talk to me!' But a living language involves all these and more.

But it is even more complex. If this learner of English had said what she said on a London bus, the reply would have been: 'Tell me about it!' (to which the response is *not* 'and which aspect should I tell you about?' but rather to realise that it can be equivalent to 'enough said!': and may mean this conversation is over). The story illustrates a fundamental aspect of language, but especially *spoken* language: communication that carries meaning belongs to the world in which we live, it belongs to our linking up – or not – with one another in a community, it is rich in meanings quite apart from what can be put down in writing (that is why we are not all novelists or poets), and it is personal. The fact that *the Dubliner* said what he did shows that he was at ease in the conversation and

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(however bizarre it might seem to someone not from the banks of the Liffey) that he actually was willing to talk to the student. Language is, after all, *our language*: it belongs to those who use it and is as peculiar to them as any other aspect of their culture. In a world with global technology for communication, it is easy to forget that all language has its origin in face to face conversation.

Here we face a fundamental fact of human communication. There is a chasm between what is *spoken / heard* and what is *written / read*. But this distinction is barely appreciated by most. We think we can write out what we will say / have said; believe the difference is just one of duration (sounds disappear while writings survive); and we even imagine that we react to what we read just as we do to what we hear. It is this illusion that has bedevilled our liturgical translations where translators believe that their skills in translating written texts are transferable to translating dialogue - liturgy is a matter of speaking and hearing – albeit recorded in written forms. Yet this distinction is easily proven: how often have you used a phone call or a 'quick word' to sort out a mess created in an exchange of written messages?

IN FRONT OF THE GPO

For Irish people few pieces of language, designed for proclamation and sonority, are as famous as the 1916 Proclamation: it is language that was intended to be heard and to stir the heart. But listen to these two sentences:

> The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Most readers will heartily approve the equality aims listed in the second sentence: but would you write or speak like that today? It is a style of English that belongs to its time – and while it is easily intelligible and Irish people have a cultural continuity with it, nonetheless, it is also to an extent foreign. We acknowledge that when we note its 'rhetorical' character.[1] All language is of its

1 We should observe that there is a ritual dynamic within this famous text that is rarely if ever noted by historians; see Molly Farneth, *The Politics of Ritual* (Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2023), 113-9 for a study of parallel American texts of civic religion.

time.[2] It belongs to a time as much as to a culture and when we use inherited language we have to make allowance for that distance.

Imagine, therefore, the cultural barriers involved in combining texts (some of which are themselves translations) from two languages (Hebrew and Greek) where commonalities of theme may only be apparent in another language's text (Latin) – and every text is from a culture without continuity with us and, at least, 1900 years old. Such is the task facing translators for our Liturgy of the Word. But translating cannot be that difficult? Surely anyone who can *read* (note the verb being used) both languages can do it?

THE LARGER TASK

But translating texts is invariably just one part of a larger cultural enterprise. At the centre of Christian mission lies a practical task and basic human activity: translating. From its earliest transition from being a movement among Aramaic-speaking Jews in Palestine to being one, brought by Paul, among others, to Greek-speaking Jews, and then among gentiles – the message about God that is revealed in Jesus – has been undergoing translation. This activity is linguistic (moving from one language to another), cultural (from one society to another), and generational (from one time / situation to another), and without it mission ceases.

Within this larger process there are the more specific translation tasks – translating our scriptures and our forms of worship – which have challenges of their own. Moreover, for Catholics there is the additional challenge that we have a common liturgy, the Roman Rite, forming the core of our worship. But how should we view these liturgical translations? This is not just a perennial task, but one that puts before us a series of very definite challenges today; and here I want to to draw attention to just some of the specific demands that our liturgy makes on linguistic and cultural translation.

IN THE WAKE OF VATICAN II

Today, sixty years after Vatican II, we still need to begin any discussion of liturgical translations by examining the expectations of those who made the first translations into living languages, both before and during the 1960s. Those expectations still, unwittingly,

2 For an example of how language becomes dated, observe how the texts created by US Anglicans in the 1970s had to be up-dated by Canadian Anglicans in the late 1980s. See Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Sharing the Eucharistic Insights of the "Star Wars Prayer": a step on our pilgrim journey towards being one in Christ,' *One in Christ* 53,1(2019)46-63.

exert an influence both on Vatican policies and in the attitudes of many involved with the liturgy.

Let us begin with the situation in 1960. The official liturgy was celebrated only in the Latin language; and it was *read*, from either a book, a chart, or from memory, by all concerned. Even those parts of the liturgy that were pronounced aloud had the character of something read, while those parts recited in silence (e.g. the Eucharistic Prayer) were read without sound but with the words formed in the mouth. The dialogues that occurred, usually with just the server, were not living encounters of two people speaking the same language, but events where one person read after another. It was not only a book-based but a *read* liturgy; and this aspect of the liturgy was captured in the phrase *missa lecta*.[3] One of the desires of the Liturgical Movement was that while the liturgy was being celebrated in Latin, those who were present should be able to follow what was being read even though they could not hear the texts[4] nor understand Latin. The result was 'the [lay] missal' giving the fixed texts in parallel translation, along with the readings in a modern language. These translations were not for liturgical use, but simply to inform a non-Latin-reader what the Latin meant. It followed from this purpose that the aim was simply to make the content of the Latin, the liturgy's language, comprehensible. This was a very limited aim both in terms of translation strategy and in terms of liturgical activity. As a translation strategy it was more restricted than 'formal equivalence' because it did not seek to be used in the way the Latin was being used, but simply 'to explain' the content of what was read. In terms of liturgical activity it was still more limited: no one was expected, nor permitted, to use these translations and, anyway, the liturgy did not require its language to sound as if it were a real language spoken among people. The book, in Latin, was supreme and, was consider by many as perfect – and 'translations' were subservient.

When the reformed liturgy arrived in 1969, visible as a book in Latin, there was rejoicing at both its form and at the possibility of its celebration in language people understood. But this was, for the most part, not an embracing of the notion that now we would worship in living human languages – a celebration of creation and our creativity today as Spirit-inspired children of God – but that we had unprecedented access, through translation, to what was contained in Latin. This attitude, i.e. making the Latin accessible,

3 As distinct from a *missa cantata* when some texts were sung but still following a written text.

4 In 1960 much of the liturgy was read *secreto* (i.e. in silence), some parts in a low voice, and some could be pronounced in a normal voice. However, unless one was physically close to the sanctuary (as close as the altar server) one heard nothing but a mumble (electronic amplification was not used).

affected our evaluation of the translators' work as witnessed that most bishops' conferences did not recognise the absurdity of using 'and with your spirit' (*Et cum spiritu tuo*) as a reply to a *spoken* greeting. In effect, we got, in all the major languages, translations that resemble those of language-learners where a translation's excellence is that it shows up an appreciation of the complexity of the original language with very little attention to the work's appeal in the target language. We could label this 'infra formal equivalence.'

This translation-literalism was not sanctioned by *Comme le Prévoit* (25 January 1969). But already many translations had been made, and the culture that viewed translations of Latin as 'domestic' or 'down market' – what English labels 'vernacular' from *vernaculus*: relating to the domestic slaves – was too strong to allow for the emergence of a fresh liturgical approach fully engaging with a spoken living language as being worthy because it was that of living Christians relating as a church to the Lord. The result in the late 1960s and 1970s was a very mixed-bag of translations. Yet, significantly, criticisms came mainly from those who imagined the translations were not sufficiently literal nor redolent of Latin as read. That so many wanted some sort of comprehensible Latin rather than real, living, *spoken* language can be seen in *Liturgiam authenticam* (28 March 2001) and the translations made in its light.

Listening / speaking are distinct from reading

But our experience now shows us we need texts that are to be heard and spoken rather than being read. They must be flowing within the rhythms of each living language's sounds because a phrase that is fluent in one is jarring in another; and these must respect each language as capable of letting us praise God and announcing God's mighty works – the vision of Acts 2. For this challenge we need a translation strategy that we might call 'supra dynamic equivalence.'

All translators are familiar with the distinction between 'formal equivalence' – for example: the translation strategy used by the Vulgate and the RSV (and to an extent in the NRSV) and 'dynamic equivalence' (e.g. the Septuagint, more or less, and the Jerusalem Bible); and most with some familiarity with Catholic liturgy imagine that this maps on to the conflicting approaches of *Comme le Prévoit* and *Liturgiam authenticam*. But liturgical reality is not so neat nor so simple. The experience of Catholic liturgical translating since Vatican II shows the need for a *four-fold* distinction:

- Infra formal equivalence – a crib of the Latin whose aim is to show in another language what is being read in Latin.

This is the level of interpretation envisaged by *Liturgiam authenticam*.

- Formal equivalence – a statement in another language which allows a study of the expressions of the original text as an object to be read and studied as a text.
- Dynamic equivalence – where the meaning of what is found in one written text is conveyed in another written text in the forms proper to the target language. *Comme le Prévoit* falls somewhere between formal and dynamic equivalence in its aims.
- Supra dynamic equivalence -where the written forms are seen as recording oral /aural communication and so have to convey not only written meaning but the meaning conveyed when it becomes sounds heard and uttered. However, *Comme le Prévoit* was aware of this when it said: 'A liturgical text, inasmuch as it is a ritual sign, is a medium of spoken communication' (n.5).[5]

It is against this experience that we have to approach the task facing us today.

What would characterise such supra dynamically equivalent translations? The *first* quality, a *sine qua non*, is a theological commitment to the notion of diversity / translation within the Latin church. It requires viewing each human language as part of the creation and to be valued as such. A language is not just a communication system, a set of codes, but a fundamental human element through which we are human and grow in our humanity. Each language is part of the divine dispensation and bringing the Christian liturgy to birth in that language is the activity of continuing the incarnation. Bringing the Logos – note this should be rendered as 'the discourse' not as 'the word' (a failure of a second-century Latin translator) – into each language is bringing the Discourse into the depths of each community's discourse. Translation is making the Christ present within us, rather than an educational activity though which those in some sort of cultural depravation are given second-hand access to 'culture' (i.e. Latin). Likewise, this theological commitment must value diversity as richness. The fact of many languages is not to be imagined within the myth of the curse of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) but within the myth of Pentecost and a great new song being formed from variety. Every language has its limitations as well as its genius, and all language

5 This sentence was quoted, without acknowledgement, in Pope Francis's Letter *motu proprio* 'Magnum principium' (9 September 2017): 'A liturgical text, inasmuch as it is a ritual sign, is a medium of spoken communication.' However, *Magnum principium* does not develop the point: it still works on the assumption that translating oral events is not distinct from translating writings.

is limited before the Mystery, so the more numerous our languages the more nuanced our common adumbration of the divine. As the diversity of gifts is the work of the Spirit, so is the diversity of languages in the liturgy.

Second, if we are committed theologically to the project of diverse tongues, we can then note how language specifically functions in worship. The most important practical characteristic is that it is closer to poetry than to prose: it must not only be fluent but have an elegance and be attractive. A poem's form captures more than its information content: it reaches from one heart to another, and makes us want to make its words our own. The poem's words now express what I want to say from within my depths. This means that one must not just be able to read the Latin and 'render it,' but can use it as the basis for a piece of poetry in one's own language. If we imagine language as simply prose, we render ourselves incapable of that flight of imagination that is central to worship.

Third, liturgical language is a performance, and not an exercise in information transfer; and how a language is performative is unique to each. This means that the translator takes the idea from the Latin text and then may have to forget its form, structure, and even images to produce a new text that has the same finality. This requires a far more extensive creative engagement by the translator than is normally envisioned by the notion of 'dynamic equivalence.' A single Eucharistic Prayer, for example, might give rise to several equally valuable and valid translations in the 'target' language.

Fourth, our liturgy is an activity and spoken language is at its heart. Reading is only – the reading of the Scriptures apart – a support to this oral endeavour. Moreover, it is an aural environment: one hears even what is read as readings! This was the central insight in *Comme le Prévoit*, indeed, its first 'general principle': 'A liturgical text, inasmuch as it is a ritual sign, is a medium of spoken communication. … By spoken words Christ himself speaks to his people and the people, through the Spirit in the Church, answer their Lord' (n. 5). One can write at a desk to be read at another, or even (with more difficulty) write to be read from a rostrum, but writing for the spoken environment is a special skill more often found among those who write for contemporary theatre or film than among Latinists who are also learned in theology and familiar with our tradition of liturgy. Translations must respect how a language is spoken, and how it is understood as it is spoken. This does not mean it should be 'colloquial' in a negative sense, but it must be *real* communication between us; and the language should be so limpid that we are hardly conscious of it. The late Cardinal Pell once criticised the 1973 English translation as being

'barbeque language' implying it lacked the *gravitas* linked to worship and, thereby, fell into the trap that conflates the solemn with the sacred. In fact, a barbecue is a place where people come together, build community, and talk about all that it dear to them: to have an Australian translation that would be capable of use at a barbecue would be to have a wonderful translation that focuses its users on its content rather than itself. It also raised another issue: what would be the equivalent to 'barbeque language' in another Anglophone society, what would it be in a German or a French setting, or in Japanese culture?

Fifth, and last, supra dynamic equivalence requires translations that are 'local' in time and place. We now have recordings of spoken language from more than a century ago. Listening to those recordings, their tones and stresses, their accents and diction reveal to us a fact of language hidden to previous generations: spoken language is very fluid and in constant evolution. A translation must be of our time, it must avoid archaic idioms and imagery that is no longer easily understood; the language must not draw attention to itself by its 'oddness.' Likewise, we know that languages are used differently within societies. They say that Ireland and Britain, and then Britain and America are separated by a common language! And the same is true with other languages used by diverse societies. We need to take these differences into account and see the internationalism encouraged by *Comme le Prévoit* as more likely to produce a false 'authoritative version' than one which belongs to any actual community of speakers. Our translations will have short shelf-lives and need continual renewal.

In our liturgical situation the continued use of Latin texts will serve as a point of practical unity.[6] However, these texts should not be 'the prayers' such that a linguist can translate them into this or that language. Rather they must be a common possession as patterns and exemplars that are culturally translated into forms that here, in this place, and for this short moment, can form a genuine expression within a community of the faith it hears and so gives voice to their utterances of need, love and praise. Such deep translating is challenging in a manner that shifting languages and checking for orthodoxy is not. But such cultural translation is the end-point of someone who seeks a *concordat cum originali*.

6 Whether or not each language should create new texts is a separate issue.

Shepherding the Shepherds
When Obedience Meets Care: Walking Together in Times of Change

Martin Delaney

INTRODUCTION

Across Ireland and beyond, bishops face the unenviable task of ensuring that every parish can provide pastoral and sacramental care, even as the number of priests declines and the average age rises. In some dioceses, more than half of priests are over seventy. In others there are more priests over ninety than under sixty and yet many continue to serve with generosity and dedication.

When an older priest is asked to move – and take on responsibility for anew parish – sometimes after decades in the same parish – it is rarely an easy decision for anyone. Bishops carry the weight of responsibility for the whole diocese, while priests and parishioners face the challenge of change.

This reflection comes from a place of understanding of that reality, not to be critical, but to explore the issues pertaining to older more vulnerable priests and how wider consultation – with the priests concerned, parish councils, other lay representatives, and fellow clergy – might help ease the burden of such decisions.

WHEN OBEDIENCE MEETS VULNERABILITY

For most priests, ministry has never been simply an occupation or a set of duties. It is a lifelong vocation, embraced with a promise of respect and obedience to their bishop at ordination. That promise is not given lightly – it is grounded in trust, love for the Church, and a readiness to serve wherever the need is greatest. When older priests are asked – or sometimes effectively told – to take on responsibility for several new parishes rather than just one, bishops will often note that such appointments are "accepted freely." And indeed, for most priests, the instinct to say "yes" remains strong

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well into later life. Many continue to minister joyfully well past the usual retirement age, sustained by pastoral zeal, the bonds of community, and a sense of unfinished mission.

Yet, when viewed through the lens of adult safeguarding, the movement of an older priest can raise deeper ethical and pastoral questions. The promise of obedience binds priest and bishop in a relationship of mutual responsibility, but in a priest's later years that dynamic can shift. For a younger priest, obedience often fosters flexibility and openness to mission. For an older priest — perhaps in fragile health, deeply rooted in a parish community, and dependent on diocesan housing or income — the same dynamic can carry hidden risks. Without care, what begins as a sincere willingness to serve can become a silent pressure to accept arrangements that may not be in the priest's best interest. I realize this is an emotive term but there is a real danger that we may stray, unintentionally, into the category of elder abuse.

The Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) defines elder abuse as — "a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, in a relationship of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person". (*Protecting Our Future: Report of the Working Group on Elder Abuse, 2002*.) This definition reminds us that harm is not always intentional but can result from decisions made without sufficient attention to dignity, choice, and well-being.

A HELPFUL PERSPECTIVE FROM SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE

HSE Principle	**Application to Clergy Moves**
Person-centered & consent-focused	Moves should prioritize the priest's wellbeing over administrative convenience. Decisions are most fruitful when genuinely informed and voluntary, with alternatives explored.
Advocacy & confidentiality	Trusted support should be available through a peer advocate or safeguarding representative. Sensitive information must be respected.
Structured reporting & oversight	Transparent oversight helps ensure that changes are fair, accountable, and pastorally sensitive.
Training & tools for staff	Formation in adult safeguarding equips Church leaders and administrators to apply best practice.

HSE Principle	Application to Clergy Moves
Monitoring & review	Gentle follow-up after a move supports both priest and parish, ensuring stability and care.
No-tolerance approach to abuse	Coercion, intimidation, or disregard for a priest's dignity must never be tolerated. Clear boundaries protect against abuse of power.

RECOGNIZING POSSIBLE RED FLAGS

Sometimes the most helpful safeguard when proposing a significant change to an older priest might simply mean pausing to ask a few honest questions before finalizing a new appointment. These questions are not accusations — they are meant as prompts that help ensure decisions remain both pastoral and fair.

- Is the priest genuinely offered more than one option or alternative?
- Is a clear written rationale, rooted in the good of souls, provided?
- Is the priest's health, community ties, and pastoral history fully taken into account?
- Is sufficient time given for reflection, prayer, and consultation?
- Could the priest decline the move without fear of losing income, housing, or faculties?

If the answer to any of these is "no," it may be worth slowing the process or exploring alternatives:

THE GIFT OF WIDER CONSULTATION: MEANINGFUL LISTENING

A decision to transfer a priest from one parish to another parish (or number of parishes) not only affects the priest himself but also the community he is leaving and the one he is moving to. Traditionally, in the Irish context at least, the communities being impacted by the 'clerical changes' have had no input into those decisions. In more recent years, even when a parish is being left without a resident priest there has still been little or no meaningful consultation with those most affected by these decisions.

Throughout the pontificate of Pope Francis the Church's renewed emphasis on *synodality* called us to listen attentively to the voices of the laity and clergy alike. But listening only becomes meaningful when it shapes the decisions that most directly affect

peoples lived faith. Such decisions include the movement of priests, the reconfiguration of parishes, and the provision of pastoral care. For parishioners, these decisions are not abstract policies; they touch the rhythm of their worship, the sacraments they receive, and the pastoral relationships they cherish. Consultation with parish pastoral councils, finance councils, and other representatives of the lay faithful is not simply a procedural courtesy. When their discernment is genuinely weighed and seen to influence outcomes, the synodal process builds trust, strengthens communion, and can even lighten the bishop's burden by fostering shared responsibility for the Church's mission.

Canon law recognizes that decisions affecting the pastoral life of a parish benefit from shared wisdom:

- Canon 515 §2: Consulting the council of priests before notable parish changes.
- Canon 524: Hearing the views of the vicar forane and, if appropriate, priests and lay faithful.
- Canon 212 §3: The laity's right – and sometimes duty – to express their views on matters affecting the good of the Church.

BALANCING CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSULTATION

Few aspects of Church governance are as sensitive as the movement of priests. In these moments, bishops must navigate a genuine pastoral dilemma: how to gather enough advice to make a well-informed decision while also safeguarding the dignity, privacy, and good name of those involved. The Church recognises this tension. Canon 220 affirms every person's right to a good reputation and to privacy; at the same time, canons such as 127, 515 §2, and 524 require real consultation before decisions that affect the life of a parish are made.

Confidentiality is not the same as secrecy. True confidentiality is about protecting information that could cause unnecessary harm if shared, while still allowing relevant facts and pastoral needs to inform the discernment process. In practice, this often means deciding not whether to consult, but *how* to consult — what to share, with whom, and at what stage. Some practical approaches include:

- Graduated disclosure: sharing fuller details with a small, trusted group (such as a bishop's core advisers or selected presbyteral council members) under clear confidentiality agreements, and sharing broader pastoral implications – without personal specifics – with parish or diocesan councils.

- Framing the discussion: presenting the issue in a way that focuses on the pastoral needs and options rather than on personal histories of priests or private matters.
- Mutual trust protocols: ensuring members of consultative bodies understand both their role and their obligation to treat sensitive information with discretion.
- Timing the conversation: sometimes sensitive information can be shared after a decision is made to explain the rationale more fully, rather than before, if early disclosure risks harm.

Handled well, confidentiality and consultation are not opposing forces but complementary goods: confidentiality protects individuals, while consultation protects the community from decisions made in isolation. The art – and the pastoral responsibility – lies in discerning the right balance for each situation.

CONCLUSION

The appointment and transfer of priests will always be among the most challenging decisions in diocesan life. Bishops must weigh the pastoral needs of the whole diocese, the wellbeing of their priests, and the hopes of parish communities.

The pastoral situation in Ireland today would have been unthinkable fifty years ago. When I was ordained in 1986, the two parishes I now serve had six active priests. The 1983 Code of Canon Law assumed that each parish would normally have its own pastor, but it also allowed that, in cases of necessity, one priest might be entrusted with several neighboring parishes. What was then an exception has, in many places today, become reality. The landscape has changed dramatically, and we must find new and creative ways of responding to the demands it now places on all of us who make up the local Church.

Wider, respectful consultation – particularly with parish councils and fellow clergy – can help ease the burdens, bringing fresh perspectives and a sense of shared responsibility. The Catechism (CCC 1903) reminds us that authority "is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned." What better way to seek the common good, particularly in times of change, than to embark on a journey of listening together – strengthening trust, deepening communion, and ensuring that decisions are made in the light of both the Gospel and the law of the Church, for the good of all.

Homilies for November [C]

Liam Kelly

Solemnity of All Saints *November 1*

Apoc 7: 2-4, 9-14. Ps 23: 1-6. 1 Jn 3: 1-3. Mt 5: 1-12.

For several years a group of academics and polemicists popularly known as the 'New Atheists' led a determined campaign to demolish faith in God. The leaders of this New Atheism movement became well-known public figures. They didn't manage to destroy faith in God but they compelled believers to think again about the nature of faith. The English writer Terry Eagleton observed during these debates that some people (both within Christianity and outside of it) seemed to imagine that, if one day a large banner were unfurled from heaven with the words: "I'm up here, you idiots!" written on it that would resolve to everyone's satisfaction the question of the existence of God. That is probably the kind of proof the New Atheists require but it should not be what determines faith for a Christian. For one thing, those who have come to know God, even a little, understand that God habitually works from within our lives, from within our hearts, expanding outwards. God isn't competing for our attention with Coca Cola or the Premier League. Our encounter with God is more inward and more relational. God reveals Godself from the heart outward, not by unfurling banners.

The life from which God has revealed Godself perfectly is the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We are, through faith and baptism, the children of God. As we grow in our relationship to Jesus and to one another we become part of how God is revealing Godself in the world. We can think of the saints as human lives which are so much in tune with Jesus that his divine life is mirrored and reflected through them. Their whole lives become a kind of 'proof' of God, though almost incidentally. The saints are not consciously confronting the 'New Atheists' or the 'Old Atheists'. By living according to the Beatitudes the are gradually transformed, more and more, into what they are already by God's gift, the children of God.

The first reading speaks of a 'huge number, impossible to count' of people from every nation, race, tribe, and language. C. S. Lewis

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remarked on how monotonously similar have been all of history's tyrants and despots and, by contrast, how gloriously different are the saints. Holiness can take root in any soil, in any culture, or tribe, or race. The feast of All Saints reminds us that Christ holds all these differences in unity, neither diminishing or negating the differences but somehow transcending them, revealing a common bond to the Father.

The psalm of today's Mass speaks of those who seek the face of God. These are people with clean hands and pure hearts, who desire not worthless things. The face of God is revealed not through the irrefutable argument but through the lives of those who 'climb the mountain of the Lord'. A picture of the ordinary thousands ascending Croagh Patrick on Reek Sunday comes to mind. Among them, many saints, making an ordinary life's journey, but taking each step with faith and love.

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls) *November 2*

Is 25: 6-9. Ps 26: 1, 4, 7-9, 13-14. Rm 5: 5-11. Lk 7: 11-17.

This Sunday's Eucharist happens to be the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed. The Sunday Eucharist is grounded in our Easter faith; we gather to celebrate and proclaim that Jesus is alive and is living among us. By way of contrast, All Souls Day is, like Good Friday, a day which speaks to us of the reality of our mortal, finite existence, and the 'sting' of death.

The rhetorical phrase of Saint Paul, 'death, where is your sting?', is baffling to someone grieving the loss of a loved one. The 'sting' of death is something so obvious and palpable that to deny it or to dismiss it, as Saint Paul seems to do, is either glib or plainly offensive. To say that death 'has no dominion' appears to be no more than 'whistling past the graveyard' to those whose lives are unravelling, after the loss of a spouse, a child, a parent, or a friend. And yet, Christians must speak of the undoing of death. Christian faith is not a sedative to dull the pain of death; it does not remove the 'sting' in that sense. But it tells us that God the Son lived a human life and died a human death and thereby broke the power of death. The 'dominion' of death is not limited to the hard reality that each and every person must die. The dominion of death means that throughout our lives, from the instant we become aware of the shadow of death over us, we are not free to live our lives to the full. The dominion of death – the awareness that our lives are limited, contingent, in the balance – makes us grasping, rivalrous, deceitful, spiteful, resentful, angry, and afraid. We live under the dominion of death in as much as it stalks us through life and marks

us, while we are still alive. In the life of Jesus we see someone who, in his imagination, is not marked by – or under the dominion of – death. The way that Jesus lives his life demonstrates that Jesus is not cornered by death into selfish and fear-based behaviours. His imagination has a deathless quality which is truly attractive to his disciples and all who recognise it. His words and actions speak of life, not death. Unlike us, Jesus' imagination is not hedged around and defeated by death. This doesn't mean that Jesus doesn't have to face death and that Jesus doesn't experience the emotion of fear facing death. But the resurrection is the vindication of his life and it is the Good News, definitively proclaimed, that death has no dominion. In the Gospel passage two crowds or processions converge. One crowd is following death; the mortal remains of a young man. The other crowd is following life, Jesus, whose whole life is a repudiation of the dominion of death. When these two crowds meet, Jesus is not insensitive to the suffering of the widow. His undoing of death is not without the cost of tears and a *suffering with* those who experience deep loss. But in this context Jesus is acknowledged as 'Lord' (the first time Saint Luke uses the title *Kyrios* of Jesus in the Gospel). Specifically, Jesus is Lord of Life. Jesus speaks, and his word has power over death. These and other actions pave the way for the disciples to accept the meaning of the resurrection; the ultimate sign of Jesus' power over death. In this sense Saint Paul can affirm for the early Church that death has, indeed, lost its sting and has no longer any dominion.

To a greater or lesser extent, we continue to experience our lives as being under the dominion of death. The Good News of Jesus means that there are already pockets of life which resist the dominion of death. These pockets of life are those places and encounters where Jesus, the Living One, meets us and reveals his victory. The victory is described in the enormously comforting imagery of the first reading. And our Eucharist, however ordinary and familiar it may seem in its weekly enactment is, indeed, the place where death has no dominion.

The Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica *November 9*

Ez 47: 1-2, 8-9. Ps 45: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9. 1 Cor 3: 9-11, 16-17. Jn 2: 13-22.

Christianity is always remembering and always forgetting. So wrote the theologian Karl Rahner. In any particular historical moment certain aspects of the Christian faith may be given special emphasis, while other aspects of the faith retreat into the background, to be rediscovered at another time. This is true not

only for doctrine, but for liturgy and forms of prayer also. Early Eucharistic gatherings were celebrated in modest private homes. In time the Eucharist was celebrated in great Roman basilicas, grandiose public spaces associated with Imperial decorum. Most of the sacred spaces we occupy today we ourselves did not design or build. These sacred spaces remind us of the historical nature of our faith in which we continue to find new forms of expression while we periodically rediscover and rehabilitate older forms of expression. The dedication of the Lateran Basilica as a Christian church signalled, in a dramatic way, the passage of the Christian Church from persecuted outliers to a socially privileged group. From the fourth century on the spaces of Christian worship would be different and so too, inevitably, would Christian worship. As the once persecuted Christians of Rome gradually exchanged their more intimate house Eucharists for grander liturgies in the Lateran Basilica, we might wonder how did *they* hear the Gospel of today's Mass? How do *we* hear it today?

The four Gospels agree that Jesus' hostile attitude toward the temple in Jerusalem was a significant factor in his eventual arrest and execution. The beautiful vision of the temple in the first reading from Ezekiel pictures the temple as a place of life and healing. The waters which well up from the temple bring abundant life wherever they flow. The temple is not primarily characterized as a fixed and solid building, but as a place of irrigation, where life-giving waters well-up, overflow, and replenish. This motif is continued in the psalm where God is experienced as a rock of refuge and, at the same time, the waters of a river give joy to God's city. The temple Jesus criticises has failed to bring joy or healing to the nation. The wholesome vision of Ezekiel can no longer be associated with the temple as it functioned in the time of Jesus. The waters of the river Jordan – the scene of John's baptism – draw multitudes of people with the hope of healing and forgiveness. From the beginning of the Gospels the role of the temple is in question.

In speaking of the destruction of the temple Jesus was certainly being provocative. While the 'cleansing of the temple' must have been a minor interruption in its daily functioning, it was, at the same time, a thundering prophetic action which demanded a response from the Sanhedrin; hence the demand made by 'the Jews' for a sign to justify Jesus' provocative actions. The Gospel indicates that the locus of worship is moving from the stone edifice in Jerusalem to 'the sanctuary that was his body'. In a time of dwindling congregations our relationship with church buildings is often characterized by a passionate attachment, on the one hand, and a deep anxiety about the future of these cherished spaces. This feast invites us to look at the places in which we worship God

today. Are our places of worship primarily monuments for the ages or do they function as 'the waters of a river' giving joy to God's city?

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time *November 16*

Mal 3: 19-20. Ps 95: 5-9. 2 Th 3: 7-12. Lk 21: 5-19.

In John Hersey's book *Hiroshima*, the author follows the lives of six residents of Hiroshima from the morning of 8th of August 1945. These six, like millions of others, are doing their best to survive the deprivations and tensions of an exhausting war. At 8.15am exactly, a noiseless flash disturbs them and within seconds unimaginable destructions falls upon Hiroshima. The first reading from the prophet Malachi is suggestive of the 'noiseless flash' and its terrible aftermath when it speaks of the Day of the Lord as 'burning like a furnace', and destroying evil doers like stubble. The apocalyptic imagery in our first reading is unsettling. It speaks to us, not so much of the insanity of total war, but of the hopes of the oppressed in every age, that God will intervene to work justice, even if the heavens must fall. Our history demonstrates that, no matter how well-intentioned, our rage against injustice is rarely, if ever, without innocent victims. We have brought into existence the 'noiseless flash' and the day 'burning like a furnace', but we have not produced the 'healing rays' which Malachi speaks about.

The psalm heralds the coming of the Lord with thunderous praise and the sound of music. There is no sense of the day of justice being also a day of vengeance. The psalm tempers the first reading's more unsettling imagery. In the second reading, Saint Paul draws our attention away from the end of history, back to the everyday and, in particular, the necessity of daily labour. The Day of the Lord is not advanced by listless speculation and idleness.

The apocalyptic theme is continued in the Gospel. The apocalyptic sayings of Jesus recorded by Saint Luke come at the end of Jesus' ministry. Two themes are explored together; the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and the end of the world. But the 'end is not so soon'. There is an indefinite period between the fall of the Holy City and the end of history. For the historical Jesus and his disciples the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD) still lay in the future; for Saint Luke it is already an historical fact, and this tension of anticipation/fulfilment is present in the Gospel. It may be that the early Christian community to whom Saint Luke addressed his Gospel understood the fall of Jerusalem to be the beginning of that long-awaited day when God would redress the grievances of the poor and oppressed. Certainly, in his account of the fall of Jerusalem Josephus paints a picture of wanton destruction in which no one is

spared. The motif of the end of history speaks to the longing for justice which is the cry of the poor from generation to generation. This longing is necessarily disruptive, even catastrophic, since injustice shapes, or rather distorts our societies, from top to bottom. The Christian who longs for an end to injustice must distinguish between the 'noiseless flash' of atomic-style retribution and the coming of 'the sun of righteousness … with healing in its rays'. We hasten the end of history's injustice by faith and love, not by violence.

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe *November 23*

2 Sm 5: 1-3. Ps 121: 1-5. Col 1: 12-20. Lk 23: 35-43

This year marks the centenary of the Solemnity of Christ the King. Established by Pope Pius XI in 1925 the solemnity was intended to be a reaffirmation of religious values over and against the rising tide of secular ideologies and ultra-nationalism. In Europe, this was still an age of monarchy. When Pope Pius was crowned in front of the altar in St. Peter's Basilica in 1922 he was told that he was now 'Father or princes and kings, guide of the world'. In the century which followed the Church – and especially the Popes – have been making a gradual but consistent retreat from associations with earthly monarchy. The last papal coronation was in 1963. The death of Pope Francis last April demonstrated that, having shed much of the trappings of monarchy, the Pope continues to be a moral guide, even for many who owe him no formal allegiance.

After the passing of a century the title 'Christ the King' has different connotations for us. And yet, the biblical tradition of monarchy helps us to associate the idea of 'king' with the idea of 'shepherd'. David, in the first reading from the Second Book of Samuel, is chosen to be shepherd of Israel, and leader. Jerusalem, the city of David, is the place where the tribes go up and where the name of the Lord is praised. David models a kingship which neither eclipses or diminishes Israel's devotion to God and, at its best, is a focus for humble praise and spiritual renewal. The second reading, taken from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians is a magnificent hymn to Christ's nature as the 'image of the unseen God' and the 'first-born of all creation'. Whether borrowed from early Christian liturgy, or a unique composition of Saint Paul, the words of this hymn, like those of the Prologue of John's Gospel, mark a bridge between the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the images and ideas of deity in Hellenistic culture. 'Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignties, Powers', whatever these words meant to Saint Paul's first century audience, are all subject to the power

of Christ for their origin is in him. And yet, the reconciliation of competing worldly powers and authorities is accomplished not through a violent cosmic showdown but, counterintuitively, through Christ's death on the cross.

The cross comes immediately into view in the Gospel. The reality of crucifixion, which Saint Luke and his community would have known very well, is one of utter humiliation. A spectacle as much as an execution, crucifixion is something between a legal penalty and a bloody sacrifice. That Jesus is subject to this especially violent, social and religious ritual of annihilation is, naturally, a source of deep scandal for many; the proverbial 'stumbling block' to the Jews and 'folly' to the Greeks. And yet, it is understood by Saint Paul to be an essential revelation of God's power. On the cross, monarchy does not involve demonstrating the power to save oneself, it demonstrates the incomprehensible love of God which breaks into this world to save others.

First Sunday of Advent, Year A *November 30*

Is 2: 1-5. Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9. Rm 13: 11-14.
Mt 24: 37-44

Advent arrives with a bang, not a whimper. At least the readings for the first Sunday of Advent are meant to rouse us from our apathy and drowsiness and direct our attention to what is essential. The liturgy is calling us to make a spiritual journey. We have an itinerary; like the psalmist, who rejoiced at the prospect of going to God's house and finds, on completion, that he is standing within the gates of Jerusalem, praying for peace. While Lent continues to have some purchase in secular society, as an appropriate time to kick bad habits and improve physical and mental health, the season of Advent has no secular equivalence. The season of Advent is not especially preoccupied with 'giving up' things. The readings of the Mass suggest that Advent is primarily a time of watchfulness; a time of spiritual awareness and readiness.

The Gospel of the Mass begins by comparing Noah's day with the day of the Son of Man. Are we to associate the day of the Son of Man with the social chaos and moral collapse that characterised Noah's generation? It seems that is not Matthew's intent. Noah is mentioned not because of the sinfulness of his generation but because that generation were too busy to notice what was happening; too busy to read the signs of the times. The day of the Son of Man is a day for watchfulness and its coming will cast light on differences and distinctions which are now obscure. Of two men working in the field; one will be taken and one left behind. Of two women grinding meal; one will be taken and one

left behind. There is a suggestion here that the day of the Son of Man will expose our deepest commitments and 'where our treasure is'. Our deepest commitments are not obvious, perhaps, even to ourselves in the routine of life and work; it is by no means certain that we are correctly reading the signs of the times. In the context of the Gospel passage, vigilance or watchfulness seems to be the essential quality, explaining the apparent enigma of why people who seem to living such similar lives are, in the day of the Son of Man, judged so differently.

The second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans is another 'wake-up call'. Waking from sleep is a good description of the kind of spiritual awareness we are being called to practice during Advent. The 'sleep' is not literally unconscious rest, but the listless preoccupations which draw us outside ourselves and numb us to the presence and purposes of God in the world. Daytime behaviour is easily distinguished from the behaviour of sleep-walkers: drunken orgies, promiscuity, licentiousness, wrangling and jealousy are mentioned. The focus on time and readiness is not primarily about chronological time. Saint Paul's message is not that each passing of twenty-four hours brings us closer to the Parousia.

The story of the sage and his two disciples may help to illustrate this shift from a focus on chronological time to the meaning of the Day of the Lord. The teacher asks his disciples, 'how can you tell the night is truly over and the day has come?' One disciple answered: 'when you can see a tree is the distance and know whether it is an apple or pear tree; then the day has come'. The teacher shook his head. The other disciple ventured: 'When you see an animal in the distance and you can tell whether it is a dog or a sheep; then you know the night is past. Again, the teacher replied: 'No'. Eager for the correct answer the disciples looked at the teacher expectantly: 'The night is truly over and the day is at hand, when you can look into the eyes of another human being and recognize your brother or your sister. Until then it is still the night for you'.

Featured Review[1]

Patrick Hannon

A predecessor of *The Furrow's* current Editor once declared that a review of a collection of essays that began with a list of titles and authors would be unsightly. A bit fastidious, but he had a point, and it seems wise to heed the implied warning. This collection contains twenty-six pieces, and the mere sight of its table of contents could deter even the intrepid. Which would be a pity, for this Festschrift in honour of Dermot A. Lane is a distinguished specimen of the genre. Topics treated range from biblical hermeneutics to feminist theology, and they are classified in sections, the headings of which give an idea of the volume's scope and the breadth of the honouree's output: biblical hermeneutics, liturgical theology, theology and philosophy, political theology, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and hope. In an engaging introduction, Ethna Regan and Alan J. Kearns borrow an expression from an early monograph, saying that their book seeks to open 'a constructive perspective' on the state of select questions in contemporary theology. And it does. The choice of contributors is an indication of his standing, and the range of his acquaintance and friendships, among leading theologians in Ireland, the U.S and the U.K

Theology according to Anselm of Canterbury is faith seeking understanding, and a gloss on this is provided in words of Dermot Lane himself that the editors reproduce in the Introduction. Theology for Lane is: 'the critical unpacking of the revelation of God that takes place in human experience through faith… the experience of life and all its spiritual implications, especially those that point towards the presence of God at the centre of life itself'. And this tells us something of what to expect as to subject-matter in the fourteen books and innumerable articles that he has published in the ensuing forty years, but also what kind his

1 Ethna Regan and Alan J. Kearns (Eds), *Critical Questions in Contemporary Theology: Essays in Honour of Dermot A. Lane*, Peter Lang, 2024. ISBN 978 1 80374 112 3.

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theology is, and how he will theologise. A pattern is discernible in the list of books, a pattern also in the essays collected in the Festschrift. And we won't be surprised to find that his work down the years is marked by an openness to interdisciplinarity and to dialogue, and a willingness to confront the challenges posed by pluralism and secularism today.

This reviewer's position is elsewhere on the field – moral theology or theological ethics - so the contributions of immediate interest were Fáinche Ryan's 'Aquinas on Truth-telling in a post-Truth World,' Alison Staunton's 'Feminist Arguments for John Paul II's Theology of the Body', Asma Afsaruddin's 'Problematising a Theology of Violence in the Islamic Tradition', John Murray's 'Is Anthropocentrism a Problem for Ethics?', and especially 'Race and Theology' by M. Shawn Copeland, of which more below. Dermot Lane is a systematician of course, but his interests include topics that are typically treated by theological and philosophical ethicists: the political, care for people on society's margins, care for the earth, what Pope Francis called our common home. And this is worth remarking, for a standard criticism among the authors of its renewal is that moral theology lost contact with its roots in Scripture and in the great exploration of the Christian mysteries that occupied the Fathers of the Church [2]when it emerged as a separate discipline following Trent's reform of training for the priesthood. To which can be added liturgy and other forms of prayer, for there is also cause for regret in the disjunction, in the Western Church especially, between the theology of morals and the 'ascetical and mystical theology' that theorised 'spirituality'. What was lost can be glimpsed as you read the essays of Thomas O'Loughlin, Joseph O'Leary, Maureen Junker-Kenny, Fáinche Ryan, and Paul Murray in this volume, all of whom more anon, and is clearly seen in the essays that deal with Lane's writings about climate change and ecological justice, Interfaith dialogue and pluralism, and through the lens of M Shawn Copeland's 'Theology and Racism' .

A disclaimer, that may strike some as itself disclaimed in the final paragraph of the review. (It isn't!) Undergraduate exposure to a subject, and being reasonably well-read, isn't the same as a training. So I don't pretend to a competence in philosophy, liturgical theology, or biblical studies, or to any competence at all as regards current work in theological anthropology as a field of study, which is why I'm already indebted to Terence Tilley and his 'Challenges of Empirical Research for Theological Anthropology' and to the others whose essays come under that heading, mentioned above among the moral theologians. And why in the end I select for comment just a handful of the pieces that were among the most

2 And some Mothers, though the convention is still to speak of the patristic era.

striking; and this is probably the place to say that there are others that on another day I might have picked instead.

First, a few details about the honouree's career. For over fifty years Dermot Lane has served his Church and its academic institutions as scholar, teacher, writer and administrator, lecturing regularly outside of the academy also, and at summer schools and conferences abroad. He became Director of the Mater Dei Institute in 1982, and in 1992, in addition to his other roles, he was appointed pastor of a busy suburban parish in Dublin where, following retirement as parish priest in 2014, he has continued to exercise a pastoral ministry as parish chaplain. The pastoral experience is perhaps one of the influences on his choice of subject-matter as well as on the manner of his handling it: climate change and ecological justice, Interfaith dialogue and pluralism, the challenges of secularism and unbelief. His writings are always well received in peer reviews, but they have also always been appreciated as resources by those whose calling is to preach and teach – and by those whose calling it is to *live* - the Way of the Lord Jesus.

Bradford A. Anderson opens the collection with what he calls a broad history of interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, 'outlining trajectories in the pre-modern era, in modernity with the rise of critical biblical scholarship, and finally in the present era, which has seen a flowering of approaches.' (7) He then moves on to explore opportunities and challenges that present themselves now. One of the challenges identified is the question, 'What texts are we talking about?', and Jonathan Kearney's essay provides scholarly input on that. We are decidedly back in the twenty-first century with Amanda Dillon's sketch of the emergence of reception as an important addition to the field of biblical studies. On more familiar territory again with the always magisterial Kieran O'Mahony, there's 'Paul after Paul: The Reverberation of the Apostle', as he traces Paul's influence in Mark, Matthew and James, John, Luke-Acts - and Paul himself, depending on where you stand on the issue of authorship.

Thomas O'Loughlin's account of 'The Continuing Quest for 'Eucharistic Origins' is another of the essays that stand out. Attractive though the historical consciousness that has been one of the strengths of modern theology is, O'Loughlin warns that the quest for origins is not without pitfalls. Yet he concludes that 'A critical engagement with the question of origins, showing it in its foreignness, its continuities, and its contingency is indispensable for locating our present, in its contingency, and giving us both freedom and confidence for tomorrow – for it too will be different (66)'. As usual, O'Loughlin has captured your attention before you know it, and you find yourself following him on a journey. Thomas

Whelan's 'Liturgical Theology in Dialogue with Contemporary Western Cultures' is a well-chosen complement to O'Loughlin's piece. As with Dillon's essay relative to Anderson's, Whelan tells you where you are at, and points to the road ahead, and it's all the more engaging that he's writing with Ireland in mind.

There's a complementarity, too, between Joseph O'Leary's 'Salutary Truth' and Maureen Junker-Kenny's "Losing 'Reason' as a Counterpart to Religion'. From current programmes of theology the latter selects three: Radical Orthodoxy, for which reason is 'heretical'; a second approach for which 'secular' is a shared sphere for different traditions in civil society, and there is a secular language that Christians had better use if they want a hearing in the public square; a third which looks for specificity in a Christian approach – regains, as she puts it, 'the biblical appeal to human freedom typical of the encounter of God with the human counterpart for the reason, as Duns Scotus concludes, to have 'fellow lovers' (*condiligentes*) for God's creatures in the historical moves they will initiate' (101). With the advent of AI and other products of human intelligence there is an urgent call, Junker-Kenny says, 'to re-kindle an experience as a finite human capable of fulfilment where the faculty of "imagination" even before the faculty of moral imagination deserves the attention that Lane has demanded for it'. (102)

O'Leary offers a salutary warning against the wrong sort of claim to truth that the Christian tradition has sometimes proffered. His exploration of Buddhist ideas is interesting not only for their place in fruitful Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, but also as potentially corrective of some Christian takes. His essay's aim: 'to reflect on the situation of theology, torn between the conventional and the ultimate, between a modest sense of its limits and a deep responsibility to the treasure of truth it bears in its "vessels of clay" (2 Cor 4:7). Finding the right relation between these two poles is the key to making theology once again a confident enactment, a truth that heals and frees' (104). His conclusion: '*Magna est veritas*. Theologians should not flee from it as a tyranny or regard it as a theme for fret and doubt. They should breathe deeply its bracing air, playing skilfully on its double register of conventionality and ultimacy. This will anchor our endless explorations of the tradition and of other religious and secular sources, so that our study and dialogue never become desultory but grow constantly in the grasp of Truth' (112.) O'Leary's reflections put me in mind of synodality and Pope Francis's call for a synodal Church: one where the People of God walk together, listening deeply, and discerning the Spirit's movement in the midst of plurality and complexity. O'Leary draws on Buddhist thought and on Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and

Feuerbach (who may be met 'at many a humble hearth in rural Ireland', O'Leary says, intriguingly,) as we search for a way to preach and teach the faith in our time, whilst synodality invites to humility, vulnerability, and depth. Both perspectives affirm that truth is not imposed from above but discovered in communion—on a journey of mutual listening and shared discernment. Viewed thus, 'Salutary Truth' isn't only a philosophical reflection but a theological companion to the concept of a synodal path. O'Leary's essay rewards close reading and re-reading.

As intimated above, M. Shawn Copeland's essay on 'Race and Theology' is both prophetic and pastoral. Drawing on Black theology and the lived experience of people that society's establishments have marginalised, she confronts an ambiguity in theology in face of systemic injustice, calling for a theological anthropology that affirms dignity, agency, and solidarity. Her indictment of the tradition is blunt and unsparing: 'While already in the first century differences between Eastern and Western approaches to Christian theology were discernible, during its first thousand years, Christian theology was international and catholic, intercultural and pluriform, and included contributions by women. But gradually, Christian thinkers and clerics began discreetly and contemptibly to enclose Christianity's Semitic origins within the Vulgate; prune its African and Syriac roots; and subordinate its identity nearly exhaustively and almost exclusively to Greco-Roman culture and philosophy' (178)

Two words recur throughout the collection, interdisciplinarity and dialogue – unsurprisingly, since both are major characteristics of Dermot Lane's work. They crop up in almost every context, even in the section entitled Theology and Philosophy, though this is an interdisciplinarity *avant la lettre*, even as Ian Leask's 'Mortal Thinking: Notes on Plato's *Phaedo*' is a reminder of the care required when speaking of Plato's thought as theology. Still, there's at least an implicit dialogue between theology and philosophy in Western thinking, begun with Plato and Aristotle, and memorably instanced at a crisis-point around 200 CE in Tertullian's 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?'. An entire section is given to Theology and Dialogue, with Andrew Pierce's 'Ecumenical Theology: a Work in Progress', Michael Barnes on 'Christology and Interreligious Dialogue', and Peter Admirand's 'Further Stepping Stones for Jewish-Christian Dialogue', its title echoing that of one of Lane's most important books. Dialogue is the subject too, as its title shows, of Joseph Rivera's 'The Open Self: Political Identity and Dialogue', though his piece is placed under the heading of Theology and the Political, where he writes about 'the spirit of dialogue' in Lane. His essay is an unusual and interesting way of

looking at Lane's work by way of an investigation of the structure of the 'open self' in conversation with John Rawls, in the process offering a plausible critique of Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Fail,* and the wider communitarian scene.

The section entitled 'Theology and the Divine Life' is fittingly placed toward the centre of the collection and, fittingly too, it opens with Jim Corkery's 'Grace: Divine Solicitude for a World in Intensive Care'. An attempt at a summary of this would be a sort of barbarism; replete with literary allusion, bordering at times on the poetic, it abounds in powerful metaphors – the two in the title will give an idea of what to expect. If your understanding of grace leaves you cold, Corkery's account won't; it's not often that an essay in theology brings light and warmth, and so gracefully. If you sometimes find it hard to go to the Creed from a Gospel reading that brings out what's meant when we say that Jesus is 'true man', Declan O'Byrne's scholarly and readable 'On Going Beyond the "Classical Presentation" of Chalcedon' sheds valuable light. And when you've got your breath back, tackle Paul Murray's 'Charism, Institution, and Trinity in the Work of Karl Rahner: On Securing the Necessary Pneumatological Ground for an Integrated Theology of Ministry'. No need to let the wordy title put you off.

The final section is Theology and Hope, and it opens with 'Hope and Reconciliation: an Ecclesiological Reflection' by Gemma Simmonds, recalling *Gaudium et spes*, and with a sentence that informs what she makes of her topic: 'If the theological virtue of hope is to have any meaning for a generation largely indifferent to, or alienated from, theological and ecclesial discourse, then it must be anchored in these joys, hopes and griefs and the desires and anguish they engender'. Simmonds' essay is another must-read. Cornelius Casey's 'On the Priority of Hope: The Poet and the Theologians' exemplifies the way in which theology can be enriched by listening and learning from what a poem can tell us of what it means to be a human being in the world. His text is Péguy's poem *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, and his reflections bring it in contact with what philosophers say, and theologians, represented here by Jürgen Moltmann, David Bentley, Herbert McCabe OP, and Pope Benedict XVI. In their 'The Global Compact on Education: Educating for Hope', Sandra Cullen and Andrew McGrady, colleagues of the honouree at Mater Dei and DCU and themselves veteran educationalists, introduce the reader to Pope Francis's initiative known as *The Global Compact on Education* which, they say, 'has the potential to be one of the most exciting developments in Catholic Education since the Second Vatican Council' (299). The section – and the book - concludes with Peter Phan's 'Keeping Hope Alive: Dermot A. Lane's Eschatology',

echoing the name of and a deliberate riff on the title of Lane's classic work on eschatology, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology*[3]. After a short account of Lane's approach to eschatology, Phan highlights three foundational themes in his work, ending with some thoughts on how his eschatology responds to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

While the essays in this collection are rich and varied, a few felt less connected to the central themes or lacked the depth of others. One or two put me in mind of the man at the party who insists on singing the aria that Otello sings before he strangles the soprano, when the prevailing genre is that of *The Bould Tenant Farmer* and its likes. (Balladry is a respected art-form in song and verse of course, even if savants class 'the opera' as superior.) That said, the overall quality is high, and the collection succeeds in advancing theological conversation even as it honours the legacy of Dermot Lane, continuing his work in new directions. For scholars, students, and anyone committed to a theology that engages the world, the collection offers insight, challenge, and hope. And it reminds us that theology is not only about answers but about asking the right questions.

Who is this book for? A typical Festschrift is not normally thought of as fare for a general reader; scholars, writing for scholars, about matters scholarly, in the language of scholars. So of course, one thinks first of a postgraduate seminar or reading course, and in this case even an undergraduate elective if a suitable selection of the essays is made. In this case also, though, given that many of the essays though rich in scholarship are written in plain language, a selection might work even for a study group in a parish or other community, especially if it had the guidance of someone with a background in theology.

On a personal note, I had the honour of being asked to contribute to this collection and have greatly regretted that my circumstances at the time prevented me completing the task, especially since we've been friends since our paths crossed at a Theological Association AGM in Kilkenny a long time ago. So perhaps it will be in order if I conclude with a word of congratulations - and don't stop now!

3 New York/Mahwah, NJ:Paulist Press, 1996.

News & Views

Paddy Daly is a School Chaplain in Dunmore CS, Co. Galway. He writes on his experience of a walking pilgrimage during Holy Week to the Shrine at Walsingham;

On a visit to Belfast during the February midterm break from school with my family I came across some information leaflets in two different churches about a Marian Shrine in the town of Walsingham in the South East of England. I was unaware of the existence of any Marian Shrine in the UK so I read the leaflets with great interest. They provided some basic information on the long and sometimes troubled story of this ancient shrine to Our Blessed Lady. My interest took me onto Google to see what else I could find out and this search drew my attention to an organisation called *Pilgrim Cross* (Formerly known as Student Cross) who annually host a Holy Week walking Pilgrimage to the Shrine at Walsingham.

A short few weeks later on Palm Sunday myself, my wife Aoife and our teenage twins Thomas & Isabel were at Knock Airport boarding a flight to London Stanstead and onward by Train to the city of Norwich. We were due to join the Wesnum Leg of the Pilgrimage which involved walking over 5 days from the town of Wyndham just outside Norwich to the Shrine at Walsingham. We were one of 8 different groups of pilgrims walking from different locations in England including London, Oxford, and Norwich. Our group was specifically for Families with Teenage Children and consisted of approximately 30 people – half adults and half teenagers.

We gathered on Palm Sunday with sense of fear and excitement for what lay ahead. Our meeting place was a short walk from the train station at a small local Parish Hall. We had clear instructions as to what we needed for the journey; this included airbeds and sleeping bags. Our accommodation each night during the week was in small parish or community halls where we all slept together and eat together. It was a truly communal experience – a deep sharing of space, food, prayer, singing, conversation and laughter. Our common goal was to arrive to Walsingham on the afternoon of Good Friday carrying with us a large wooden cross.

We knew little of the history or story of *Pilgrim Cross* (Student

Cross) before setting out from home in Athlone. Briefly, it began in 1947 when a group of College students whose education had been interrupted by the Second World War felt the need to do some public act of Reparation for the atrocities of the War they had just participated in. Thus the first *Pilgrim Cross* group walked in 1947 from London to Walsingham. As the years passed it grew in size and groups started out from different locations. This year there were eight groups – two specifically for families with teens -- and when we all merged together on Good Friday in Walsingham we numbered over three hundred [300] people.

Our group was called *The Wesnum Leg* because we largely followed the course of the River Wesnum. Each day we walked between 10 and 13 miles with various stops and prayer stations along the route. The military origins of the pilgrimage were evident in lots of different ways- the precision timing of each day from rising time to departure and to all the stops en route; the rituals around taking up, putting down and carrying the cross; the organisation along the road; the detailed planning of the day and nightly debriefing; lights out at 11!!

On our first evening we participated in a welcome service with prayers and singing and each pilgrim was presented with their own personal pilgrim cross to wear with the words "*Welcome to Wensum*". Along the way we were hosted by different church groups; mostly Anglican communities but in one town we slept inside the Methodist Church. Each day we joined different church communities for a prayer service – morning prayer, a Holy Communion Service or a prayer service hosted by one of our own liturgy Groups. In addition to these services individual pilgrims volunteered to host shorter Stations where a reflection was read and some hymns sung somewhere on the road.

As regards food, we had a communal breakfast which we provided ourselves, but most of our other meals and snacks were provided by communities along the way. The leadership team had built up close links with different communities and these looked forward to our arrival. Just one example is typical of what we encountered – on Holy Thursday our final stop was at an Anglican Church just beside the Parish Hall which we were to stay in. We arrived at the Church singing our Pilgrim Song and laid our cross at the top of the Church. We were at the end of a long day walking so were immediately offered a cuppa. The priest then invited us to take our tea to the Pews and he began the Holy Communion Service which they had prepared but which we could follow and participate in from the prayer and hymn books provided. Following the Mass they laid tables along the centre Isle of the church and provided us with a full dinner and deserts. Their generosity, hospitality and

joy on having us participate was overwhelming. This is but one example of the daily experiences we had with numerous different communities and churches along the road. Some people even waited outside their house to see us pass and allow us to use their bathroom facilities if needed.

The majority of our Route was on public roads – mostly country roads which were not too busy. Three people carried the cross and the rest of us walked in pairs behind, switching onto the cross when required. Along the road we had long conversations interrupted by times of singing from our specially prepared hymn song and prayer books. Our songs included hymns but also traditional English, Scottish and indeed Irish ballads. The teens mixed easily with the adults and also had lots of fun and laughter together along the way – at night they tended to bed down together in whatever space they could commandeer on our arrival. Most of the teens had participated many times in Pilgrim Cross so they knew one another well, however, they immediately reached out to our twins and made them feel at home from the get go.

The first part of our journey ended on the afternoon of Good Friday with our arrival in Walsingham where we celebrated the Easter Triduum. Our group stayed at the Anglican Shrine where the accommodation was very comfortable and food amazing – others stayed at the Catholic Shrine. However, we all gathered as one Pilgrim Cross family for the Easter Liturgies mostly in the Catholic Church. For the Easter Vigil we lit the Pascal Fire at the Anglican Shrine, lit our individual candles and then processed through the village in full singing voice to the Catholic church. It was a profound experience of Easter Joy and one I will never forget.

It was certainly a very unique experience for us all and one we really enjoyed. The family dimension was very powerful, everyone was drawn into full participation from the outset. There was a group of younger people who co-ordinated the liturgies for the week. We were split into 4 different liturgy groups for some of the more significant liturgies. Our liturgies were very rich and empowering, demonstrating how everyone can play a role in the planning, preparation and facilitation of good liturgy.

The other stand out part for me were the liturgies we attended in the different Anglican Churches. Their female ministers – with their practical no nonsense attitude towards their Sacred Spaces! – had removed a large proportion of their bench seats in their larger churches meaning there was great space freed up for other more practical and pressing needs – an area to sit and have a cup of tea, an area for children, an area to gather outside of liturgy, a library, an area for sleeping if needed! One church had a stand with

different coats hanging and you could take one to borrow if you needed a coat. There were also some beautiful interpretative aids included inside the churches – for the artwork, stain glass windows etc. Everywhere we went there was a great sense of warmth and welcome. Finally, there were fantastic liturgy aids so that you never got lost even if you were unfamiliar with the liturgy.

Could *Pilgrim Cross* work in Ireland? I'd love to try!

Frank Browne, Permanent Deacon in Ballyroan Parish, writes on the need to use succinct and plain English to explain our catholic doctrines to young families.

In the Dublin Diocese much work has been put into the 'Building Hope: Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource'. Parish Pastoral Councils are reflecting together as a parish partnership on ideas for pastoral initiatives. There is agreement that supporting the faith development of young families is essential.

We recently organised a joint parish Corpus Christi Procession, and it was a special occasion for those who attended. June weather is usually kind, and we got to capture some of the most beautiful photos of the year. But I wonder if this fourteenth century custom of carrying the Blessed Sacrament in a procession after Mass on the feast of Corpus Christi, is really understood by our families?

Sacramental preparation for children and their parents is a hot topic of discussion within our Diocese. Our Parish Pastoral Council is reflecting on whether we should continue with what we have always done and organise a committee of parents to plan and allocate tasks at the various children's Masses, or should we prioritise a parish led sacramental preparation programme. We do appreciate that whatever we choose, it must facilitate meaning for all involved. In my parish we have invested in projectors that can display the prayers of the Mass visually, to encourage families to participate more. We have someone to welcome and explain the different moments of the liturgy, to help children and their parents to follow what is happening at Mass.

Over the last months we have had some important feast days; the Ascension of the Lord, Pentecost, the Holy Trinity and recently the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi). My parish priest wished me well when I suggested preaching on the Holy Trinity, as he advised it was no easy task to explain a complex theological doctrine to families. One of the useful strategies used within the health service where I work during the week, is the use of 'plain English,' It can be challenging to explain service developments

and policies in a simple, concise, and accurate way. Much thought is required to ensure nothing important is missed while facilitating understanding. It seems appropriate to consider using this approach in helping our young children and their parents to understand the sacrament and mystery of Corpus Christi.

While studying theology in Dublin City University, a common task offered to us as students was to complete a 'précis,' to summarise the main ideas and arguments of an article in one paragraph. While we may have groaned at the challenge, we did appreciate that despite having to read the article several times, a well written 'précis' was the result of having a clear understanding of what the writer was saying.

Imagine if we could find the time to apply the principles of a 'précis,' and 'plain English' to convey the Church's teaching on 'Corpus Christi, and its meaning and relevance for how we live out our faith. We might explain a little of the historical background; that the Eucharist or our Mass is a thanksgiving meal, coming from the Jewish celebration of 'Passover' during the time of Moses, who had led his people from slavery. We could make the link between the Jewish 'Passover meal' and Jesus' Last Supper meal that he shared with his close followers and that this meal that Jesus celebrated was to be our first Mass. His closest friends were told to celebrate this meal regularly until his return, so becoming our first priests.

Finally, we might try to explain, that during this last meal Jesus blessed the bread and wine, and he told them that he would be present with them sharing his Body and Blood when they blessed the bread and wine. Holy Communion like all food strengthens us but we believe that we are *changed* when we receive Holy Communion, as we become part of the Body of Christ which is our Church. We can explain that the Church we attend is not just a building; it is a community of people who want to receive and share in God's love.

Planting the seeds of faith does require *preparation*, and *patience*. Those in pastoral ministry need to be able to translate the message of faith in a way that the next generation can understand, so that their faith can grow amid the challenges of life. We need to be brave and not shy away from trying to explain complex theological doctrines that are at the core of what distinguishes our Catholic faith from other Christian denominations.

New Books

Maynooth College Reflects on Catechesis in the Life of the Church. Edited by Jeremy Corley, Andrew Meszaros & John Paul Sheridan. Foreword by Bishop Michael Duignan. Messenger Publications, 2025. ISBN 978 1 7881 2718 9

Catechesis is a much-discussed subject in Ireland today as new forms of ministry develop for a synodal Church and dioceses are beginning to have conversations about how the ministry of catechist can be developed locally. This is why this collection of reflections from Maynooth is timely. The first chapter highlights the significance of the intrinsic relationship between human development and faith development as catechesis takes place in the lives of persons, intentionally connecting life stages with stages of faith in the new Directory for Catechesis 2020. For those who are not familiar with this developmental approach this chapter is helpful, although more recent studies on women's faith development are not included. Crucially the author points towards the importance of accompaniment in catechesis and forming catechists to walk alongside those they are accompanying.

This connects very well with Chapter 3 where there is an emphasis on the holistic formation of catechists and the three dimensions of knowing how to be with, knowledge of the tradition and knowing how to communicate. If catechists are to play a profound role in the Church's future mission, then formation must focus on these key competencies. This is complimented by Chapter 7 which argues for balance based on the four pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, where faith is not only believed, but lived, celebrated and prayed, implying that catechists need a holistic formation.

While Chapter 6 argues the case for the seamless connection between catechesis and religious education, it does point to the increasing disconnect between the classroom activity of religious education and setting faith formation goals. Chapter 12 brilliantly highlights the yet untapped potential of engaging in what has been called the Church's best kept secret, which is Catholic Social Teaching, engaging both teenagers and adults in their concerns to challenge injustice. This moves the discussion about catechesis beyond the sacraments and into the arena of everyday life and witnessing in the world. As we begin to imagine what a catechist might do, Chapter 4 provides a historical perspective, tracing the history of the impact of catechists in Zambia. For those who are charged with developing the ministry of catechist in their dioceses Chapter 3 begins to highlight the many avenues of service that open in this ministry, affording an opportunity to foster lay leadership in a Church of multiple ministries.

The section on the Spirituality of the Catechist is the most practical, where Chapter 16 poses the catechetical challenges in a digital world to growing in prayer where social media overwhelms interiority. This indicates how formation of catechists must enable them to teach prayer. Chapter 17 adds to this by arguing for an integrated model where scripture and worship provide the best framework for growth in faith.

Overall, this is a helpful primer for those who are reflecting on the ministry of catechesis in the twenty-first century, opening the possibilities offered by both the Directory for Catechesis 2020 and *Antiquum Ministerium.* Every chapter provides questions for reflection and discussion. These are useful for those developing this ministry in a team setting. If there is one weakness in the book it is its lack of reference to the potential of parish-based catechesis and how this might compliment and enhance the work of schools, nevertheless this book will contribute to deeper ongoing conversations about the untapped potential of the ministry of catechesis.

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