

**The Paschal Dimension of the 40 Days as an
interpretive key to a reading of the new and
serious challenges to faith in the Roman
Catholic Church in Ireland 1990-2010**

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reading of the new and serious challenges to faith in the Roman
Catholic Church in Ireland 1990-2010**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2011

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Ph.D. is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Kevin Doherty

ID No: 53155831

Date: 30th September 2011

DEDICATION

*To my parents Betty and Donal Doherty.
The very first tellers of the Easter Story to me,
and always the most faithful tellers of that Story.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
INTRODUCTION.....	ii

CHAPTER I

From Famine to Fall

The Historical Journey of the Church in Ireland 1850-2010

1.1 ESTABLISHING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	1
1.2 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND 1850-1989.....	2
1.2.1 The 'Cullenisation' of the Church	2
1.2.2 The Church and the New State: 1922-1949	6
1.2.3 The 1950s.....	11
1.2.4 The 1960s.....	16
1.2.5 The 1970s.....	21
1.2.6 The 1980s.....	24
1.2.7 Assessment of the Church entering the 1990s.....	29
1.3 IRISH CATHOLICISM 1990-2010	31
Recasting of the Church	
1.3.1 Scandal in the Church.....	32
1.3.2 Institutional Scandal.....	36
1.3.3 The Fallout.....	38
1.3.4 Influences advancing the 'Liberal Agenda'	44
1.4 SYNOPSIS	47

CHAPTER II

A Sociological Reading of the Church in Ireland 1990-2010

2.1 ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT FOR ASSESSMENT	51
2.2 THE ISSP (1998) AND EVS (1999) SOCIAL SURVEY STUDY	53
2.2.1 Sociological Analysis	53
2.2.2 Further Analysis.....	66
2.3 THE CHALLENGE OF INDIFFERENCE (The 2009 MacGréil Report) ...	69
2.4 RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS.....	73

CHAPTER III

An Interpretive Key – The 40 Days

3.1 A THEOLOGICAL READING – INTRODUCTION.....	77
3.2 THE POST RESURRECTION APPEARANCES	80
3.2.1 40 Days – Analysis	80

3.2.2	The Pauline Context	82
3.2.3	The Gospel Context	84
3.2.3.1	<i>Mt 28:1-10 Mary of Magdala and the other Mary</i>	85
3.2.3.2	<i>Mt 28:16-20 The eleven disciples</i>	86
3.2.3.3	<i>Lk 24:13-35 Cleopas and one other</i>	87
3.2.3.4	<i>Jn 21 Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, et alia</i>	90
3.2.3.5	<i>Jn 20:11-18 Mary of Magdala</i>	92
3.2.3.6	<i>Jn 20:19-23 The disciples without Thomas</i>	95
3.2.3.7	<i>Jn 20:24-29 The disciples with Thomas</i>	99
3.2.3.8	<i>Mk 16:9-20 Mary of Magdala, two disciples, the Eleven</i>	101
3.2.4	The Context in Acts.....	102
3.2.5	Reflection on the Appearance Experience	106

3.3	SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVES	
	ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE RISEN CHRIST	109
3.3.1	The Impact of Encounter	109
3.3.2	The Eternal Presence	111
3.3.3	Sacramental Presence.....	113
3.3.4	Ecclesiological Presence	115
3.3.5	Introducing the Irish Context	118

CHAPTER IV

Grieving What You Have Lost

The task to 'name our deaths'

4.1	THE NATURE OF LOSS	120
4.2	GRIEVE WHAT YOU HAVE LOST.....	122
4.2.1	Name Your Deaths	122
4.2.1.1	<i>Secular Marginalisation of Religious Belief</i>	126
4.2.2	Death and New Life	128
4.3	A CLERICALIST MINDSET	133
4.3.1	Clerical Caste	133
4.3.2	Vocation.....	139
4.3.3	One Priesthood.....	144
4.3.3.1	<i>Disenchantment with the Church</i>	146
4.3.3.2	<i>Customer and Shopkeeper</i>	148
4.4	SACRAMENTAL ENCOUNTER.....	152
4.4.1	Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story	157
4.4.1.1	<i>Redundant Expectation</i>	158
4.4.1.2	<i>Call to Awareness</i>	159
4.4.1.3	<i>Encounter with a 'Stranger'</i>	160
4.4.1.4	<i>Oculata Fide</i>	161
4.5	GRIEVE FOR WHAT HAS DIED	163

CHAPTER V

Adjusting to the New Reality

The task to 'claim our births'

5.1 CLAIM YOUR BIRTHS (New Life)	165
5.1.1 New Life – A 'New Pentecost' in the Church	165
5.1.2 New Life – The Call to Collaborative Discipleship	172
5.1.2.1 <i>Gift</i>	172
5.1.2.2 <i>Ministry</i>	174
5.1.2.3 <i>Mission</i>	178
5.1.3 New Life – The Search for the Sacred	184
5.1.3.1 <i>A Post-modernity of Christian Making</i>	186
5.1.3.2 <i>A Renewed Imagination</i>	189
5.1.4 New Life – Communion.....	192
5.2 40 DAYS: INVITATION TO INTIMACY	200

CHAPTER VI

A Reflection on New Ecclesial Movements

Evidence of 40 Day Engagement in the Irish Church

6.1 LIFE AND SPIRIT	204
6.1.1 Establishing a Context	204
6.1.2 New Ecclesial Movements	205
6.1.2.1 <i>Rooted in Vatican Council II</i>	205
6.1.2.2 <i>Elements of Commonality</i>	210
6.2 'WAVES' OF NEW MOVEMENTS IN THE CHURCH	216
6.2.1 The Early Church.....	216
6.2.2 Anthony and Basil.....	217
6.2.3 Gregorian Mission.....	219
6.2.4 The Cluny Reform Movement	220
6.2.5 Francis and Dominic	221
6.2.6 The Company of Jesus	223
6.2.7 Missionary Congregations.....	229
6.2.8 Charismatic Irruptions	230
6.3 COMMUNION AND LIBERATION	231
6.3.1 Origins	231
6.3.2 Charism and Mission	235
6.3.3 Organisation and Structure	238
6.3.4 The Irish Context.....	241
6.4 THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY	244
6.4.1 Origins	244
6.4.2 Method.....	250
6.4.3 Criticisms	254
6.4.4 The Neocatechumenate in Ireland	257
6.4.5 Papal Affirmation.....	259
6.5 PARISH CELLS OF EVANGELISATION	260
6.5.1 Origins	260

6.5.2	<i>Oikos</i> Evangelisation	263
6.5.3	The Fruit of the Cell Experience	266
6.5.4	Recognition	269
6.6	THE COLUMBA COMMUNITY	271
6.6.1	Origins	271
6.6.2	Four Apostolic Centres	272
6.6.2.1	<i>Columba House</i>	272
6.6.2.2	<i>Saint Anthony's Retreat Centre</i>	274
6.6.2.3	<i>White Oaks Rehabilitation Centre</i>	274
6.6.2.4	<i>IOSAS Centre</i>	275
6.6.3	Life and Spirit	276
6.7	NEW ECCLESIAL REALITIES IN IRELAND	278

CHAPTER VII

40 Days – The Mandate to tell the Easter Story: A Concrete Proposal for the Church in Ireland

7.1	TELLING THE EASTER STORY	282
7.1.1	The Point of Departure	284
7.1.1.1	<i>Shibboleth</i>	288
7.1.1.2	<i>Initiation into the Christian Story</i>	291
7.2	A WAY FORWARD	294
7.2.1	Re-Image the Easter Story	294
7.2.1.1	<i>Objective and Subjective Encounter</i>	298
7.3	DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE Assessment and Formulation of the Confirmation Process	301
7.3.1	A Journey of Encounter	301
7.3.1.1	<i>Darkness</i>	301
7.3.1.2	<i>Initiative</i>	304
7.3.1.3	<i>Shalom</i>	307
7.3.1.4	<i>Recognition</i>	312
7.3.1.5	<i>Mission</i>	316
7.4	ASSESSMENT	319

CHAPTER VIII

The Call to Paschal Imagination

8.1	DARKNESS	324
8.1.1	An issue of Choice	327
8.2	A PARADIGM SHIFT	328
8.2.1	A New Departure	328
8.3	A PASCHAL IMAGINATION	333
8.3.1	For forty days he had continued to appear to them	336

APPENDICES.....339

Appendix 'A'

Exposition Survey Data

Appendix 'B'

The use of 40 in the Old Testament

Appendix 'C'

Church fails to react to shortage of priests

Appendix 'D'

An outline of some New Ecclesial Movements in the Irish Context

Appendix 'E'

Evidencing of ineffectual attempts to communicate the Easter story in the contemporary event of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland

Appendix 'F'

The call to a 'new imagination'

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....354

Church Documents354

Reference Books355

Commissions of Investigations – Publications356

Book Titles356

Articles and Book Chapters363

ABSTRACT

The Paschal Dimension of the 40 Days as an Interpretive Key to a reading of the new and serious challenges to faith in the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland 1990-2010

Kevin Doherty

The qualitative methodology underpinning this research seeks to reflect on the extent, if any, of the demise of Irish Catholicism, particularly in the years since 1990, to present evidence relevant to that, and to put forward an interpretative reading of the current circumstances of the Catholic Church in Ireland from a theological and ecclesiological perspective.

In that regard, inspired by a representation of the cycle of the paschal mystery outlined by Ronald Rolheiser, this thesis proposes that an aspect of the paschal cycle to the fore at this time in the Irish Church is that represented by the 40 days linking Easter Day and Ascension Day. As such, interpreting the 40 Days as a symbol of encounter with the risen Jesus – understood as the journey from death to new life – it seeks to apply this template to the circumstances of the contemporary Irish Church.

Moreover, naming this new life *par excellence* as the ‘new Pentecost’ present in the event of Vatican Council II, this research seeks evidence of symbiosis between the new life symbolised by the 40 Day template and the expression of the ‘new Pentecost’ in the current manifestation of Irish Catholicism. Within that, it applies a critical dimension of 40 Day encounter, the call to a paschal imagination.

INTRODUCTION

Parameters

This thesis is thematically based in origin and in concept. Its intention is to address the context of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland at the outset of the third millennium. As such, it seeks to position the event of Irish Catholicism against what has been referenced as the ‘Irish church’s dark night of the soul’.¹

A generic interpretation of this depiction of the Church might instinctively read it against the litany of scandal attaching to the Irish Church, as well as the recent marginalisation of the status of Catholicism in Ireland relative to its traditional ascendancy. Both these elements are obviously central in any appraisal of the place of the Roman Catholic Church in modern Ireland, yet their occurrence in the contemporary event of Church is neither isolated nor detached from a more complex reading of the Church within the Irish context.² In that regard, commentators question the extent to which the qualities attaching to ‘traditional Irish Catholicism’ were either traditional or Catholic.³ As such, they speak of an ecclesiological and cultural structure, upon which Irish Catholicism functioned for generations, as acting to the detriment of the spiritual and catechetical well-being of the ‘People of God’.⁴ Moreover, and significantly, as often in history, ‘the bill is presented many decades later’.⁵ Definitively,

Irish Catholicism now began to pay the price for an over-rigid emphasis on the observance of law, and even more so for having paid little attention to trying to educate the ordinary people in the faith.⁶

Reflecting this, the central focus of this thesis is to assess the extent of the ‘dark night’ encountered by the Church in Ireland. Specifically, it will address the repositioning of the Church against the cultural, sociological and ecclesial ‘tsumani’ defined, substantially, by the timeframe 1990—2010. In pursuing this, it will take cognisance of the broader historical context attaching to the place of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland.

¹ Michael J. Farrell, ‘Irish church’s dark night of the soul’, in the *National Catholic Reporter*, August 27, 1999.

² Reference to the ‘Church’ in the context of this thesis is taken to refer, unless otherwise stated, to the Roman Catholic Church. This designation is inspired only on the basis that it marks the parameters of experience from which this research is undertaken and to which it refers.

³ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2003), 47.

⁴ Tony Flannery, *The Death of Religious Life?* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1997), 40.

⁵ Jan Kerkhofs, ‘Europe needs therapy’, in *The Tablet*, 24th July, 1999.

⁶ Tony Flannery, *The Death of Religious Life?*, 40.

Outline

In his pastoral letter to the Church in Ireland, Pope Benedict outlines that in recent decades the Church has had to confront ‘new and serious challenges to the faith’.⁷ He includes among these ‘the rapid transformation and secularization of Irish society’, the impact of ‘fast-paced social change’, and a misinterpretation and confusion regarding the implementation of the programme of renewal proposed by Vatican Council II.⁸ Furthermore, these act merely as a backdrop to the *raison d’être* of the letter, ‘the abuse of children and vulnerable young people by members of the Church in Ireland, particularly by priests and religious’.⁹ The Holy Father names as the cumulative effect of these factors in the Irish context ‘the weakening of faith and the loss of respect for the Church and her teachings’.¹⁰ Moreover, proposing concrete initiatives designed to ‘assist the local Church on her path of renewal’, Pope Benedict speaks in terms of ‘a rebirth of the Church in Ireland’.¹¹ It is a reading that, relative to the paschal dimension of death and new life, reflects the parameters of this thesis.

The very issuing of the pastoral letter conveys a magnitude of concern and uneasiness attaching to the context and status of the event of contemporary Irish Catholicism. As such, it is a reading often reflected in Irish theological commentary, and widely interpreted in Irish social commentary. This is established by even a generic referencing of opinion and comment on the circumstances of the Church in modern Ireland.

Authors speak variously of ‘The End of Irish Catholicism?’,¹² ‘The Changing Religious Situation in Ireland’,¹³ and ‘Cultural Change and Theology in Ireland’.¹⁴ They point to tensions relative to such transposition as manifest in terms of ‘Clashing Symbols’,¹⁵ and ‘Cultures Apart?’.¹⁶ Some interpret the prevailing condition of the church in terms of decline and demise, referencing it as ‘The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland’,¹⁷ and,

⁷ Benedict XVI, Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland, 19 March 2010 (4).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. (1)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. (14)

¹² Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2003).

¹³ Ignatius Murphy, ‘The Changing Religious Situation in Ireland’, in *Doctrine and Life*, 29/6 (1978), 378-383.

¹⁴ James Corkery, S.J., ‘Cultural Change and Theology in Ireland’, in *Studies*, 88/352 (1999), 371-380.

¹⁵ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003).

¹⁶ Oliver V Brennan, *Cultures Apart?* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2001).

¹⁷ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998).

unambiguously, ‘Goodbye to Catholic Ireland’.¹⁸ Others, again, questioning ‘What Future Does the Church Have?’,¹⁹ are convinced enough to talk of ‘The Future Irish Church’,²⁰ and ‘A Church with a Future’.²¹

Within that context the genesis of this exploration of the circumstances of contemporary Irish Catholicism takes root. Essentially, understanding that within a generation the Catholic Church in Ireland has undergone an unprecedented journey of cultural, ecclesial and political transformation, it seeks to present a critical and focused analysis of this adjustment. The qualitative methodology underpinning this research – exploring sociological, ecclesiological and theological data apropos the contemporary status of the Church in Ireland – determines to establish a reading of that status. Addressing particularly the capacity of the Church to engage with a changed situation *ad intra* and *ad extra*, it aspires to position the Church against these changed circumstances – colloquially, to reflect on ‘where we are, how we got there, how we might face the future’.²²

In that light, chapter one, seeking to establish a framework within which a reading of the current circumstances of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland might be advanced, will outline the historical context attaching to the positioning of the Church. To that end, it will first address the broader context by situating the Church against the historical and political evolution in Ireland from 1850—1989. The chapter will then move to a specific reading of Irish Catholicism against the background of the cultural, sociological, ecclesiological, and political upheaval experienced in Ireland in the years 1990—2010. Chapter two, discussing the asserted ‘demise’ of the Catholic Church in Ireland,²³ will seek to explore the causes, both within and beyond the Church, driving that assessment. Particularly, benchmarking the sociological status of Irish Catholicism at the end of the 1990s, and again following the turbulent first decade of the new millennium, it will draw on (especially) the ISSP survey (1998), the EVS study (1999), and the national survey of religious attitudes and practices authored by Micheál Mac Gréil (2009).²⁴

¹⁸ Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: a social, personal and cultural history* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997).

¹⁹ James O’Connell, ‘What Future Does the Church Have?’, in *The Furrow*, 55/1 (2004), 13 – 21.

²⁰ Edmond Cullinan, ‘The Future Irish Church’, in *The Furrow*, 54/7 (2003), 414-418.

²¹ Niall Coll and Paschal Scallan, *A Church with a Future* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2005).

²² Cf. Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 10.

²³ As it has been described for example by Edmond Cullinan, ‘The Future Irish Church’, 415.

²⁴ The *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) chose religion as its theme for research in 1998. It was conducted in Ireland in May and June 1998 by the Survey Research Unit of the Economic and Social Research

The third chapter will posit the need for an interpretative reading of the ‘demise’ from a suggested theological and ecclesiological perspective. In that context, it will introduce a representation of the paschal cycle by Ronald Rolheiser, and, within this, focus especially on that aspect of the forty days linking Easter Day and Ascension Day. Moreover, proposing the 40 Day paradigm as applicable to the current circumstances of the Irish Church, it will analyse the paschal dimension of the 40 Days in their immediate context, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As such, it will explore the appearance narratives named in the scriptural accounts. From this, presenting the 40 Days as a symbol of encounter with the risen Jesus, it will outline systematic perspectives on the experience of encounter. This will include a reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar locating the resurrection encounter as a period of formation in identity and mission for the disciples. It will develop this by appeal to the thinking of Karl Rahner who evidences the encounter as inclusive of the acts of Jesus in the founding of the Church. The chapter will conclude by drawing reference to the contemporary position of the Church in Ireland.

Rolheiser names as the task of the 40 Days the capacity to ‘grieve what you have lost and adjust to the new reality’.²⁵ This forms the basis of chapters four and five. The fourth chapter addresses the first part of that couplet. It reflects how, in the Irish situation, ‘grieving what we have lost’ points to the need to question the extent to which the deaths within the Church have been acknowledged and accepted. Naming resistances in that regard it includes an analysis of a detrimental attachment within Irish Catholicism to a clericalist mindset. Similarly, it will address issues relative to the practice of sacramental initiation in the Irish context. Against that, referencing what Enda McDonagh names in the Irish experience as ‘faith in a wintery time’, it reflects on the need for ‘a new imagination out of which the Christian story might be retold’.²⁶

The fifth chapter, addressing the second aspect of the task, reflects how, in the Irish context, ‘adjusting to the new reality’ means that we need to question the extent to which we have understood and embraced the many new ways that life is present to the Irish Church. In

Institute. The *European Values Study* (EVS) is a pan-European project which surveys especially values associated with work, religion, life-styles and other issues. Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference: A Need for Religious Revival in Ireland* (National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2009).

²⁵ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), 139.

²⁶ Dermot A. Lane, ‘Faith’ in *New Century New Society: Christian Perspectives* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2001), 159-173 at, 170.

particular it will name this new life *par excellence* as the ‘new Pentecost’ present in the event of Vatican Council II.

The purpose of chapter six is to seek evidence of correlation between the new life symbolised by the 40 Day template and the expression of that new life in the current manifestation of Irish Catholicism. To that end it will address what is widely acknowledged as a manifestation of the ‘new Pentecost’ in contemporary ecclesial expression, namely the status of New Ecclesial Movements and Lay Associations.²⁷ In that regard, having established a theological and historical basis for the Movements, it will explore the formation and structure of three of the more prominent International Movements, in addition to an indigenously Irish Lay Association. The chapter will conclude by exploring approaches towards a coordinated and collaborative integration of Movements and Associations in the Irish context – particularly initiatives sponsored by the Irish Episcopal Commission.

Chapter seven proposes an initiative for the Irish Church as it seeks to find ever new ways to present ‘the ancient deposit of faith’.²⁸ Establishing as the mandate of the Church the directive to tell the Easter story (cf. Mt 28:19), it recognises, *apropos* the ‘new and serious challenges to the faith’ in Ireland,²⁹ particular ecclesiological and sociological difficulties in the fulfilling of this mandate. Specifically it focuses on the area of sacramental initiation, especially that of the Sacrament of Confirmation. In this context, applying the 40 Day template against the assessment and re-formulation of the Confirmation Process in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York, the chapter seeks to gain perspective from that process for the Irish context – essentially to seek potential for greater affiliation between sacramental preparation and the telling of the Easter story.

The concluding eighth chapter names as a precondition accompanying the telling of the Easter story to contemporary society the need to first remake the Christian fabric of contemporary ecclesial life.³⁰ In that light, drawing on writers such as Michael Paul Gallagher, it first

²⁷ Message of Pope John Paul II for the World Congress of Ecclesial movements and new communities, ‘You Express Church’s Fruitful Vitality’, 27 May 1998.

²⁸ Cf. Pope John XXIII, opening address to the Second Vatican Council, October 11th 1962: Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (London and New York: Continuum, abridged edition, 2000), 222.

²⁹ Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland, (4).

³⁰ *Christifideles laici*, 34. Pope John Paul II reflects that to imbue societies with a Christian spirit, ‘what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself.’

references engagement with the 40 Day paradigm in the Irish context as grounded in the call to renewal – to effect a paradigm shift in the religious consciousness of the Church in Ireland. The chapter concludes in the drawing together of various strands of the argument, and locates the efficacious potential of these against a singular and critical dimension of 40 Day encounter, the call to a paschal imagination.

Inspiration

If the essence of story is that ‘they all lived happily ever after’, then the Easter story inherent to the Christian people is quintessentially *the* paradigmatic story. In that context, the analysis of Pope John Paul, that many of the baptised today ‘think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all’, and that often they are lacking in even ‘the most basic elements and notions of the faith’, is instructive.³¹ The implication is that something in the telling of the story today is lacking.

Responding to this, Fr John Shea, linking the personal life story with the Grand Narrative that is ‘The Event of Church’,³² holds that ‘personal experiences and stories should be heard before the traditional experiences and stories are consulted’.³³ This diagnosis acts as a personal inspiration in the formulation of this thesis.³⁴ As such, it is a story rooted fundamentally in my experience as a member of the Roman Catholic Christian Community, and, within that, my experience as a presbyter of the Archdiocese of Dublin. Against that, one example, perhaps, stands as a vignette within the metanarrative of the contemporary Irish Church.

Diversity of Encounter

The church door verdict indicated that my homily was well structured and relevant. It seemed that my referencing of the Teresian analysis of ‘the rich young man’, on the basis that *we are*

³¹ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, On Jesus Christ Alive in His Church the Source of Hope for Europe (Rome: Vatican Press, 2003), 47.

³² John Shea, *Stories of Faith* (Chicago, Illinois: The Thomas More Press, 1980), 76-125.

³³ *Ibid*, 77.

³⁴ Addressing the crisis of unbelief in the contemporary world, and specifically the Christian task of ‘Proclaiming the Gospel of Hope’ to this unbelief, Pope John Paul determines, on the basis ‘of making a courageous diagnosis which will make it possible to decide on appropriate therapies’ (*Ecclesia in Europa*, 46, and Chapter III, ‘Proclaiming the Gospel of Hope’).

exactly like him, was helpful.³⁵ Thus, the vigorous and somewhat aggressive lambasting that ensued from ‘a church elder’, on the grounds that such ‘rambling on’ demonstrated merely a deficiency of courage on my part, as the presider, was unanticipated. Moreover, it transpired that such paucity of content was not my personal preserve, but merely symptomatic of a generic cowardice among the Irish presbyterate. ‘Young people are living in sin’, he insisted cogently, ‘and they think it’s alright. And adultery? What are you saying about that?’ By way of buttressing his case he thrust the text of the gospel before me. And then, with his index finger pneumatic-like pounding the text, concluded that ‘This is what you should be talking about. The commandments and the rules.’

The following day, invited by a school retreat team, I celebrated with a number of retreatants the sacrament of reconciliation. Celebration, that is, in the sense that the principle of *ex opere operato* established the canonical veracity of the encounter. Beyond that, any linkage to the traditionally understood practice of ‘confession’ was more fortuitous than deliberate. For the ‘penitents’, the idea of sacramental confession, let alone the practice of it, was an alien concept. None of them could recall having celebrated the sacrament since their first confession. Indeed, some couldn’t recall having celebrated it at all. Most freely admitted that their presence was entirely circumstantial, having been corralled and coerced by the events of the retreat. And yet, given the opportunity, many, most, gave voice to a deeply felt need for healing, to a dis-ease surrounding the integrity of their ethical life-choices, to vulnerability, confusion, fear. In short, they demonstrated ability for honest appraisal, matched by a genuine need to seek out the authentic. Rooted in the commitment of *ex opere operantis* they demonstrated a capacity to encounter reconciliation to a degree seemingly absent in the approach of the rich young man ... and perhaps in an excessive attachment to ‘the commandments and the rules.’

What are we at?

The juxtaposition of these encounters brings into focus the scale of diversity in the imaging of faith expression within contemporary Irish Catholicism – a diversity that, in my time in presbyteral ministry, has become ever more pronounced.

³⁵ E Allison Peers (trans), *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946). The analogy with the rich young man (Mt 19:16-22) is found in the Third Mansions of ‘The Interior Castle’ (Vol 2, 221).

I was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin at Pentecost, in June 1992. In May 1992, the revelations concerning Bishop Eamon Casey had come to light. It was to be the first in a seemingly unending series of scandalous revelations umbilically attaching to the journey of the Irish Church going forward. The need, at this time, is not to rehearse the cumulative effect of these revelations – other than acknowledging that they have acted as a prevailing backdrop to ecclesial life, including presbyteral ministry, in Ireland. Aligned to developments in the broader societal context, many generated by the delayed arrival in Ireland of Enlightenment inspired values, it gives rise to a fundamental premise of this thesis: that the Church in Ireland is in transition to a new and a different form of presence in Irish society. The task is to respond to this call to transition.

In that light, it recalls another occurrence in 1992. At that time, Michael Casey, a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin, published a book on his experience of priestly ministry. The publication was rhetorically entitled ‘What Are We At?’³⁶ To the extent that any resolution has been found to this conundrum, the circumstances attaching to the position of the Irish Church in 2010 applies a current relevance to the question. Against this, notwithstanding the sense of *schadenfreude* among many regarding the Church in Ireland, a deeper malaise is evidenced in the contemporary event of Irish Catholicism – that the power of the Christian story to attract and to impact is diminished, that the presenting ability of the story to engage hearts and minds and spirits has lessened.

Yet, the telling of the Easter Story is the very *raison d’être* of the Church: ‘Go out to the whole world: proclaim the Gospel to all creation’ (Mk 16:16). It is in that light that this thesis marks a personal quest, and only that. It is an attempt to validate and verify what Pope John Paul has identified as ‘a proclamation of joy’,³⁷ and what I have placed as a scriptural verse on my ordination card: ‘Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you’ (1 Peter 3:15).

³⁶ Michael Casey, *What are we at?: Ministry & Priesthood for the Third Millenium* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1992). Reflecting on ‘how parish is succeeding or not as a vehicle of evangelisation and pastoral care’, and whether it is a question that should be addressed, Casey concludes, ‘We need to, urgently’ (ibid 112).

³⁷ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 1.

Chapter I

From Famine to Fall

The Historical Journey of the Church in Ireland 1850-2010

1.1 ESTABLISHING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Contemporary perspectives regarding the position of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland are generically characterised by an abiding sense of crisis, closely linked within the Church to an associated feeling of despondency. The generation of Church since the Papal visit of 1979 has witnessed the crossing of the watershed from ecclesial boom to decline. Gradual at first, this decline has accelerated considerably in the years since 1990. Concisely we are informed: ‘Clearly the cultural scaffolding – of habit, assent, consensus, obedience, tradition or whatever – within which Irish Catholicism flourished for a century and a half, has collapsed’.¹ Concomitantly, the reversal in the Church's fortunes has given rise to many questions and much commentary – ranging from wondering how it is that the Church has got into such a mess, and the attribution of blame, to acclamation within political and social circles of the post-Christian order in Irish Society.

Yet, such commentary, often reflecting a popular mindset, can fail to take account of the evidence regarding the status of Catholicism in Ireland. In that light, the objective of this thesis, drawing on such evidence, is to look at the nature and extent of the apparent demise of the Church in Ireland,² particularly addressing the timeframe 1990-2010. The objective of this chapter is concerned primarily with establishing foundational parameters within which readings, relative to the Church in Ireland, might be advanced. To that end, methodologically, it will pursue an historical positioning of Catholicism in Ireland.

As such, it will first address the broader context by situating the Church against the historical and political evolution in Ireland from 1850-1989. Seeking to establish a more focused assessment, the chapter will then move to a reading of Irish Catholicism against the

¹ Seán Mac Réamoinn, ‘With the Past, in the Present, for the Future’, in Denis Carroll (ed) *Religion in Ireland: Past, Present and Future* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1999), 96-126 at 123.

² Reference to the ‘Church’ in the context of this thesis is taken to refer, unless otherwise stated, to the Roman Catholic Church. This designation is inspired only on the basis that it marks the parameters of experience from which this research is undertaken and to which it refers.

background of the cultural, sociological, ecclesiological, and political ‘tsunami’ experienced in Ireland in the years 1990-2010.

Collectively, moving forward, this exploration of the historical context will establish a framework within which to pursue an objective analysis of the status of Catholicism in Ireland at the outset of the new millennium.

1.2 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND 1850-1989

The long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism

1.2.1. The ‘Cullenisation’ of the Church

The triumph of the Irish Counter-Reformation gave rise to what Tom Inglis refers to as ‘The long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism’.³ It was a triumph born out of the experience of famine, the ‘great divide in the religious history of the Irish Catholic Community’.⁴ It was symbolised by the food-for-faith controversy colloquially known as ‘souperism’,⁵ and was responsible ultimately for a religious revival essentially unparalleled in extent and influence. Under the directorship of Paul Cardinal Cullen, Archbishop of Armagh from 1850 and of Dublin from 1852-1878, the post-famine Church in Ireland undertook a ‘devotional revolution’⁶ that was to shape and form religious, social, and political life for entire generations of Irish people.⁷

³ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 98, 256.

⁴ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950 – The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2002), xxvi.

⁵ See Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1998), 49-51.

⁶ Séan Mac Réamoinn, ‘With the Past, in the Present, for the Future’, 112. See also Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, xxvi, 282: While acknowledging that the ‘revolution’ has traditionally been attributed to the efforts of Cardinal Cullen, Fuller further outlines that recent theory (proposed by T.G. McGrath) holds that changes in belief and practice should be more appropriately understood as the Irish ‘tridentine revolution’, that is, the delayed working out in Ireland of the decrees of the Council of Trent. See also Michael Drumm, ‘Irish Catholics – A People Formed by Ritual’, in Eoin G. Cassidy, (ed.), *Faith and Culture in the Irish Context* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1996), 83-99 at 90: This theory is given credence by Michael Drumm in outlining the practice of ‘many historians’ in speaking of ‘evolution’ as opposed to ‘revolution’, that is that ‘it took almost three centuries for a truly tridentine Church to be established in Ireland’.

⁷ See, for example, F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana Press, 1973), 19: As an indicator he outlines that ‘in 1850 there were about 5,000 priests, monks and nuns for a Catholic population of five million, in 1900 there were over 14,000 priests, monks and nuns to minister to approximately 3 1/3 million Catholics, and this vastly increased figure takes no account of the steady flow of Irish missionaries overseas.’

Inspired by the renewed theological emphasis of Trent, a key pastoral goal of the revolution was ‘the weaning of the people from an over-reliance on elements of folk religion to a chapel-centered practice of faith’.⁸ In this drive to chapel-centered worship, the ‘Cullenisation’ of the Church introduced a particular category of language and ritual, mostly Italian in origin, in regard to faith practice, one that was to become so embedded in the core of the Irish religious psyche that its vocabulary and devotional mindset came to be understood as indigenously sacrosanct. These faith rituals were normally highly affective in nature, and highly effective in practice. They included the introduction of prayer forms such as the Forty Hours adoration, Benediction, devotions to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Conception, fidelity to the Rosary, and the Stations of the Cross. Logistically, the establishment of sodalities, confraternities, and altar and temperance societies facilitated the practice of devotions. They were further assisted by devotional aids such as medals, beads, missals, prayer books, catechisms, scapulars and holy pictures.⁹ In addition, an evocative and dramatic sense of liturgy was added to through the use of music, rich vestments, incense and candles, all used to draw out a full gamut of sensory experience.

The intent of Cardinal Cullen was to unite the Church in willing obedience to Rome and to present the face of the Church as unambiguously ultra-montane. To this end, he convened the Synod of Thurles in 1850.¹⁰ At the same time his stewardship as Archbishop was motivated by two of his guiding ambitions – the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and the establishment of a denominational system of education.¹¹ In addition, while Irish Catholicism as an institution was indisputably adherent and faithful to the Papacy, culturally and ethnically many of its bishops and priests were sufficiently imbued with a spirit of Gallicanism such that identification with many of the national aspirations of their fellow citizens was essentially preordained.¹² In that regard, Cullen recognised the expedient nature of the need for compromise and political leverage. This led to his peculiar alliance with English liberalism, many of whose policies were anathema to the political aspirations of the

⁸ Michael Drumm, ‘Irish Catholics – A People Formed by Ritual’, 88.

⁹ Michael Drumm, *Passage To Pasch*, 51.

¹⁰ Cf. Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy: Militant Catholicism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2010), 45: ‘This synod laid down the structures and strategies for the governance and development of Irish Catholicism from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.’

¹¹ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 20.

¹² Ibid. See also Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, xxvii: Ultramontane Catholics considered that a strong centralised papacy was considered necessary for the Church in an age when anti-church and anti-clerical sentiment was growing. The movement known as Gallicanism was opposed to Roman centralisation and believed instead in restricting the pope’s power to intervene in the affairs of national Churches.

papacy.¹³ This uncommon alliance saw Gladstone introduce the Irish Church Act of 1869, which led to the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1871. Further, a combination of demographic and religious factors ensured that legislation, which had been designed in theory to provide for multi-denominational national schooling, had become *de facto* denominational by the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In conjunction with the success of his institutional and devotional reorganisation, it was apparent that by 1870 the Cullen reforms were triumphant.¹⁵

1870 -1922

A common perception of the ‘Cullenised’ Church is of a monolithic institution, imposing in nature, and unified in its divinely sourced mandate to engage the social, political and religious world, certain in the exclusive righteousness of its position. It would be inaccurate, however, to present the religious and political history of the post-famine Church purely in these terms, as one and indivisible. Whatever the public persona, the internal history of the Church was marked by a generic sense of unity in diversity, and by the experience of division, of tension, of conflict – with Rome, among the episcopacy, between the bishops and priests.¹⁶ The central question was the reconciliation of Catholicism and nationalism, which in broad terms was successfully managed.¹⁷ This reconciliation was given expression in the quasi-synergic relationship in which the terms Catholic and nationalist came to be understood as essentially synonymous. External to the Church also, tensions relative to its relationship to the broader Irish society were equally apparent.

¹³ Ibid, 21. ‘One of the most remarkable, if transient, partnerships of the nineteenth century’ (143). See further Ciarán O’Carroll, *Paul Cardinal Cullen: Profile of a Practical Nationalist* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2009), 244: This approach also points to Cullen’s role as ‘a practical nationalist’, applying his ‘considerable talents to both the church and to what he was convinced were the best material interests of the people he was sent to serve’.

¹⁴ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, xxii.

¹⁵ Michael Drumm, ‘Irish Catholics – A People Formed by Ritual’, 89. For a developed reading on the ‘Cullenisation’ of the Irish ecclesial and political landscape see Patrick Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), especially 192-225.

¹⁶ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 18.

¹⁷ Ibid, 20. See also Marguerite Corish ‘Aspects of the Secularisation of Irish Society 1958-1996’ in Eoin G. Cassidy (ed.), *Faith and Culture in the Irish Context* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1996), 138-172 at 139: Corish holds that one consequence of the British occupation of Ireland in the 19th century was that Catholicism and nationalism became close allies, ‘the two main pillars on which Irish political culture rested’. In this way Ireland rallied around the Catholic Church as a means of ‘asserting national identity against the foreign oppressor’.

For instance, agrarian reformist Sir Horace Plunkett attacked Catholicism on the basis that it was ‘too authoritarian, too liable to induce fatalism in the devout, too little concerned with economic realities and too concerned with raising money’.¹⁸ Similarly, in 1888, following the intervention of Pope Leo XIII in the Irish land question (where he condemned the practice of boycotting as illegal), the nationalist politician John Dillon outlined his understanding of the proper relationship between Church and State in a Catholic country. He included notably that ‘a free Ireland...will not be an Ireland that will conduct its affairs at the bidding of any body of cardinals’.¹⁹ The political acumen of the bishops was demonstrated on this issue when, faced with choosing between the dictates of Rome or the *de facto* loss of their domestic power base, they chose to side with the people, and the retention of their power base.²⁰

This political favouritism did not extend to the politics of revolutionary involvement. Indeed, through the period between the Famine and the Treaty, the bishops were almost universally united in their opposition to violent and radical action on the basis of its implications for the stability of society in general, and the moral well-being of individual Catholics in particular. This stance is demonstrated by such as the hierarchy's condemnation of Fenianism in the 1860's and the worst excesses of the Land War in the 1880's. Significantly, however, regarding the future shaping of Irish Catholicism, this stance was not universally supported by the priests at parish level, a number of whom indeed supported the cause and right of revolution to the extent of being imprisoned for their convictions and actions.²¹ Questions, however, regarding the capacity of the clerical set to identify with the lives and circumstances of ordinary people were raised by the apparently ‘scant understanding’ of many clergy of the difficult socioeconomic conditions in the first decade of the new century.²² Similarly, the troubled events of social unrest from 1910-1913, interpreted by many clergy as ‘a syndicalist revolutionary plot’, signified a disconnect between their position and ‘the real miseries’ experienced by many in the city, and town labourers.²³

A tangible if subtle shift in the position of the bishops is noticeable by the time of the 1916 Easter Rising. This is evidenced by their more temperate response to those events, possibly strengthened by the shock initiated by the executions of the leaders of the rebellion. Also,

¹⁸ Ibid. 209.

¹⁹ Ibid, 191.

²⁰ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, xxxiv.

²¹ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 21.

²² Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 34.

²³ Ibid, 35.

indications point to the politically inspired actions of younger clergy in their support of the rebellion. Moreover, the anti-draft stance of the bishops to Lloyd George's *de facto* imposition of conscription on Ireland in April 1918 further added to the accumulative effect of establishing the connection between the Irish Catholic clergy and the Irish Catholic laity as intimate and intense.²⁴

The effects of the unambiguously pro-Treaty stance of the Irish Hierarchy on the Irregular (anti-treaty) forces during the Irish Civil War are difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, the moral proscription and threat of excommunication upon a population that was devoutly Catholic would indicate intervention at a significant level.²⁵

1.2.2 The Church and the New State: 1922 -1949

The establishment of the Irish Free State was not the catalyst in the development of a triumphalist inspired Irish Catholic nationalism – it was, rather, its final act.²⁶ The place of the Catholic Church in post-independence Ireland was linked inexorably to the consequences of the civil war, and its positioning in that regard. As such, a coalescing of divergent factors engendered, essentially, a calculated re-positioning of the Church in the emerging Ireland.²⁷ Born out of the violence and division of the War, the new Irish State had achieved an economic and political independence. In those circumstances, Irish Catholic Nationalism had served its purpose.²⁸ The Church, recognising the new realities, moved to ensure that its influence would be maintained, and strengthened, in the Ireland that would emerge. In this, it found an ally in a new militant grouping called Catholic Action.²⁹

²⁴ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 22. Cf. also, 393: Cardinal Logue and the Standing Committee of the Irish bishops issued a public statement stating that 'conscription forced in this way on Ireland is an oppressive and inhuman law which the Irish have a right to resist by every means that are consonant with the laws of God'.

²⁵ See Brendan Ó Cathaoir, 'The forced retreat of the Catholic Church', in *The Irish Times*, 28th July 2003: Ó Cathaoir hypothesises whether events regarding the dominance of the Catholic Church might have been different had a civil war not accompanied the birth of the State. He questions whether, in opposing the Treaty by violence, 'the republican movement discredited itself and cleared the way for a paternalistic church to exercise untrammelled power. Uniting Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter became a meaningless mantra as bourgeois Ireland divided the spoils'.

²⁶ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 8.

²⁷ These factors included, for instance, the ruthless violence and appalling cruelty attaching to the Civil War. This had revealed a volatility and unpredictability in the lives of many Irish Catholics. Also, and critically, the Church's support for the new government had aroused hostility from a significant number of republicans.

²⁸ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 8.

²⁹ Cf. Pius XI, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*, Encyclical on the Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ, 23 December 1922, 54 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi (Encyclicals)]: 'We include among these fruits of piety that whole group of movements, organizations, and works so dear to Our

This was a coalition of Catholic lay movements whose focus was the reinforcement of a Catholic Irish identity, and whose mandate was unambiguously to serve as an arm of the hierarchy in lay life.³⁰ Maurice Curtis traces the origins of Catholic Action to the modernist crisis associated with Pope Pius X (especially 1907-1910).³¹ In the Irish context, the ‘modernist debacle’ was to have a major influence, acting particularly as the inspiration for an oppressive censorship campaign, the propagation of Catholic propaganda, and the active pursuance of ‘vigilance activities’.³²

At the vanguard of these movements was the *Catholic Truth Society of Ireland* (CTSI).³³ Addressing the 1921 conference of the CTSI, Cardinal Michael Logue advised that, in the emerging Ireland, based on a major ‘Re-Organisation Plan’ sponsored by the Irish hierarchy, ‘a forward Catholic movement would be undertaken’.³⁴ Rooted in that mandate, for the next three decades the annual conferences of the CTSI became ‘the forge in which the Catholic identity of the Irish Free State was hammered out and its moral and social values articulated’.³⁵ Reflecting this, the formative decades of the new Irish Free State were years in which the relationship between the Catholic Church and Irish society was solidified and strengthened, such that the terms ‘Irish’ and ‘Catholic’ became unapologetically synonymous.³⁶

fatherly heart which passes under the name of "Catholic Action," and in which We have been so intensely interested.’ Further, this term, coined first by Pius X, was ascribed its classical definition by Pius XI – essentially the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the church’s hierarchy: ‘Tell your faithful children of the laity that when, united with their pastors and their bishops, they participate in the works of the apostolate, both individual and social, the end purpose of which is to make Jesus Christ better known and better loved’ (*Ubi Arcano Dei*, 58).

³⁰ See Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 42.

³¹ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 203.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ The *Catholic Truth Society of Ireland* (CTSI) was founded on 12th October 1899 to publish and make available a range of religious materials that would appeal to the Irish people at the time. Prior to that, all such materials came from England and frequently did not answer the particular needs in Ireland. The Society operated on the basis of membership, with members receiving copies of all pamphlets that were published.

³⁴ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 45. Cardinal Michael Logue (1840–1924, and Primate of All Ireland from 1887). The ‘Re-Organisation Plan’ included the establishment of branches of the Society in every parish in the Country, thus allowing for the effective promotion of Catholic polemic.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁶ Cf. Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 5: As outlined for instance by Eamon de Valera in a St Patrick’s Day broadcast to the United States in 1935. See also Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2003), 32: Twomey talks of the effective (though not formal) recognition of the Catholic Church as ‘a quasi-established Church of the newly independent Irish Free State’. See further Marguerite Corish, ‘Aspects of the Secularisation of Irish Society 1958-1996’, 139: She holds that from the establishment of the Free state onwards it proved difficult not to be a Catholic in Ireland ‘for fear of losing one’s national identity’.

It was a time when the Roman Church achieved ‘effortless influence in Irish social and political life’.³⁷ While the high-point of this development was the new Constitution of 1937, which accorded and acknowledged the ‘the special position’ of the Catholic Church to and within Irish society, this merely reflected the relationship operative within the political establishment at that time, a relationship which *de facto* deferred to the thinking of the hierarchy in the legislative process.³⁸ In that regard, Catholic Action inspired pressure groups, such as the Irish Vigilance Association,³⁹ or An Rioghacht,⁴⁰ were prominent in advocating (successfully) the pre-eminence of Catholic ideals and belief.⁴¹ Thus, for instance, policy in regard to the question of divorce (1923), the Film Censorship Act (1923), the Censorship of Publications Act (1929), the Criminal Law (amendment) Act (1935),⁴² the Public Dance Halls Act (1935), were all habitually weighted in favour of the solicited advice from the Catholic bishops, and all contributed to the position whereby ‘the Catholic moral code became enshrined in the law of the land’.⁴³ Moreover, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican (1930), and the triumphant hosting of the International Eucharistic

³⁷ Gabriel Daly, ‘Liberal Democracy, Crisis and the Christian Vision’, in Denis Carroll (ed.), *Religion in Ireland, Past, Present, and Future* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1999), 140-154 at 146.

³⁸ See for instance, Tom Quinlan, ‘Ferretting out evil: the records of the Committee on Evil Literature’, in *Irish Archives*, Autumn 1995, Vol.2, No.2, 49–56, at 49. Quinlan recalls that the ‘Committee on Evil Literature’, appointed by Minister for Justice, Kevin O’Higgins (in February 1926, following mounting public pressure in opposition to his stated position in favour of the status quo), was tasked to consider extending the powers of the State ‘to prohibit or restrict the sale and circulation of printed matter’. ‘The initiative came directly from the CTSI’ (Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 81). The report of the Committee (in December 1926), outlining the inadequacies of existing laws, concluded that ‘it was the duty of the State to take any necessary action to prevent the circulation of literature that was considered to be obscene and morally corrupting’ (‘Ferretting out evil’, 49). The Committee also recommended the establishment of a censorship board (ibid).

³⁹ Sourced originally in the anti-modernist position of Pope Pius X, the *Irish Vigilance Society* (IVS) evolved as one of a number of organisations in response to his teachings. (See, for instance, Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, ‘On the Doctrines of the Modernists’, 8 September, 1907, #2: regarding those who, ‘imbued with the poisonous doctrines taught by the enemies of the Church, and lost to all sense of modesty, vaunt themselves as reformers of the Church’). Established in 1911, the *Society* concentrated on vigilance activities on behalf of the Catholic Church in Ireland, particularly in the 1920s. In that regard, they were influential in such activities as the call for a renewed and stronger cinema censorship legislation, a call reflected in the Film Censorship (amendment) Act of 1925 (Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 96). Also, the 1926 campaign to enshrine the Catholic view on literature censorship in Irish legislation, marked by the report of the ‘Committee on Evil Literature’, was strongly influenced by the Society (ibid, 206). For organisations such as the IVS, a distinctly Irish censorship, consonant with its conception of Ireland as a Catholic country, was one of the prerogatives, if not obligations, of the State.

⁴⁰ See Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 55. *An Rioghacht*, the ‘League of the Kingship of Christ’, was established in Ireland in 1926. Modelled on associations such as *Action Populaire* in France and the *Catholic Social Guild* in Britain, it was founded by Jesuit priest, Edward Cahill. Cahill, aware of a general intellectual deficiency within Irish Catholicism, gathered to this organisation ‘a select body’ of women and men who ‘all made a serious study of Catholic social principles’. The organisation was to be an important element in the intellectual drive behind the Catholic Action movement.

⁴¹ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 96.

⁴² Section 17 of which prohibited the importation and sale of artificial contraception.

⁴³ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 4, 6. See also Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 78: Inglis outlines a list of sixteen occasions (from 1923-1965) in which there was direct input from one or more bishops in the legislation process.

Congress (1932) forwarded the understanding of Ireland as a Catholic State for a Catholic people.

Central to these developments were the activities of the Catholic Action movement. In 1934, a CTSI publication entitled 'The Serried Ranks of Catholic Action' gave voice to the potentiality of influence inherent in the Catholic lay organisations. Using explicitly military imaging it announces:⁴⁴

Our main army of advance will consist of the formative and constructive societies. The general staff will be the CTSI. The centre or main strength of the Catholic Action army will be the CYMS with its core of seasoned veterans.⁴⁵ On our right, our eager new levies, the Knights of St Columbanus.⁴⁶ On the left will flutter the banners of the Legion of Mary.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cited in Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 9.

⁴⁵ The Catholic Young Mens Society (CYMS) had been founded 1849 with the express purpose of countering the Protestant proselytizing initiative known as 'souperism' (Maurice Curtis, 37). In 1925 they undertook a reorganisation. This was inspired by Fr Ambrose Crofts, a Dominican priest. Based on his experience in Belgium, he was a strong advocate of Catholic social organization. He initiated the structuring of CYMS into a federation of branches throughout Ireland, the drawing up of a constitution, and a refocusing of their *raison d'être* to a militant support of Catholic Action (Curtis, 61). Supporting the Irish Bishops campaign against moral degeneration, they became actively involved in the 'Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade', and the promotion, among women of 'purity and modesty' Curtis, 64-65). Again, based on their compliance with the utterances of the hierarchy, the CYMS was often regarded as *the* Catholic Action movement (Curtis, 77). The movement was involved also in calling for the strict 'censorship of all film displays', particularly anything 'not in conformity with Catholic teaching' (Curtis, 101). In the 1930s they were at the forefront of anti-Communist activities. In the 1940s they were proactive in the formation of the Catholic Societies Vocational Organisation Conference. They were active in campaigning against the 'liberal' legislation of the 1980s and 1990s, and, in 2000 made submissions to State hearings on abortion (Curtis, 201).

⁴⁶ The Order of the Knights of Saint Columbanus (KSC) is an Irish Catholic fraternal and service organisation for laymen over twenty-one years of age. It was founded in Belfast in 1915 by James K. Canon O'Neill. He was greatly influenced by the social teaching of the Church and particularly the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The inspiration to place the Order under the patronage of St. Columbanus was inspired by his missionary zeal in bringing the good news of salvation to all. In 1922, the Order merged with the Dublin based Columbian Knights (founded in 1909 by members of the Catholic Defence Society). Among their objectives (subject to the approval of Church authority), was included the promotion of Catholic interests (including action on behalf of the poor), fostering the cause of Catholic education, and securing adequate recognition of Catholic doctrines (Maurice Curtis, 53). In the 1930s they helped, covertly, to establish the 'Irish Christian Front' as part of the anti-Communist effort in Spain (Curtis, 111). In 1939, the Irish Hierarchy (suspicious of lay initiative) sought a more centrally controlled approach to Catholic Action activities. The associated report was favourable of KSC (despite their 'web of secrecy'), not least because of their close ties to the 'professional and business classes' (Curtis, 156). Regarded as 'the elite' of Catholic Action they included prominent figures among their membership (including future president Séan T. O'Kelly, and Taoiseach Séan Lemass). Seen as the 'Commandos' of militant Catholicism (Curtis, 183), they were again prominent in the revival of the vigilance campaign in Ireland in the 1950s (Curtis, 96). Placing emphasis on Catholic social teaching, since 1930, the Knights had been sponsors of the Chair of Catholic Action and Sociology at Maynooth College. Today, the Knights continue to welcome into their ranks 'Catholic men, in full communion with the Church, who would wish to bring to the service of Christ their talents and skills towards the promotion of Christian values and principles in Society, for the greater Honour and Glory of God the Father' (www.knightsofstcolumbanus.ie).

⁴⁷ The Legion of Mary was one of the most influential of the Catholic Action movements that emerged in Ireland in the twentieth century. It was founded by layman Frank Duff in Dublin, on 7 September 1921. Drawing its inspiration from the 'True Devotion to Mary', as taught by St. Louis Marie de Montfort, the Legion was placed at the disposal of Bishops and Priests for use in the mission of the Church. Loyalty to the Magisterium and to Ecclesiastical Authority is a basic legionary principle. An early priority for the Legion was

Many other units will be gladdened by the spectacle of our Irish Army of Catholic Action marching in serried ranks to battle and to victory.

Significant in this ‘advance’ was the Irish Constitution, sanctioned by a referendum of the people on 1st July 1937, and which was imbued with ‘a very specific Catholic content’.⁴⁸ This was particularly so as it applied to issues such as the family, education, private property and religion. Indications suggest the influence of the encyclicals of Pius XI in this regard, especially *The Christian Education of Youth* (1929), *Christian Marriage* (1930) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931).⁴⁹ It is article 44 (of the Constitution) that ‘recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens’. For some bishops, however, this *imprimatur* was not sufficient in itself in that it could (and was) interpreted as qualified and reserved, and therefore less than had been petitioned for.⁵⁰ Further, Holy Ghost priest, Fr Denis Fahey, concurring that the 1937 Constitution was not Catholic enough, established the *Maria Duce* organisation in 1945. The purpose of this movement was to persuade the State to formally recognise the Catholic Church as the one true Church.⁵¹

In spite of these developments, however, by the time of ‘The Emergency’ the ascendancy of the Catholic moral, political, and social order, bolstered by civil legislation, was assured to the extent that, in 1945, one Monsignor Cotter could boast of ‘Ireland, standing majestically

its campaign against prostitution, resulting in the closure of the notorious Monto district of Dublin (Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 72). They were also involved in the anti-Communist campaign (ibid, 106), the promotion of voluntary charitable work (ibid, 164), and vigilance activities to protect the moral and orthodox *status quo* (ibid, 213). However, although a very orthodox organisation, there emerged serious tensions between Duff and (sequentially) Archbishops Byrne and McQuaid of Dublin. This was motivated by their uncompromising opposition to any independent lay initiative, which, in their understanding, Duff was pursuing. On that basis, the Legion did not receive their approval, but, rather, opposition and censorship (ibid, 65-67). Modelled on the Roman Army the Legion is hierarchical in structure. In levels of ascendancy these are: Praesidium (parish), Curia (area), Comitium (regional), Regia (provincial), Senatus (State), Concilium (world). Again, although essentially a lay association, the movement solicits and receives spiritual counsel and apostolic formation from priests and religious. The Legion remains a presence in Ireland in the twenty-first century, but with a reduced membership, and reformatted objectives (ibid, 214). The members participate in the life of the parish through visitation of families, the sick, and through collaboration in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by the parish (from www.legionofmary.ie). Moreover, they are present today in about 170 countries (ibid), with greater than three million active members and eight million auxiliary members (from www.legion-mary.org/origin.htm). Further, it counts numbers of martyrs among its members, especially in China and Africa (ibid).

⁴⁸ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 545.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cf. Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 285, n 25: Cardinal MacCory of Armagh and Dr John Charles McQuaid had sought to have this article (44) recognise the Catholic Church as the one true Church. Article 44 was deleted by referendum on 7th December 1972.

⁵¹ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 182.

among the wrecks of earth ... a brilliant apostle among the nations'.⁵² Again, the place of Catholic Action was central in the formation this belief. Curtis explains that, by the 1940s,

There were thousands of Catholic Actionists at work throughout the Country; every parish had at least half a dozen organisations acting as moral guardians and constantly feeding information to priests and bishops on local and national developments. They had become the eyes and ears of the Catholic Church.⁵³

1.2.3 The 1950's

Accounts relating to the lived experience of 1950s Irish Catholicism, notable for their depiction of fidelity by the masses to the precise letter and law integral to the practice of their faith, in addition to their unquestioned adherence to the dictates and orthodoxy of episcopal supremacy, could to the outside observer appear at times so exaggerated as to presume overstatement to a significant degree. Yet, this was 'the most Catholic country in the world',⁵⁴ exuding 'an atmosphere impregnated with the faith'.⁵⁵ The dominance of Irish Catholic culture was all-pervasive, and manifested itself as such.

It was an Ireland that was deeply conservative, largely untouched by the Enlightenment, and unaffected by the developments of the modern world.⁵⁶ It was an Ireland steeped in Catholicism, one marked by an extraordinary level of religious practice,⁵⁷ practice that went beyond the mere attendance at Mass in its witness to the influence of 'Cullenisation'. Thus, devotional forms such as confraternities, sodalities, the forty hours novena, the Stations of the Cross and the nine first Fridays were universally observed. It included devotions to the Sacred Heart, to the cult of the saints, and to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. In addition, it was reinforced by pilgrimages, processions, and parish missions.⁵⁸ Further, the erection of crosses, statues and grottos, the widespread dissemination of devotional literature and the cult of indulgences were its distinguishing characteristics. It was the Ireland in which the staff of the *Irish Independent* would customarily gather at midnight around the statue of Our Lady of

⁵² Paul Blanchard, *The Church and Catholic Power. An American Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 3.

⁵³ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 205.

⁵⁴ Dr James Devane, *Irish Rosary*, December 1952. Cited Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 28.

⁵⁵ Archbishop P.J.B. McKeefrey, 'Farewell to Shannon', in *The Furrow*, March 1950, 5-8. Cited in Fuller, 29.

⁵⁶ Dermot Lane, Vatican II: The Irish Experience, in *The Furrow*, February 2004, 67-81 at 70.

⁵⁷ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 19 (greater than 95%): Cf. Conor Ward.

⁵⁸ See Dermot Lane, 'Vatican II: The Irish Experience', 69.

Dublin to say the Rosary.⁵⁹ It was the Ireland in which students in University College, Dublin, would stand every day at noon to say the Angelus.⁶⁰ It was the Ireland in which newly ordained priests left the seminary confident in the belief that they knew all the answers to every moral dilemma.⁶¹ It was the Ireland in which the practice of faith was quantifiable, centered on strong individual piety, and emphasising the observation of rules and regulations in the knowledge that failure in this respect gave rise to sin, often affording the opportunity of mortal sin. Moreover, to die in a state of mortal sin was to die outside the state of grace and allow then for the eternal damnation of one's soul. It was the Ireland in which 'this inculcation of fear began in school'.⁶²

It was also the Ireland where the seeds of change were being sown. An emerging Catholic clerical intelligentsia was raising questions regarding the true state of the Irish Church. For instance, Fr Liam Breen wondered how the fact that vast numbers attending Mass was in itself a cause for 'glory' given that 'many have no idea of why they are there other than that they are escaping mortal sin'.⁶³ Breen's attitude was reflective of new publications such as *The Furrow* (1950) and *Doctrine and Life* (1951),⁶⁴ all of which helped cast a somewhat critical eye over the nature and effect of Irish Catholic piety. Indeed, in that context, the founding issue of *Doctrine and Life* indicated that the faith experience generated by such piety was insufficient, malnourished, and lacking. Thus, it held that many people were losing their faith because they had never really grasped it in the first place, they had never really fully understood its intrinsic call to deep personal conviction.⁶⁵ Likewise, *The Furrow* highlighted the new and inspiring developments in the Church of post-war Europe in such areas as liturgy, catechesis and theology, as well as the impetus to change inherent in that, change that would inevitably make its way to Ireland. In the broader context too there were

⁵⁹ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 27.

⁶⁰ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help my Unbelief* (Veritas Publications, Dublin, 1983), 58.

⁶¹ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 38. See also, for instance, Kevin T. Kelly, 'Confessions of an Ageing Moral Theologian', in *The Furrow*, February 2004, 82-91 at 82: He reflects that 'When I was first ordained and sent off to train as a moral theologian...I believed that when it came to moral teaching, the Catholic Church had the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth'.

⁶² Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 21.

⁶³ Liam Breen, 'The Liturgy in a City Parish', in *The Furrow*, 5/11 (1954), 694. Breen further questioned the extent of understanding regarding the social and personal implications of receiving Holy Communion, the lack of any sense of 'corporate worship', and the liturgical and catechetical implications attaching to the practice of priests distributing Holy Communion before and throughout the Mass (ibid. 694-695).

⁶⁴ *The Furrow* founded in 1950 by Fr J.G. McGarry, professor of Sacred Eloquence and Pastoral Theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth; *Doctrine and Life*, a Dominican publication originally part of the *Irish Rosary*, founded as a separate publication in 1951, the founding editor, Fr Anselm Moynihan, being succeeded by Fr Austin Flannery in 1957.

⁶⁵ Michael G. Olden, 'Irish Catholicism: Reflections', in *The Furrow*, April 2003, 238-248 at 241.

stirrings, further calls to renewal and reform. Contributions from writers such as Bryan McMahon and John D. Sheridan pointed to awareness among a section of the Catholic laity that ‘the Christian message, as delivered by bishops and priests, was, as far as they were concerned, somehow out of focus’.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding the danger of oversimplification, it is possible to establish certain rudiments in regard to the bishops’ self-understanding of their role with and for Irish Society at this time. Primary among these is the fact that they were experts on what was best for people.⁶⁷ Moreover, on the basis of the providential nature of their role, in matters of fact there could be no argument: succinctly, ‘the bishops had no doubt in regard to their right to be heard and obeyed’.⁶⁸ Further, regarding the practice of morality, things were really very simple: ‘the rules were there; the bishops and priests were to enforce them; it was a sin to transgress’.⁶⁹ Highly influential in the formation of this attitude had been the publication in 1931 by Pope Pius XI of the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. Since then the attitude of the Irish Bishops, drawing on the authority of that papal imperative, had become progressively more integralist regarding the stressing of Catholic concepts of the moral law.⁷⁰ This approach, in conjunction with their role in the cultural social order of Irish society, solidified in the Bishops’ mindset their role as protectors of the flock from harmful influences. To this end by the 1950s they were repeatedly cautioning against the dangers of the modern world with its lethal cocktail of materialist and secularist attitudes. Thus, through the twin pillars of condemnation and warning they outlined the dangers to the spiritual well-being of the flock inherent in ‘too much concern for amusement’.⁷¹ Moreover, the litany of dangerous opportunities for amusement was seemingly unbounded: cinema, dancing, evil literature, modern song, drinking, commercial dancehalls.⁷² In particular, the subjugation of the passions, and their catalyst, the sexual instinct, was seen as imperative. In that regard, Bryan MacMahon reflects,

⁶⁶ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 57.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 75.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 59. See also Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 38: Moral theology was the strongest branch of Irish theology prior to Vatican Council II. Excessively legalistic, it perfectly matched, and nurtured, an obsession within Irish Catholicism conducive with a religious practice marked by a strong ethos of social conformity.

⁷⁰ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 574. For an outline of *Quadragesimo Anno* in the Irish context see Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 69.

⁷¹ Lenten pastoral letter of Bishop O’Neill of Limerick, as quoted in the *Irish Independent*, 25th February 1952, 6. Cited in Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 52.

⁷² Michael G. Olden, ‘Irish Catholicism: Reflections’, in *The Furrow*, April 2003, 238-248 at 242.

‘It would appear as if the whole artillery of our Irish Church had been brought to bear on that mysterious force – the “company keepers”’.⁷³

It was at the macro level, however, where a particularly focused motivation driving the efforts of the episcopacy was found – the threat posed by the ‘great menace’ of Communism and its avowed mission of ‘treachery and persecution to wipe out the one true faith of Jesus Christ’.⁷⁴ Tangibly connected with that was the post-war movement towards social reform in the countries of continental Europe and in Britain, which included reform of welfare and health services allowing for a greater degree of State intervention. Such intervention to the mind of the Irish Bishops conflicted with Catholic social teaching regarding the rights of the family, in the sense that it undermined the position of the head of the household in his role as provider. Moreover, underscored as it was by socialist tendencies, such reform represented the advance of atheistic Communism. Again, the teaching of *Quadragesimo Anno* and its predecessor *Rerum Novarum* (1891) proved crucial. Both encyclicals argued against the case for excessive state intervention in any form. Further, they attached particular importance to the ‘natural unit’ of the family. In that context the scene was set for confrontation between the teaching authority of the Irish hierarchy and the political mandate of the Irish legislature, should the latter consider similar social reform to that of its European neighbours. Such a confrontation ensued.

Rumblings of Church–State tensions were evident following the publication of the Fianna Fáil Health Act of 1947, but that government fell from power before the premise could be tested.⁷⁵ The fall-out, however, was to impact significantly on the first inter-party government of 1948–51. Policy issues in regard to the provision of social insurance and with legal adoption were the first to meet with and succumb to the weight of episcopal ‘integralist’ opinion.⁷⁶ Indeed, the issues surrounding the debate around the provision of legal adoption demonstrated the extent to which the self-proclamation of Catholic orthodoxy, relative to its position as the bastion of the ‘one true faith’, rendered the legislative process as subsidiary to that position. Thus, for instance, the Attorney General, Mr C.F. Casey, when addressing the debate in 1951 declared that as ‘this country is predominantly a Catholic country ...

⁷³ Bryan MacMahon, ‘Getting on the High Road Again’, in John A. O’Brien, ed., *The Vanishing Irish* (London, 1954), 211. Cited in Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 53.

⁷⁴ Lenten pastoral letter of Cardinal D’Alton as quoted in the *Irish Independent*, 20th February 1950, 8.

⁷⁵ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 576.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Parliament surely cannot be asked to introduce legislation contrary to that great Church'.⁷⁷ Such debate regarding policy issues represented however only 'an ominous foretaste'⁷⁸ of what faced the government in its attempts to introduce policy in the absence of episcopal sanction. The bishops' fears surrounding unwarranted interference by the State in the affairs of its citizens culminated, infamously, in the 'mother and child' scheme of 1951.

Attempts by the inter-party government under the ministry of Dr Noel Browne to introduce a scheme relating to maternity and child welfare met with Church opposition on the basis that such a scheme was 'entirely and directly contrary to Catholic teaching'.⁷⁹ Within weeks, once the hierarchy had made their position clear, 'the resistance of the government crumbled', resulting in the withdrawal of the proposal and the resignation of the minister.⁸⁰ Moreover, that Browne's resignation was pursued by both the Taoiseach (John Costello) and his party leader (Sean McBride), 'accompanied by extravagant declarations of their obedience to Church teaching', has been interpreted as a demonstration of the political power of the Church at this time.⁸¹

For many this represented the capitulation of secular democracy to ecclesiastical authority, leading *The Irish Times* to conclude that 'the Roman Catholic Church, would seem to be the effective government of this country'.⁸² The fall-out was extensive and far-reaching. Séan Mac Réamoinn recalls how the popular support for the position of Browne was extraordinary, surpassed only by a remarkable 'near unanimous' criticism of the bishops' and the unprecedented sense that they were 'wrong' in their judgment.⁸³ In that regard, Louise Fuller reflects that the controversy represents much more than a political battle between Church and State in that it held 'deeper implications in relation to more fundamental sociocultural change'.⁸⁴ The episode marked a turning point within Irish Catholic culture. It opened the way for a widening sub-culture of dissent, a constituency previously the almost exclusive

⁷⁷ See Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 73. Casey added, for clarification, 'legislation which would endanger the soul of a single child' (ibid).

⁷⁸ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 576.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Cited from a letter in 1947 by the Bishops to An Taoiseach, Mr de Valera.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 577. The resignation took effect from 11th April 1951.

⁸¹ Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 187. Curtis outlines, further, the complexity attaching to the situation in the broader context. He suggests that members of the powerful Irish Medical Association, fearful of losing fee-paying patients to a State service, 'manipulated the bishops themselves' (ibid). Again, that a broadly similar scheme to Browne's was introduced successfully in 1953, but with the caveat of excluding the 15 per cent of highest income families, gives substance to this argument.

⁸² Ibid, 578. See also 577 which outlines the opposition of the medical profession also to the scheme.

⁸³ Séan Mac Réamoinn, 'With the Past, in the Present, for the Future', 121.

⁸⁴ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 74.

domain of the intelligentsia and literati.⁸⁵ For the first time the bishops were put in the position of defending their role. Moreover, the customary and unquestioning acceptance of episcopal pronouncements was shown that it could be open to challenge. Nevertheless, the primary insight the episode offers is of the power wielded by the hierarchy at the time. This understanding was scarcely tempered when, in 1953, the bishop of Cork, Dr Lucey, noted that the bishops ‘were the final arbiters of right and wrong even in political matters’.⁸⁶

At the parochial level too, the practice of ceding the position of leadership *ex officio* to the local priest went essentially unquestioned. His was the voice of authority in practically all matters – religious and moral, social and administrative, cultural and educational. With few exceptions, his influence was paramount, his manner was authoritarian, his nature was conservative. It was an arrangement that gave expression to the broader unified political and ecclesiastical vision advocated by Éamon de Valera and the Irish bishops – a vision of Irishness grounded in the broadly ‘Gaelic, nationalist and Catholic’⁸⁷ spiritual ethic, and insulated from the contaminating materialist and secularist attitudes of continental Europe.⁸⁸ It was a vision that within a few years was to change dramatically.

1.2.4 The 1960’s

Michael Paul Gallagher holds that the genesis of change and reformation can be traced back with some exactness to events at both international and domestic levels in the last years of the 1950s.⁸⁹ In 1958 Pius XII died and John XXIII became pope, and his pontificate, short as it was, became the catalyst which transfigured the understanding of Church, from one focused on the authoritarian leadership of bishops and the conventional passive acquiescence of the laity, to a new order which impressed upon the positive role of the individual as a co-equal member of the universal Church. In Ireland at this time (1959), Éamon de Valera retired from active government and under the leadership of his successor, Sean Lemass, the ‘economic

⁸⁵ Ibid. 77.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 79. See also Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 18-19: Twomey holds that that the Church-State confrontations of the 1970s through the 1990s over contraception, divorce and abortion, and the apparent defeat of the Church in each, is the ‘price paid for what proved to be the pyrrhic victory of the Mother and Child controversy’. See also Séan Mac Réamoinn, ‘With the Past, in the Present, for the Future’, 121: ‘I believe that the display of naked authoritarianism shown by the bishops’ spokesmen, and the government’s submission to their wishes, was the beginning of the end of the church’s “special position” in the Irish polity’.

⁸⁷ Cf. Peadar M. Kirby, ‘The Irish Church: the Shifting Sands’, in *Doctrine and Life*, October 1977, 28-37 at 30.

⁸⁸ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 79.

⁸⁹ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief*, 48.

miracle' of the 1960's was realised. Together, these two factors contributed significantly to a new Ireland. They spawned an Ireland which, within the space of a few decades, was to change from one rooted in a traditional rural and Catholic ethos, to a young, urban, technologically based society for whom the centrality of religion became less important.

Vatican Council II

It was on January 25th 1959 that Pope John announced his intention to convoke the Church's 21st ecumenical council.⁹⁰ A stress he put on this council was that it could lead towards 'the recomposition of the whole mystical flock of Christ' and would involve 'a change in mentalities, ways of thinking and prejudices, all of which have a long history'.⁹¹ But such was the scale of change that it is questionable if even Pope John himself could have appreciated the effect it was to exert.⁹² An indication of the degree of transformation involved is found even in the designation and ordering of the Council's publications. For instance, spoken of as 'the most important part of the work of the Council',⁹³ the document on the constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, underwent a number of adaptations. Ultimately, the fact that it was considered important enough to dedicate an entire chapter to the 'People of God' is highly significant in itself. The decision, however, to insert the chapter prior to that on the hierarchy was symbolically one of the most important of the Synod.⁹⁴ Within the Irish context such developments represented a sea-change of Copernican dimensions. The emphasis called for a refocusing of religious practice and priority from a private, legalistic, and fear-driven interpretation of faith, focused on the demands of personal salvation, to one reflective of more communal and positive witness as a co-equal member of a pilgrim Church.

The evidence points to some inconsistency between detail and spirit regarding the implementation of the Council decrees in the Irish context. Certainly the establishment of new Episcopal commissions in line with Vatican directives was seen as efficient and

⁹⁰ The Second Vatican Council opened on October 11th 1962.

⁹¹ Adrian Hastings (ed.), *Modern Catholicism* (London: SPCK, 1991), 29.

⁹² See, for instance, Guzmán Carriquiry, 'The Ecclesial Movements in the Religious and Cultural Context of the Present Day', in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops* (Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2000), 47-69 at 52. 'The windows were flung open to change an air that had become stale, but what entered was a hurricane'.

⁹³ Charles Whithead, 'The Role of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the Life of the Church', in Michael Hayes, *New Religious Movements in the Catholic Church* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005), 15-29 at 19.

⁹⁴ See 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church', *Lumen Gentium*, chs 2 and 3, in Austin Flannery, (ed.), *Vatican Council II*, (New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1975), 359 and 369.

impressive.⁹⁵ The new order of the Mass allowing for greater congregational participation, particularly through its celebration in the vernacular, was introduced from the first Sunday of Lent 1965. Broader liturgical and structural changes too were undertaken in fidelity to the provisions of the Council. These developments were managed and implemented under the directorship of William Cardinal Conway, whose positive approach conveyed a style, mood and form of leadership ‘in sharp contrast to that of his predecessor, Cardinal D’Alton’.⁹⁶ His skills as an administrator were, however, negated in some quarters by a sense that his ability to grasp the full implications demanded of Conciliar reformation was deficient. The intimation was that his understanding was limited to the need for structural change only, and took no account of the move towards a change of spirit that Vatican II also encouraged.⁹⁷

These sentiments were echoed in the retrospective considerations of Professor John Horgan when reflecting on his experience as a journalist at the Council, and of its later impact on the Irish Church. He talks of astonishment and frustration that the experience of ‘theological, historical and liturgical richness’ to which they had been exposed at the Council and which had left an ‘indelible mark’ on all who encountered it ‘had only touched the fringes of Irish Catholicism’.⁹⁸ This echoed the position of the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr John Charles McQuaid who, upon his return from the Council, cautioned people not to be concerned with the talk of impending changes: ‘Allow me to reassure you. No change will worry the

⁹⁵ See Dermot Lane, ‘Vatican II: The Irish Experience’, 70-71 for an outline on the evolution of the Commissions: Liturgy Commission (1964), Commission on Art and Architecture (1965), Episcopal Commission of Ecumenism (1965), Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (1969), the Commission for Social Welfare (1970), Episcopal Commission for Missions (1968), the Episcopal Catechetics Commission and the Education Commission. In addition there followed the establishment of the Catholic Communications Institute of Ireland (1969), the establishment of Trócaire (1973), as well as third level educational institutions – Mater Dei (1966), Milltown Institute (1968), Mount Oliver (1969), Irish School of Ecumenics (1970), National Centre for Liturgy (1970).

⁹⁶ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 230. Fuller continues: ‘and to that of many of the older bishops like Archbishop McQuaid and Bishops Lucey and Browne’.

⁹⁷ See Joe Dunn, ‘Looking for a Leader’, in *The Furrow*, July 1977, 407-416 at 409. See also Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 61: Reflecting on Conciliar renewal in Ireland Twomey argues that such renewal ‘was carried out in Ireland according to the letter but, I venture to say, has on the whole not yet been carried out according to the spirit’. He continues, ‘Until such time as the liturgy has been renewed in harmony with the letter *and* the spirit of the Council, the Catholic Church faces a rather bleak future’.

⁹⁸ John Horgan, ‘Remembering How We Once Were’, in *Doctrine and Life*, April 2003, 240-246 at 241. Further, regarding the leadership of Cardinal Conway, Horgan comments that ‘What the Irish Church needed at that time was not an administrator, but a prophet’ (242). On this, see further Daithí Ó Corráin, *Rendering to God and Caesar: The Irish Churches and the two states in Ireland, 1947-1993* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2006). Ó Corráin, reflecting on the Irish Hierarchy’s viewpoint of the Council, describes it as ‘myopic’, ‘paltry’ (204), and ‘outside the climate of the Council’ (205).

tranquillity of your Christian lives.’⁹⁹ It was scarcely a resounding endorsement of the spirit of *aggiornamento* in which Vatican Council II was grounded.¹⁰⁰

Changes in Society

Within the broader Irish context, the transformation required by Vatican Council II did not occur within a vacuum but rather in conjunction with wider cultural, demographic and sociological developments.¹⁰¹ Paramount among these was the advent of the national television service (RTÉ) in 1962. The impact that this development effected on the collective Irish psyche and on the position of the Catholic Church is both considerable and important.¹⁰²

Critical in that regard was that television was seen as essentially neutral relative to power or position, was resolute in the face of tradition, and proved itself ‘the ultimate leveller’.¹⁰³ Significantly, in relation to the presentation of Catholicism, ‘it demystified with ease the kind of distance, aloofness and mystique which had characterised the episcopal office in the past’.¹⁰⁴ Essentially, its ability to bring an alternative perspective to that of the Catholic Church into the very homes of people enabled it to challenge the moral framework of the Church on such issues as social life, the family, and sexuality. Often the content of the programmes on the new service depicted glossy American and British lifestyles, which not only presented priests and religion as essentially irrelevant, but also brought home to many Irish people what they were not and had not.¹⁰⁵ Thus began the process in which many Irish Catholics stopped being limited by the moral discourse and practice of their Church choosing instead the path presented by a more consumerist and individualistic mentality.

⁹⁹ *The Irish Times*, 10th December 1965, 11: The remarks were included in his sermon at the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, on the day following his return from the Council.

¹⁰⁰ See Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII, Pope of the Century*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2000 edition), 200.

¹⁰¹ See Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 231: It was a time of considerable change including a decisive population shift from the land to the town, a time of increased mobility, access to BBC television, the influence of cinema. In addition there was the emergence of pressure groups calling for a more liberal society.

¹⁰² Cf. Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 128. ‘Statement of the Irish hierarchy on forthcoming Irish TV network’, Maynooth, October 1961, *Furrow*, November 1961, 695-7. In advance of the launch of the service the Irish Catholic Hierarchy had acknowledged the potential for good that the new service offered, but qualified their remarks by outlining its inherent ability to cause harm ‘in the broadcasting of programmes which offend all reasonable standards of morals and decency’.

¹⁰³ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 132.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ See F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 692. Writing against the background of the recent advent of the national television station, in addition to widespread access to British channels, Lyons reflects: ‘The fact that such a considerable proportion of Irish families could see on their hearthrugs all the manifestations of the permissive society which British relays with such unflagging zeal, not only made nonsense of the censorship of books and films, but threw many stones, or rather bombshells, into the quiet waters of Irish domesticity’ (*ibid.*).

It was not long before the subject matter of the Church and that of the national broadcaster overlapped. On one such occasion, notwithstanding the sapience of the Archbishop of Dublin regarding the matter of undisturbed tranquillity, it seemed that the serenity of one bishop was disturbed sufficiently enough for him to communicate with RTÉ during a particular broadcast of the *Late Late Show* in 1966. Bishop Thomas Ryan of Clonfert felt the need to express immediately his protest at the programme he was watching, which had just shown women in the audience being asked (and seemingly happily telling) what they had worn in bed on their wedding night – thus giving rise to the case of ‘the bishop and the nightie’. The response was considerable and informative. Front page headlines, public claims of moral degeneracy, intense media and national debate, all ensued. RTÉ issued a statement of apology. In retrospect, what it demonstrates is an aspect of the prevailing cultural ethos of the time, one marked by a puritanical attitude to anything even remotely connected to sexuality.¹⁰⁶

Humanae vitae

The publication of the encyclical *Humanae vitae* on 25th July 1968 by Pope Paul VI marked a watershed in the Church universal – the Irish Church was no exception. Against a background where ‘the issue of the moment was birth control’,¹⁰⁷ and an expectation that the transforming spirit of Vatican II would lead to a more liberal reading of the Church’s stance on contraception,¹⁰⁸ the Pope’s reaffirmation of that stance was met by a widespread sense of disbelief, incredulity, and anger. Predictably, given that ‘the Pope had in fact taken on the world single-handedly’,¹⁰⁹ these sentiments found expression in a storm of controversy throughout the Catholic world as the consequences and repercussions of the ruling were debated and considered. The upshot was that within days ‘revolution had erupted within the Church’.¹¹⁰ From the Irish perspective the debate was perhaps less vociferous than in other countries but it nonetheless raised serious and new questions.

¹⁰⁶ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 130. See further, Peadar Kirby, *Is Irish Catholicism Dying?*, (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1984), 20. Kirby holds that such was the status and influence of the *Late Late Show* in the Ireland of the 1960s that it became, essentially, ‘an alternative teaching authority to that of the Church’.

¹⁰⁷ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 136.

¹⁰⁸ See Marguerite Corish ‘Aspects of the Secularisation of Irish Society 1958-1996’, 148.

¹⁰⁹ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 139.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 137.

From the outset the presentation of the teaching to the Irish people is considered to have been a public relations disaster.¹¹¹ The approach of the Irish bishops was at once considered paternalistic and inadequate, and indicated an unwillingness or inability to engage on the substantive issues.¹¹² Moreover, if ostensibly the issue was *On the Regulation of Births*,¹¹³ within the Irish context the deeper implication of *Humanae vitae* lay in its broader impact on the Church in Ireland. Vincent Twomey holds that the core issue was not birth regulation but the nature of morality (and moral relativism).¹¹⁴ Similarly, Dermot Lane argues that the real significance of the encyclical in the Irish context is the fact that it initiated open discussion in the Irish Church to a degree unknown in the past.¹¹⁵ At both a theological and pastoral level the teaching authority of the bishops was challenged as never before – no longer did episcopal declaration enjoy the unquestioned acquiescence of Catholics, particularly in regard to moral and social issues. This marked a further, and substantial, indication of the changing cultural landscape in Ireland.

1.2.5 The 1970's

Reflections on the place and role of Catholicism in the Ireland of the 1970s is spoken of as an exercise in making sense of 'the manifest schizophrenia of Irish Church life'.¹¹⁶ On the one hand there was the Church network of parishes, schools, hospitals, and religious orders, collectively operating to such a level of efficiency that, essentially, they represented a logistical paradigm in the art of corporate management. On the other hand there were growing numbers of people for whom the experience of Church was increasingly that of an 'outdated relic of the past', negative in influence and irrelevant in practice.¹¹⁷ Further, the utter inability of the former to identify with the reality of the latter represented 'a measure of the tragedy' facing the Irish Church at that time.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Ibid. See also Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 199: An indication of the division brought about by the encyclical was evident from its unveiling to the Irish public. During his introduction of the encyclical at a press conference in Dublin on 29th July, Professor P.F. Cremin, professor of Moral Theology and Canon Law at Maynooth, announced that 'I personally have never received a better piece of news'. The following day's *Irish Times* quoted Fr James Good, a UCC based moral theologian, as describing the document as 'a major tragedy' and one destined to be 'rejected by the majority of Catholic theologians and by Catholic lay people'.

¹¹² Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 201, 202.

¹¹³ See Paul VI Encyclical Letter, *Humanae Vitae: On the Regulation of Births*, 21st July 1968.

¹¹⁴ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 138.

¹¹⁵ Dermot A. Lane, 'Vatican II: The Irish Experience', 72.

¹¹⁶ Peadar M. Kirby, 'The Irish Church: the Shifting Sands', 28.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

An indication of the ‘measure’ involved is outlined in the thoughts of one commentator reflecting on the state of the Irish Church in the 1970s. In spite of the ultimately redemptive cadence to his article, his frankness is as revealing as it is stark:

The dying embers are all that remain of the torch which was lighted a decade or so ago, and there seems no hope, now, of a fire. Priests and religious are opting out in ever-increasing numbers. Frustration and anguish at the lack of concrete and practical implementation of all the fine theology are eating away at what remains of Christian expectation. Active lay Christians are losing heart in the face of rigid structures, while the weakly-committed churchgoer has long since vacated his pew in favour of the more immediate comforts of late rising or early opening.¹¹⁹

Others, in echoing these sentiments, and attempting to establish an underlying rationale behind them, suggest a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the bishops as a primary cause. Thus, for instance, ‘too few risks have been taken’, ‘wet blankets have been thrown over too many initiatives’, and a purge has been put on ‘people trying to think for themselves’.¹²⁰ Again, drawing on his theory of inherent ecclesial schizophrenia, Peadar Kirby holds that a reason the institutional Church did not respond as it might have is because it did not see the need. Rather, what is in evidence is ‘the typical response of an institution under attack, hang on to power’.¹²¹

A recurring theme throughout the decade pointed to an apparent inconsistency within Irish Catholic experience – a separation between the extraordinarily high practice rate,¹²² and the capacity of this to impact on the spiritual formation of Irish Catholics at any serious level. This phenomenon, described by Michael Paul Gallagher as ‘Atheism Irish Style’,¹²³ argued that, if high levels of practice are in themselves to be welcomed, effectively they exert only minimal influence on value formation, and generate little on the level of genuine spiritual experience. Moreover, it pointed to a Church that is more at home in ‘the juridical niceties of Roman legislation’ than in ‘any creative effort to preach the Gospel in a living way’.¹²⁴ The import is a restating of the prophetic voices from the 1950s in such as *Doctrine and Life* and *The Furrow* which indicate that the real threat to religion comes not from unbelief but from

¹¹⁹ Fr Edward Fitzgerald, ‘On Not Throwing in the Towel’, in *The Furrow*, September 1974, 471-477 at 472.

¹²⁰ Louis McRedmond, ‘The Future of the Church in Ireland, 4’, in *Doctrine and Life*, November 1975, 787-801 at 797.

¹²¹ Peadar M. Kirby, ‘The Irish Church: the Shifting Sands’, 32. Particularly, Kirby argues, as it applies to the control of Catholic schools and religious education, and in the issue of ‘moral (meaning sexual morality) pluralism’ (33).

¹²² See Marguerite Corish ‘Aspects of the Secularisation of Irish Society 1958-1996’ 156: Measured at 91% in 1973-74.

¹²³ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘Atheism Irish Style’, in *The Furrow*, 25/4 (1974), 183-192.

¹²⁴ Peadar M. Kirby, ‘The Irish Church: the Shifting Sands’, 31.

shallow belief. Elsewhere, Gallagher couches this situation in Marxist-speak by reflecting that ‘a full house could be the opium of the clergy’.¹²⁵ Against that, a common understanding of Church for people is of a remote and faceless institution, without challenge or depth, and on the margins of life.¹²⁶ Thus it is, that against the rise of pluralism and consumerism the Church is indicted ‘not for being Christian, but for not being truly so’.¹²⁷

Perhaps another branch of the ingrained ‘schizophrenia of Irish Church life’ at this time was the evolution within the Church, and particularly in the Episcopal Conference, of the implementation of the social ethic of Vatican II. An important development in this regard was the increased awareness and concern of the Church with issues of social justice. Reflecting events in the wider Church, and acting out of a renewed vision, the bishops sought to address ongoing domestic social and political questions.¹²⁸ In this way it focused on the dominant societal issues such as the deepening crisis in Northern Ireland, the accession of Ireland to the European Economic Community, the establishment of Trócaire, and difficulties attached to the prevailing economic recession such as unemployment and poverty.¹²⁹ For the bishops this

¹²⁵ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘What Hope For Irish Faith?’, in *The Furrow*, October 1978, 607-617 at 608. He continues, that the clergy could thus be blind ‘not only to the growing absenteeism but to the hidden spiritual malnutrition of those present’.

¹²⁶ See Ignatius Murphy, ‘The Changing Religious Situation in Ireland’, in *Doctrine and Life*, June-July, 1978, 378-383 at 381, 382: This reflects the comments of Michael Paul Gallagher and Seamus Ryan to the National Conference of Priests of Ireland in 1978.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 380. A report on the National Conference of Priests of Ireland in 1978. Intriguingly, Fr Murphy also draws attention to the fact that ‘rather surprisingly...nobody seemed inhibited by the presence of reporters from the press and R.T.E. at the discussions’ (382).

¹²⁸ It amounted to a reorientation on the part of the Irish Bishops in their approach to pastoral practice and social analysis, and reflected the development of social analysis in the broader Church. As already discussed pre-Conciliar attitudes within the Irish Church tended to distrust tendencies towards social reform as the assault of the twin evils of communism and socialism. Conciliar and post-Conciliar teachings however changed this emphasis. Emulating the spirit of the social encyclicals of John XXIII (*Mater et Magistra*, 1961; *Pacem in Terris*, 1963), the Council put a particular emphasis on the praxis of social justice as a *conditio sine qua non* of Christian life. A significant emphasis of *Gaudium et Spes* is that of the Church putting itself consciously at the service of the human community. It underscores strongly the intrinsic dignity of the human person and the primacy of social obligation in that regard. Post-Conciliar teaching too reflected this emphasis. *Populorum Progressio* (1967) advances the concept of Christian humanism as expressed at the Council. It addresses the inequality that exists between nations and how such militates against the weaker economically, arguing that economic planning ‘must foster the development of each man and of the whole man’ (*Populorum Progressio*, 14). The Latin American bishops at Medellín (1968), called for the Church to stand in solidarity with the poor. Similarly, in *Octagesimo Adveniens* (1971). Paul VI states that each local church must analyse its particular situation and, in the light of the gospel, ‘bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many places to be urgently needed’ (*Octagesimo Adveniens*, 4). Again in 1971 the Synod document ‘Justice in the World’ echoed the distinctive voice of Medellín when it proclaimed that ‘action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel’ (*Justice in the World*, 6).

¹²⁹ See, for instance, *A statement on Social Policy*, published by the episcopal committee of the Council for Social Welfare in November 1972. This statement stemmed from a conference sponsored by the bishops on the problem of poverty in Ireland. The same committee also authored a critique of the government social strategy in *Planning for Social Development: What Needs to be Done* (1976). In addition, a joint pastoral letter entitled

represented a significant move to the centre-left of the Irish political framework, a change that would have been unimaginable in the pre-Conciliar Church.

Coincidentally, and ironically, in 1979, the year that Pope John Paul visited Ireland, sociologist Liam Ryan reported that the theocratic-State model, in so far as it ever applied to Ireland, was 'officially dead'.¹³⁰ Whatever the repercussions of the bereavement, it did not impact on the level of attendance or interest for the visit of the Pope in September 1979. So enormous were the crowds, that parallels to the golden age of triumphalism of the 1950s were drawn. By this stage, however, 'all had changed, changed utterly'.¹³¹ Even in the midst of genuinely felt affection and respect for the person and office of its spiritual leader, and the undoubted and many positive effects of his presence in Ireland, retrospective argument suggests that the Papal visit was, effectively, the ritualising of 'a great funeral liturgy' marking the death of a particular expression of Irish Catholicism.¹³² Throughout his visit, Pope John Paul challenged the more liberal influences that had come to impact on Irish society since the 1960's, and their inherent dangers to 'the things of the spirit'.¹³³ Yet, even by this stage these 'values and trends'¹³⁴ had become so embedded in the Irish psyche and culture that further 'liberalisation' of Irish society was inevitable.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the substance of what Pope John Paul was outlining marked the parameters of the relationship of the Irish Church to, and with, Irish society as it was to evolve.

1.2.6 The 1980's

The Ireland of the 1980's was a difficult one for both Church and State. The economic tone for the decade was set as early as its second week when the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, informed the people of the nation that 'we are living away beyond our means'.¹³⁶ Against that, the economic context was dominated by high and rising unemployment, fiscal rectitude,

The Work of Justice (1977) strongly reflected the spirit of the Council's shift to a more radical Christian humanism and the emphasis it placed on the Christocentric nature of the Church's social teaching.

¹³⁰ Liam Ryan, 'Church and Politics': The Last Twenty-Five Years', in *The Furrow*, January 1979, 3-18 at 13. He was in fact referring to the statement of the hierarchy in November 1973 which, in regard to Church teaching on issues of moral prohibition, included the phrase, 'No one has ever suggested, least of all the Church herself, that they should be prohibited by the State'.

¹³¹ WB Yeats, 'Easter 1916'.

¹³² Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, (Dublin:Banley House, 2007), 24.

¹³³ See the Pope in Ireland: Addresses and Homilies, (Dublin, 1979), 77 (from his homily at Limerick, 1st October 1979). Cited in Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 238.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* In his homily at the Phoenix Park, 29th September 1979.

¹³⁵ See Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 238.

¹³⁶ Broadcast on the 9th January 1980. Cited in Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 239.

and the age-old Irish 'solution' of emigration. Politically, the situation in Northern Ireland remained difficult, dominated in the early eighties by the highly charged and emotive issues of the IRA hunger strikes. The coalition government (1982-87) was very much influenced by the constitutional reform agenda of the Taoiseach Dr Garret Fitzgerald. Not unrelated, the advocates of the liberal agenda became ever more vociferous, organised and articulate.

Not unlike the economic forecast, the 'start as you mean to go on' tone was systemised early in the life of the decade for the Irish Church too. This is established by even a cursory review of the content pages of Irish Church periodicals in the embryonic months of the new decade, which in hindsight prove both revealing and prophetic. For instance, the January 1980 issue of *Doctrine and Life* addresses the issue of 'Abortion, the Church and Society'.¹³⁷ Within the year it has included articles on 'Natural Family Planning',¹³⁸ 'The Homosexual and the Church',¹³⁹ the 'Moment of truth in Northern Ireland',¹⁴⁰ in addition to the claims of 'Working for Justice with the Poor'.¹⁴¹ For good measure, the January issue of *The Furrow* talks of 'Rethinking the Indissolubility of Marriage'.¹⁴² Together with the Bishops' publications – *The Work of Justice* (1980), *Christian Faith in a time of Economic Depression* (1983), *Love is for Life* (1985) – they, collectively, in a sense outline what were to be the core issues for the Church throughout the decade: issues of social justice, of political engagement, and of moral argument.

The Abortion Referendum

Increasing pro-abortion legislation in Western societies was the catalyst behind the calls in Ireland for constitutional provision supporting the right to life of the unborn. To this effect the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) was formed in April 1981 and they obtained a commitment from political leaders to hold a constitutional referendum in that regard.¹⁴³ The

¹³⁷ Ian Linden, 'Abortion, the Church and Society', in *Doctrine and Life*, January 1980, 15-20.

¹³⁸ Michael Golden, S.P.S., 'Natural Family Planning: an Appeal for Support', in *Doctrine and Life*, November 1980, 476-481.

¹³⁹ Anthony Redmond, 'The Homosexual and the Church: a plea', in *Doctrine and Life*, October 1980, 406-408.

¹⁴⁰ Denis Faul and Raymond Murray 'Moment of truth in Northern Ireland', in *Doctrine and Life*, March 1980, 161-170.

¹⁴¹ Colm McKeating, 'Working for Justice with the Poor', in *Doctrine and Life*, March 1980, 150-155.

¹⁴² William Cosgrave, 'Rethinking the Indissolubility of Marriage', in *The Furrow*, January 1980, 8-23.

¹⁴³ See Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 83: PLAC, demonstrating expedient timing and political acumen, exerted pressure on the leaders of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael during the General Election campaign of June 1981. When Fine Gael consented to a referendum Fianna Fail were politically obliged to follow.

ballot took place on September 7th 1983 and was passed by a margin of 66.45 per cent to 32.87 per cent.¹⁴⁴

The referendum marked an important departure in the life of the Catholic Church in Ireland in that the dynamic behind the drive to reform, unapologetically in tandem with Catholic moral teaching, was not the hierarchy but primarily a movement of lay Catholics.¹⁴⁵ In that regard, PLAC mobilised the vast physical organisation of Catholic lay and parish organisations throughout the country and in this way brought Catholic moral teaching, almost evangelical like, into the streets and to the front doors of Ireland. Significantly, therefore, ‘it was this force of committed Catholics, for a long time the pawns of the Church, who entered the centre stage of the battle for Catholic moral principles in the 1980s’.¹⁴⁶ Hierarchical input to the debate included a collective statement that, while affirming that according to the moral law abortion was wrong in all circumstances, also recognised ‘the right of each person to vote according to conscience’.¹⁴⁷ The bishops of two Dioceses, McNamara in Kerry and Ryan in Dublin, were more specific in the calling for a ‘Yes’ (‘pro-life’) vote.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, it is argued that, if the core issue of the referendum was that of constitutional reform, the nature of the debate was to a significant degree a plebiscite on the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The issue created significant and deep division in various sections of Irish society – politically in Fine Gael,¹⁴⁹ in the medical and legal professions,¹⁵⁰ in the farming community.¹⁵¹ Inglis holds that the issue which mainly divided these groupings was

¹⁴⁴ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 240. On a turn out of 53.67 per cent.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 193: the impetus and the energy for the referendum came from populist lay Catholics – described by opponents as ‘fundamentalist right-wing Catholics’.

¹⁴⁶ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 88.

¹⁴⁷ See *Statement issued by Irish Episcopal Conference*, 22nd August 1983, in *The Irish Times*, 23rd August 1985, 5. The statement includes the belief that ‘a clear majority in favour of the amendment will greatly contribute to the continued protection of unborn human life in the laws of our country’.

¹⁴⁸ The Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Dermot Ryan, issued a pastoral letter on the Sunday preceding the vote urging support for the amendment. Bishop McNamara also issued a pastoral letter on the same basis.

¹⁴⁹ See Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 85: Political savvy and personal conviction caused a number of Fine Gael TDs to publicly announce their support for amendment, in contravention to the party position.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 86: The medical and legal professions divided on the same issues – the constitutional status of certain forms of contraception, including the treatment of a mother during pregnancy, in the event of a ‘Yes’ vote. See also Evelyn Mahon, ‘From Democracy to Femocracy: the Women’s Movement in the Republic of Ireland’ in *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, Patrick Clancy, Sheelagh Drudy, Kathleen Lynch, Liam O’Dowd (eds) (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1995), 675-708 at 689: Mahon argues that the advocates of ‘No’ vote in this specific grouping (‘doctors and lawyers’) were directly and knowingly influenced by the polemic of the ‘Women’s Right to Choose Campaign’ (WRCC).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*: Reports circulated regarding the formation of a ‘Farmers Against the Amendment Group’ which included Donal Cashman, the President of the IFA. Soon disbanded, Cashman and eleven members of the IFA executive were suspended for attempting to establish an anti-amendment alliance.

whether the Constitution should be changed to reflect the interests of a Catholic pressure group, and therefore of the Catholic Church. In this way, the referendum became ‘a test of the loyalty and respect of the Irish people for the bishops, Pope John Paul II, and the teachings of the Catholic Church’.¹⁵² Unsurprisingly, in the light of that, the result was interpreted by many as a victory for the conservative branch of Catholicism, and against the ongoing drive to liberalisation in Ireland.

The Divorce Referendum

A referendum proposing to remove the constitutional ban on divorce was held on 26th June 1986. The proposal was defeated by a margin of 63 per cent to 37 per cent, almost a replica of the figures for the 1983 referendum.¹⁵³ Endorsed by Taoiseach, Dr Fitzgerald, as part of his pluralist reform agenda, the bishops in their opposition to the proposal challenged it on the grounds that the provision of civil divorce was not merely a political matter, but was also a moral issue.¹⁵⁴ As in the ‘abortion’ referendum, while advocating their position, the hierarchy yielded final arbitration to the personal conscience of each voter. Unlike the 1983 poll, and in a new and important departure, the bishops further stated that a Catholic could vote in contravention to Church teaching ‘without incurring guilt’.¹⁵⁵ Again, as in 1983, the collective voice of the hierarchy proved unsustainable in the light of separate and proactive interventions on the parts of Archbishop McNamara of Dublin and Bishop Newman of Limerick.¹⁵⁶

In a further indication of a shift within Irish Catholicism, flagged first in the 1983 campaign, the vanguard in maintaining loyalty to the teachings of the church continued to rest with lay Catholic organisations. In that regard, the campaign against the proposal to introduce divorce was spearheaded by Family Solidarity, who, further to the success of PLAC in 1983, and drawing from their resources and experience, coherently and skilfully argued against the proposed constitutional change.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁵³ On a substantially higher poll (63 per cent).

¹⁵⁴ *The Irish Times*, 12th June 1986, 7: ‘The questions raised in this debate are not simply political. They are also moral. Each legislator and each voter is faced with a moral decision. Changes in civil law can influence moral attitudes and affect the whole moral atmosphere of society’.

¹⁵⁵ *The Irish Times*, 12th June 1986, 7.

¹⁵⁶ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 245.

¹⁵⁷ Evelyn Mahon, ‘From Democracy to Femocracy: the Women’s Movement in the Republic of Ireland’, 690.

Reasons for the defeat of the proposal are varied and complex. It would represent a misreading to interpret the result as merely that of a victory for the Catholic Church. Drawing on the adage that 'all politics are local',¹⁵⁸ evidence would suggest a range of factors militating against a 'Yes' vote, including significant levels of concern relating to legal and economic aspects of the proposed legislation.¹⁵⁹ In that regard Evelyn Mahon nominates four principal reasons for the defeat of the divorce amendment: the central role of the family in the lives of Irish Catholic women; the exploitation of dependency or the real fear of poverty; the character of the proposed divorce legislation; the lack of any theoretical feminist direction on the issue.¹⁶⁰ Inglis, in addition, holds that the strong and well organised anti-divorce lobby, closely aligned to Catholic principles, was successful in refocusing the debate from one of 'minority civil rights for non-Catholics' to the broader concept of the common good of Irish society.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, however, what the campaign demonstrated was the continuing influence exerted by the Catholic Church in the minds and hearts of the Irish people, indicating that the separation of Church and State 'was still far from being completed in the 1980s'.¹⁶²

Moving Statue Syndrome

An ironic coincidence of events in February 1985 bore witness to the complex diversity in unity common in Irish Catholicism at this time. In the first place, the passing of liberalised Family Planning legislation was seen as a victory over the Catholic Church, made so essentially by the trenchant interventions of Bishops McNamara and Newman.¹⁶³ That very week the first reports of the phenomenon of the 'moving statues' circulated. In the following months there were reports of the same happening coming from small rural areas all over the country. The most famous was at the grotto of Ballinspittle in West Cork where, it is estimated, half a million people visited that year. Efforts to articulate a theological

¹⁵⁸ Attributed to Irish-American Tip O'Neill, one time Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

¹⁵⁹ Evelyn Mahon, 'From Democracy to Femocracy: the Women's Movement in the Republic of Ireland', 691. Mahon points out that in the immediate lead up to the referendum revisions were still being made about pension rights, benefits and inheritance.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 90.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ See Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 245: The *Family Planning Amendment Bill* passed by the Dáil on 21st February 1985 allowed for non-medical contraception to be made available without prescription to persons of age 18 and over.

perspective pointed to a serious spiritual vacuum within the faith experience of Irish Catholics.¹⁶⁴

In that regard, however, if the public image of Catholicism of the 1980's was the confrontation between the moral crusade and the liberal agenda, in addition to the phenomenon of the moving statues, at another level significant and important developments were attempting to give expression to deeply felt needs. For instance, the National Council of Priests in Ireland (NCPI) in 1982 likened the Church in Ireland to a ship that was letting in water below the surface, and yet the captain and crew, on the basis that the ship was afloat, decided against examining the situation too closely.¹⁶⁵ Further, the *Pobal* Conference in 1987, reflecting on the future direction of the Church, listed as its first priority the abandonment 'of the disastrous lay/clerical split...a distortion of the vision of Jesus'.¹⁶⁶

In the final analysis, given the events of the decade, perhaps Bishop Brendan Comiskey in an article entitled 'The Church in the Eighties' had proven somewhat prophetic. In the article, penned at the beginning of the decade, he suggested that the greatest contribution of Pope John Paul's visit to Ireland was to awaken anew in its people 'a hunger for the holy' and that, consequently, 'high on the agenda for the eighties must come the need for adult catechesis'.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, reflecting in the future of the Church in the late eighties, Séan Mac Réamoinn talked of 'incomparably the most urgent task of evangelisation today'.¹⁶⁸ His plea is that 'Jesus as a teacher of how to live must be brought among us...His Church needs to preach his word warmly, directly and untrammelled by the preoccupations of the past'.¹⁶⁹

1.2.7 Assessment of the Church entering the 1990s

By the end of the 1980's Mass attendance by Irish Catholics was measured as 'the highest in the world'.¹⁷⁰ This fact in itself, if not a cause for complacency in the Irish Church, was surely at least a reason for humble satisfaction. Moreover, in conjunction with the referendum

¹⁶⁴ See for instance, Peadar Kirby, 'On Moving Statues: A People's Cry for Spirituality' in *Doctrine and Life*, April 1986 171-181 at 180; also Fr Gabriel Daly, in the *Sunday Independent*, 22nd September 1985, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief*, 39.

¹⁶⁶ Sean Freyne, 'The Laity and the Church', in *Doctrine and Life*, May-June 1987, 234-242 at 239.

¹⁶⁷ Brendan Comiskey, 'The Church in the Eighties', in *The Furrow*, December 1981, 691-699 at 691, 693.

¹⁶⁸ Oisín, 'Laylines' in *Doctrine and Life*, September 1986, 373-380 at 379.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 209: at 85 per cent – sourced from Andrew Greeley.

successes in the ‘battle of strength between Church and state for the hearts and minds of Irish people’,¹⁷¹ perhaps echoes of Archbishop McQuaid’s Teresian-like ‘tranquillity’ were appropriate.¹⁷² Yet, there were indications that ‘the manifest schizophrenia of Irish Church life’ was alive and well. For instance, reading the signs of the times, Michael Paul Gallagher asserted that, if fidelity to Mass-attendance was the greatest strength of the Irish Church, it could quickly become its greatest weakness because of its failure to engage on a level other than convention.¹⁷³ Other indicators too pointed to a declining influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland.¹⁷⁴ Sociological data also demonstrated a strong undercurrent of changing patterns in regard to belief and value systems.¹⁷⁵

The reality was that the Church was, essentially, fighting ‘a rearguard action against the permissive society’.¹⁷⁶ The response was, tellingly, a return to an ultramontanist strategy not dissimilar to that waged by Cardinal Cullen in the previous century.¹⁷⁷ The result was that, within years, we were being informed that ‘Most analyses of the current state of Irish Catholicism are unrelievedly gloomy’.¹⁷⁸ Echoing this reading, the events of the coming two decades – the pivotal years marking the transition from the second to the third millennium – were to demonstrate that the past was certainly another country when it came to Catholic Ireland. Analysis on the place of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland from 1990–2010, would demonstrate, unequivocally, the changed dynamic pertaining to the relationship between the Church and Irish Society – namely, that the ‘long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism’ had well and truly come to an end.

¹⁷¹ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 246.

¹⁷² *Let nothing disturb thee; Let nothing dismay thee: All things pass; God never changes. Patience attains All that it strives for. He who has God Finds he lacks nothing: God alone suffices.* These lines, generally known in English as ‘Saint Teresa’s bookmark’, were found after her death in her breviary.

¹⁷³ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief*, 35.

¹⁷⁴ See Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*: He outlines decline in Catholic Practice, 209; in moral authority, 210; in the educational field, 223; in the health field, 226; in the sociology of the family, 238; and *passim* 203-242

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Eoin G. Cassidy, ‘Modernity and Religion in Ireland: 1980-2000’, in Eoin G. Cassidy (ed), *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2002), 17-45 *passim*.

¹⁷⁶ Brendan Ó Cathaoir, ‘The forced retreat of the Catholic Church’, in *The Irish Times*, 28th July 2003.

¹⁷⁷ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 257: A strategy driven, ironically, by Cullen’s successor as Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Desmond Connell.

¹⁷⁸ Kevin Hegarty, ‘Faith of our Children’, in *The Tablet*, 14th March 1998.

1.3 IRISH CATHOLICISM 1990 – 2010

Recasting of the Church

In the Ireland of the early 1990s, unemployment was reaching record levels, political tradition was being challenged,¹⁷⁹ and voices from within the Church spoke of the need for the Irish Church at this time to reacquaint itself with the deliberations and decisions of Vatican Council II, indicating that the prevailing dominant model of Church was inappropriate for the demands of the 1990s and into the Twenty-First century.¹⁸⁰ Prophetically, it was a model that over the following years was to face an examination of such forensic and public attention that it was symbolically marked as ‘the crumbling of an ecclesiastical Berlin Wall’.¹⁸¹

Not unconnected, Dr Garret Fitzgerald, reflecting at this time on his vision for the future of Irish Society, talks of the Christian task as that of challenging the assiduously promoted false value system sweeping the country.¹⁸² Pointedly, however, he asserts that the capacity of the Church to prophetically engage this task is weakened by ‘a disturbingly negative image of what Irish Christianity has stood for’.¹⁸³ Accordingly, in order to maintain its place as a value system which can inspire and challenge, the Church ‘will have to change much and quickly’.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Mary Robinson was elected as Ireland's first woman President in November 1990, thus initiating ‘a new relationship between the State and the Catholic Church’ (Margaret MacCurtain, ‘Mary Robinson: Metaphor for Change’, *The Furrow* 41/12 (1990), 673-676 at 675).

¹⁸⁰ For example the President of the National Council of Priests of Ireland, Fr Harry Bohan. See Flan Markham, ‘NCPI Conference 1990’, *The Furrow* 4/11 (1990), 654-662 at 659. A not insignificant appendix to this call was the adoption by the NCPI at their AGM in 1990 of Resolution 8: ‘This Conference is concerned for the victims of sex-related offences particularly rape and abuse. We recommend that Church resources be placed at the disposal of the victim and those assisting the victim’ (Ibid, 66).

¹⁸¹ John Horgan, ‘Eamon Casey: a Reverie’, *Doctrine and Life* 42/8 (1992), 477-484 at 478.

¹⁸² Garret Fitzgerald, ‘The Future of Irish Society’, in *The Furrow*, 42/10 (1991), 543-549 at 544. Values such as the ‘extolled worldly success of the most vulgar kind’, in addition to ‘ostentatious displays of wealth and a hedonistic way of life contemptuous of the standards of behaviour of ordinary people’.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 545. He talks of a perceived legacy of Irish Catholicism to the present generation as comprising of school brutality, negative views of sex even within marriage, clerical hypocrisy, the compromise of honesty to authority, and ‘non-credible accretions to the eternal truths of the gospel’.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 546.

It is against this background, where debate was questioning the extent to which the Church in Ireland was, essentially, 'fit for purpose', that we reflect on its status over the period of the Great Jubilee, the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus. In that context, analysis reveals a complexity of reasons, which collectively contribute to a progressive realignment of sociological, anthropological, and religious priorities within Ireland.¹⁸⁵ However, the pathway taken by the Church during this period is perhaps most accurately indicated in the designation of this time as 'The Scandal Decade of the '90s'.¹⁸⁶

1.3.1 Scandal in the Church

Allegations connecting Church personnel to a seemingly unending litany of scandal and abuse started to emerge in the early 1990s. These revelations gave account of physical, psychological and sexual violence enacted by clergy and religious on children and others who had been placed in their care and sphere of influence. Moreover, the attendant revelations led to accusations of conspiracy and cover up on the part of the clerical establishment, as well as ineptitude and negation of responsibility on a colossal scale.

The first major revelation came in May 1992 when the media exposed the fact that Bishop Eamon Casey of Galway, had had an affair with Annie Murphy, an American divorcee, and was the father of a 17-year-old son from that relationship. The fall-out from the revelation was immediate and far-reaching, and for many people it simply bore out their perception of the Catholic Church in Ireland – 'its capacity for double standards, the dark side of its attitude towards women, its Byzantine disciplines, and its capacity to abuse its power'.¹⁸⁷ Again, addressing a perception that the response of the media to the story amounted, essentially, to a debasing of accepted levels of integrity, Séan Mac Réamoinn holds they were pushing an open door – 'Catholic Ireland' was all too willing.¹⁸⁸ Further, sociologist Tom Inglis holds that the Church found itself incapable of developing a language appropriate to the evolving circumstances, and thus incapable of addressing the demands of contemporary public

¹⁸⁵ These include particularly the swift osmosis-like penetration of enlightenment based philosophical and ethical values, the ferocious and apparently insatiable capacity for satisfaction demanded by the celtic tiger, and the concomitant departure from the Christendom paradigm of Church.

¹⁸⁶ Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, 'Morale in Church and Society', *The Furrow* 49/4 (1998), 195-201, at 195.

¹⁸⁷ John Horgan, 'Eamon Casey: a Reverie', 478.

¹⁸⁸ Séan Mac Réamoinn, 'Laylines', in *Doctrine and Life*, 43/4 (1993), 236-242 at 236.

scrutiny.¹⁸⁹ In a situation where the Church had lost its aura of sacredness, and was therefore exposed to the same criteria of analysis as any other group, such restriction was to prove devastating.¹⁹⁰

The Casey scandal received renewed momentum in 1995 when it was revealed that Fr. Michael Cleary, a well known Dublin priest, had fathered two children with his housekeeper, Phyllis Hamilton. Like Annie Murphy, Ms Hamilton published her account of the affair, first in the *Sunday World* newspaper and then in book form.¹⁹¹ The curious irony that both men had acted as the 'warm-up' act for the Pope's Mass in Galway in 1979 only added to the sense of incredulity, and as such served to symbolise what was to be the considerable fall from grace for the Catholic Church in Ireland. The fundamental moral contradiction embodied by the Casey and Cleary affairs left many Irish people with serious questions regarding the gap between preaching and practice. By that time, however, events had conspired to relegate the status of clerical adultery and paternity from its position relative to the hierarchy of Church based scandal. In 1994 the story of Fr Brendan Smyth came to the attention of the Irish Public. It was an episode that was to rock the very foundations of the Irish Church, and to reverberate to the very heart of the Irish nation.

In October 1994 it emerged that the extradition warrants issued against Smyth by the Northern Ireland Office on charges of paedophilia had not been acted upon.¹⁹² By November 1994, and within weeks of coming into the public forum, the Brendan Smyth affair had acted as the catalyst in the collapse of the Government, in the resignation of the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, and in the forced relinquishment, after only a few days in office, of Harry Whelehan in his role as President of the High Court.¹⁹³ It was a scandal that brought to light

¹⁸⁹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 218.

¹⁹⁰ See *Ibid*, 217. See also Marguerite Corish, 'Aspects of the Secularisation of Irish Society 1958-1996', 152: Corish talks of an embedded 'revenge logic' against the Church operative in the mindset of Irish journalists. Similarly, Vincent Twomey asserts 'what is uncontested'(sic), namely that 'from the point of view of the Catholic Church, the Irish media can be described as the most hostile media in the developed world' (*The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 67).

¹⁹¹ See Phyllis Hamilton with Paul Williams, *Secret Love: My Life with Father Michael Cleary* (Dublin: Mainstream Publishing, 1995). See also Annie Murphy with Peter deRosa, *Forbidden Fruit: The True Story of My Secret Love Affair* (New York: Warner Books Inc, 1994).

¹⁹² Questions regarding the Smyth extradition affair were raised in the Dáil, focusing particularly on the actions of Attorney General Harry Whelehan. When, within the month, and against the absence of a satisfactory account from Whelehan, he was appointed by the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, as High Court President, the junior Coalition (Labour) Party withdrew its support for the Government. Smyth was a priest of the Norbertine order and resided in their monastery in Ballyjamesduff.

¹⁹³ Smyth eventually pleaded guilty in a Northern Ireland court to 17 counts of indecently assaulting five girls and two boys while serving in West Belfast from 1964 to 1988. He was sentenced to four years in prison in June

various undercurrents of unacceptable behaviour at both a political and ecclesiastical level. From the Church perspective the repercussions were disturbing, suggesting an inability among senior Church leaders to appreciate the level of gravitas attached to the paedophile activity of Catholic clergy, and, consequently, the effect of such activity on its victims.¹⁹⁴

What made the Brendan Smyth case particularly shocking was not merely the fact of the devastation he had caused in the lives of his many victims, or even that, as an ‘an apparently incorrigible paedophile’,¹⁹⁵ his crimes could be traced back to the 1960s. It was, in addition, that evidence presented to the religious authorities about Smyth’s activities had been suppressed or covered up for decades.¹⁹⁶

The reverberations were many and widespread. Primary among these were the shattering of some of the sacred icons of Irish society. Traditionally, a conventional sense of Irishness was underpinned by the reverence accorded such icons as the position of the priest in society, the sacredness of the family, the respect for children, and a more conservative practice of sexuality.¹⁹⁷ Peadar Kirby talks of these icons as being ‘grotesquely’ disfigured in the aftermath of the Brendan Smyth affair and, in that, bringing to light ‘the stark contradiction between image and reality in Irish life’.¹⁹⁸ This ‘contradiction’ was seen to be a recurring

1994. See also Kathy Donaghy, ‘Diocese is still haunted by infamous trio’s sustained reign of abuse’, in the *Irish Independent*, April 8th 2002: It was revealed that Smyth’s abuse of children had occurred on both sides of the Irish border, in Britain and in the US. The scandal was only highlighted when victims came forward in large numbers after a UTV programme was made. Ultimately Smyth pleaded guilty to 74 incidents of sexual abuse of 20 young people over a period of 36 years. He served two prison terms in Northern Ireland before being handed over to the Irish State authorities in 1997. He died in prison at The Curragh camp in 1997.

¹⁹⁴ Peadar Kirby, ‘The Death of Innocence: Whither Now? Trauma in Church and State’, *Studies* 84/335 (1995), 257-265, at 258. See also Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: a social, personal and cultural history* (London:Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997), 395: Kenny reflects that a feature of the Brendan Smyth case was that reports hardly ever specified exactly what he had done, preferring instead to describe his actions generically as ‘child abuse’. This, she holds, is ‘an unsatisfactorily vague term’ as it is open to equivocation. Accordingly, she outlines her understanding that what Smyth did was ‘put his hands up the skirts of little girls, and down the trousers of little boys, and fondled their private parts’.

¹⁹⁵ Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 377.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Barry M. Coldrey, ‘The Sexual Abuse of Children: The Historical Perspective’ in *Studies*, 85/340 (1996), 370-380 at 377: Research, undertaken by Chris Moore of Ulster television, shows that for nearly forty years, Smyth’s superiors ‘did know of his abuse and were unwilling or unable to stop him’. The *Irish Times* of December 1994 quoted an Irish member of the Norbertine order, Fr Bruno Mulvihill, as stating that he had repeatedly raised issues regarding Smyth’s misconduct with the Abbot and that nothing had been done (Peadar Kirby, ‘The Death of Innocence’, 258); This was despite the revelation that Smyth had attended psychiatric counselling for his paedophilic compulsion in 1968, with no apparent progress (Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 377); Further, it was revealed that the Abbot had disregarded a decree issued by the Congregation of Religious in Rome in the late 1960s, which called for Smyth to be confined to the monastery and to undergo ‘strict supervision for the rest of his life’ (Peadar Kirby, ‘The Death of Innocence’, 258).

¹⁹⁷ Peadar Kirby, ‘The Death of Innocence’, 259.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* He offers as further evidence in this the death of another priest, Liam Cosgrove, in a Dublin gay sauna just hours before Reynolds appointed Whelehan to the Presidency of the High Court (*ibid.*). Cf. also Mary

pattern within Irish Catholicism in the 1990s. This pattern decreed that when things could get no worse for the Church, they got much worse. The unfolding litany of scandal took on increasingly predictable and ever more tragic proportions.

Allegations against Fr Sean Fortune of the Diocese of Ferns ultimately gave rise to the publication of *The Ferns Report* in October 2005.¹⁹⁹ As in the case of Brendan Smyth, it emerged that Fr Fortune's paedophilic tendencies (and activity) were not unknown to the Church authorities.²⁰⁰ Brendan Comiskey, left to answer the many questions raised by the Fortune affair, both those of the victims and of the wider public, resigned as bishop of the diocese in March 2002.

If Smyth and Fortune represent the high profile cases of clerical sexual abuse, they proved to be neither isolated nor atypical. Other cases that emerged into the public forum included those of Fr Paul McGennis,²⁰¹ Fr Ivan Payne,²⁰² Fr Daniel Curran,²⁰³ Fr Tony Walsh,²⁰⁴ Fr

Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 375: Kenny adds that Fr Cosgrove was given 'the last rites' by two priests who were also present. According to the owner of the club priests represented a significant number of its membership. Kenny further points out that the two leading stories on the evening RTE news were concerned with Frs. Smyth and Cosgrove. The third leading story concerned the conviction of a Galway priest for a sexual assault on a young man (377).

¹⁹⁹ The report identified more than 100 allegations of child sexual abuse made between 1962 and 2002 against twenty-one priests operating under the aegis of the Diocese of Ferns.

²⁰⁰ In 1981, newly ordained, Fr Sean Fortune was appointed to Fethard-on-Sea in the Diocese of Ferns. Soon complaints were made about him by parishioners, referring to his 'predatory' behaviour, to the diocesan Bishop, Donal Herlihy, and to his successor, Bishop Brendan Comiskey, as well as to the Papal Nuncio. Cf. BBC News World Edition, *Suing the Pope*, broadcast 19th March 2002 [accessed March 2011] at

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/1879407.stm>. In 1991 he was assigned to the parish of Ballymurn, apparently on the basis of his therapist's recommendation, namely that 'the priest had been cured' (*The Tablet*, 27th March, 1999, 447). In February 1995, Colm O'Gorman, one of those he had abused in Fethard-on-Sea, reported Fortune to the Gardaí. This instigated an investigation that would ultimately result in sixty-six charges of sexual abuse being brought against Fr Fortune. Consistently Fortune would deny the allegations, arguing instead that he was the victim of a conspiracy. For more than four years he used legal process to avoid facing the allegations against him. Ultimately, however, all avenues were closed off and in March 1999 he was brought to trial. Eleven days later, while out on bail, the forty-five year old priest used a cocktail of drink and drugs to take his own life See *The Tablet*, 20th March, 1999, 412).

²⁰¹ See Kathy Donaghy, 'Diocese is still haunted by infamous trio's sustained reign of abuse', in the *Irish Independent*, 8th April 2002: Fr McGennis was sent to prison to serve two nine-month concurrent sentences, one for indecently assaulting a 13-year-old girl in a hospital bed when he was a chaplain at Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children in Crumlin in 1960 and another for a similar assault on a choir girl in Co Wicklow between 1977 and 1979. Moreover, it emerged that he had served in at least eight parishes over a 40-year period. Dublin woman Marie Collins (the victim in Crumlin) remarked that when she reported the abuse which took place to the Church authorities in the 1980s they refused to back up her allegations to the Gardaí.

²⁰² Ibid: There was public outrage at the perceived leniency of a two-year jail term given to Fr Payne in June 1998 upon his conviction of abusing altar boys, and patients in Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin. On appeal the sentence was increased to six years. Again, records reflect the apparent inaction of the Church in that allegations of abuse came from different parishes, in this case Cabra and Sutton.

²⁰³ Cf. Barry M. Coldrey, 'The Sexual Abuse of Children: The Historical Perspective', 378: A Belfast priest, Fr Curran was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for the sexual abuse of boys in his parish over a four-year

Patrick Hughes,²⁰⁵ Fr Thomas Naughton,²⁰⁶ Fr Eugene Greene.²⁰⁷ Indeed, such was the preponderance of incidents that it was reported that files marked 'Priests/Sex Abuse' in Irish newspaper libraries bulged with such material.²⁰⁸ It registered as a real mark of the Church's anguish that, by the end of the decade, when a number of clergy and religious brothers were serving custodial sentences for child sexual abuse, the scandals generated by Bishop Casey and Fr Cleary, once so earth shattering, seemed almost innocent.

1.3.2 Institutional Scandal

While revelations regarding clerical paedophilia involving individual children at the diocesan and parish level represented a scale of abuse and victimisation publicly unprecedented within Ireland, essentially they represented only half the story. The other half of the story involves the reported systemic physical, emotional and sexual abuse of women and children in the care of Irish religious at various church-run institutions.

Tom Inglis traces the catalyst of a series of revelations regarding institutional abuse and mistreatment to a decision taken in 1993 by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in Drumcondra to sell off a graveyard to finance their debts, a decision that was to have repercussions on a scale and at a level that could not have been foreseen. Literally and metaphorically it had the effect of bringing to the surface quite a number of skeletons. The

period. At his trial a fellow curate claimed that 'He was known as a heavy drinker but nobody thought he was a paedophile'.

²⁰⁴ Fr Walsh, a priest of the Dublin Archdiocese, and once part of the All Priests Show, served a six-year sentence in the 1990s for abusing six boys. Walsh challenged the church's decision to remove him from the clerical state. In 2010 he was sentenced to 16 years in prison, with four suspended, for 17 counts of indecently assaulting three altar boys in the 1970s and 1980s.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 376: Kenny holds that in 1995 Fr Hughes, from the Archdiocese of Dublin, made an out-of-court settlement of £50,000 to a former pupil. Now an adult, the plaintiff had accused Hughes of sexually abusing him from age nine to eleven. Moreover, the abuse had come to the attention of the Archdiocese who had sent Hughes to a psychiatrist but had allowed him to continue in his ministry.

²⁰⁶ Cf. *The Irish Examiner*, 23rd July 1998: Ordained as a member of St Patricks Missionary Order, Fr Thomas Naughton was jailed in July 1998 for a total of three years for indecently assaulting four altar boys in Dublin during the 1980s, while serving as a priest in the Dublin Archdiocese. Church authorities were informed in November 1985 of abuse of the first victim in Donnycarney church and Fr Naughton was sent to a treatment clinic in Stroud, England. On his return he was sent to Ringsend parish even though his counsellors felt he had limited insight into his offences. Fr Naughton was returned to the clinic when further offences came to light in 1988. In December 2009 Naughton received a further three year prison sentence for the sexual abuse of a boy at least 70 times in Vallemount, Co Wicklow, between 1982 and 1984.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *Sunday Business Post*, 29th December, 2002: As a priest of the Diocese of Raphoe, it is claimed that Fr Eugene Greene's paedophile activities went undetected for 35 years. He was sentenced in 2000 to 12 years imprisonment on charges of sexual assault against 26 children in Donegal between 1965 and 1982.

²⁰⁸ Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 377.

graveyard contained the bodies of 133 women who had worked in the convent laundry. These were 'abandoned' women and included unmarried mothers who had been rejected by their family and community, women who had become destitute through mental illness or alcoholism, and 'wild' girls.²⁰⁹ The episode brought into focus and, consequently, into question, the treatment that these women had experienced during their incarceration at the laundry. Thus, accounts emerged of regimes where relentless mistreatment, ruthless cruelty, and serious neglect, were practised with apparently effortless regularity.

Throughout the 1990s, a series of important television programmes such as 'Dear Daughter',²¹⁰ 'Sex in a Cold Climate',²¹¹ 'States of Fear',²¹² and 'Sinners',²¹³ helped focus public attention on this issue of institutional abuse in Ireland. In this way they gave voice to adult survivors of the institutions who provided testimony of their experiences, as well as speculating on an inherent climate of censorship and denial permeating the Church response when faced with controversial accusations. The broader context also is important. Established practice suggested that detailed circumstances of child protection and care in Ireland were not viewed by the public as a relatively high priority.²¹⁴ However, in the wake of a series of high profile and difficult cases in relation to child care, both the political and social climate in the country changed so that issues in that regard were brought more into focus.²¹⁵ It was into this

²⁰⁹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 228.

²¹⁰ An RTÉ production broadcast in February 1996. It portrayed life in a Dublin orphanage run by the Sisters of Mercy in Goldenbridge in the 1950s and 1960s. The programme marked a serious escalation in the public exposé of scandal in Church-run institutions. It portrayed a 'brutal and uncaring' regime where the absence of any sense of compassion and love, was matched only by an over concentration of institutionalised cruelty and the eradication of personal dignity (cf. Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 254). As such, it proved both devastating in its content and ground breaking in its effect. The presentation and content of the programme, styled on a crude 'goodies and baddies' format, indicated that it was 'open-season on the nuns and the Church' (Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 229).

²¹¹ A Channel 4 documentary, which examined the fate of ex-Magdalene laundry inmates.

²¹² A three-part documentary broadcast by RTÉ in April and May 1999. It addressed the experience of people who had spent their childhood years in state industrial schools in the care of religious orders.

²¹³ A fictional story revolving around a young girl who becomes pregnant in the West of Ireland in 1961, and the consequent harsh treatment she endured in the Magdalene laundry. When the programme was aired at primetime by RTÉ on 23rd March 2002 (the vigil of Holy Week), it received the highest ratings for any programme that month.

²¹⁴ Harry Ferguson, 'The Paedophile Priest: a Deconstruction', *Studies* 84/335 (1995), 247-256, at 248.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* These include cases such as 'the X case' in 1992; the Kilkenny incest case in 1993, which initiated a major inquiry into the apparent inaction on the part of public authorities to halt incidents of horrendous child physical and sexual abuse that had been ongoing since the mid-1970s; the case of the tragic death of Kelly Fitzgerald and the subsequent conviction of her parents in October 1994 on the charge of her 'willful neglect'. See also John Dardis S.J., 'Speaking of Scandal', *Studies* 89/356 (2000), 309-323 at 309; Dardis points out that, in addition to the clerical sexual abuse scandals of Casey, Smyth *et al*, Irish society was at regular intervals giving witness to a series of high profile scandals in its political, commercial, and legal sector – a list that included the Beef Tribunal, allegations about planning corruption in Dublin, the Philip Sheedy-Hugh O'Flaherty controversy, the Blood Transfusion Service Board, and questions regarding the involvement of the banks in the DIRT tax affair.

refocused environment of social perspective and heightened awareness that revelations concerning the treatment and welfare of children who had been placed by the State into the institutional care of religious run reformatories and industrial schools, began to emerge. From there the focus broadened to include the infamous Magdalene Asylums or 'Laundries'.²¹⁶

The ensuing debate and media coverage allowed surviving women to tell their story, and in so-doing, raise important questions regarding the place of the Catholic Church in Irish society, the status of women, and the nature and role of religious sisters. Further, in the debate it appeared that the Church was at no stage a willing participant, but rather was forced to submit to the demands of public scrutiny by the power of the media.²¹⁷ Moreover, they proved merely the precursor to a litany of revelations and allegations regarding the mistreatment of residents in State-sponsored, Church-run institutions.²¹⁸ In that context the argument is made that the manner and methodology employed by the media in their pursuance of the story of the scandals, was such that it 'tainted the role of the church as carer, and portrayed it instead as an abuser.'²¹⁹ Further, the context of the debate centred on the role of religious and patriarchal forces in the domination and limitation of women's sexuality and fertility. In that regard it raised questions around the position of women within Irish society, the structure of family, and access to contraceptive and abortion rights – all of which further challenged the position and practice of the Church in Irish society.

1.3.3 The Fallout

The cumulative effect of these seemingly incessant instances of abuse and scandal exacted a high price from the Church in terms of damage and credibility. James Mackey argues that while the damage inflicted on the Church by the very fact of such scandal is obviously considerable, the manner of the Church's response exponentially increased the impact of the

²¹⁶ These 'laundries' were originally set up in the early 19th century as a refuge for prostitutes. In time they became places of detention to which young Irish women 'in moral danger' were sent. They were the basis for the 2002 Film 'The Magdalene Sisters' which portrays them as places of 'ritualized cruelty', as 'a hell on Earth', and institutions reminiscent of 'medieval times, so archaic and brutal are the tortures' carried on within their walls. (See, Ann Hornaday, 'Sisters, Cursed Among Women' in *The Washington Post*, August 15, 2003, C05).

²¹⁷ Ann Hornaday, 'Sisters, Cursed Among Women'.

²¹⁸ For instance regarding Madonna House in Blackrock, Dublin, a residential home for disadvantaged children run the Sisters of Charity; 'Goldenbridge', a Dublin orphanage run by the Sisters of Mercy in the 1950s and 1960; the revelation of Church-State collusion in the (past) practice of exporting Irish babies for adoption – an RTÉ Prime Time documentary of 20th June 1996 entitled 'The Secret Baby Trail', outlined how in the 1950s and 1960s the State and Church acted together in arranging foreign adoptions for Irish babies.

²¹⁹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 227.

damage.²²⁰ Echoing this position, Noel Barber holds that the way in which bishops and religious superiors dealt with the issue of abuse has angered people as much as the fact of the abuse itself.²²¹ He presents the bishops' response as a misreading of the situation in that they saw the abuser as the primary victim 'because he sinned by indulging in illicit sexual pleasure'.²²² This compounded their inability to respond adequately to the situation. Patrick Hannon talks of the 'anger and disillusionment' generated by the scandals impacting on levels of Church attendance and people's readiness to give credence to church leadership on moral issues.²²³ In that context, Louise Fuller draws an image of a Church that emerged for many people at this time – an institution, lacking in honesty, severely pastorally deficient, and concerned primarily with its own protection.²²⁴

Primary among these, Mackey argues, was the Church's obsession for self-preservation, which, in its campaign to minimise possible collateral damage, was pursued to the detriment of other pressing responsibilities.²²⁵ Thus, the consuming focus of the 'clerical establishment' was one of self-protection, a crusade engaged in at the expense of the Church as the 'People of God' and, particularly, of the response demanded by the pastoral care and the healing journey of its victims.²²⁶ This misplaced commitment was manifest in such as the cover up of evidence, in the redeployment of accused clergy to unsuspecting communities, and, even against the light of revelations, in a plethora of explanations designed only to excuse, and 'almost to justify', the nature of their response.²²⁷ Again, Barber concurs, arguing that the concern for 'the good name of the Church' on the part of its authorities stemmed, in part,

²²⁰ James P. Mackey, 'The internal politics and policies of the Roman Catholic Church at the turn of the millennium', in James P Mackey (ed.) *Religion and Politics in Ireland* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2003), 13-40 at 30.

²²¹ Noel Barber (ed.), 'Scandals in Church – The Irish Response', *Studies* 89/356 (2000), 307-308 at 307.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ Patrick Hannon, 'Christian Values in a Pluralist Society', in Dermot A. Lane (ed.), *New Century New Society: Christian Perspectives* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2001), 149-158 at 157.

²²⁴ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 257.

²²⁵ See 'Bishops admit: We hid abuse to avoid scandal', in the *Irish Independent*, December 5th 2003. The article reports on the publication of a study of clerical sex abuse in the Irish Church entitled 'Time to Listen'. The report states, "The clergy and Church personnel interviewed described how the goals of preventing scandal and protecting the laity guided many decisions made in managing allegations of child sexual abuse." See also Catholic Communications Office, Launch of *Time to Listen: Confronting Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy in Ireland*, 4th December 2003: 'Church personnel interviewed described the Church's overall management strategy in relation to child sexual abuse as an attempt to prevent scandal and protect the Church as an institution. Ineffective leadership and poor communication were regarded as factors contributing to ineffective management. Other factors such as unfamiliarity with the issue, lack of procedures and conflicting external advice were also identified as challenges to effective management.'

²²⁶ James P Mackey, 'The internal politics and policies of the Roman Catholic Church at the turn of the millennium', 30.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

from an over-concentration on holiness of the Church, and a concomitant lack of appreciation of the sinfulness of the Church.

A common 'explanation' forwarded was the appeal to ignorance, that Church leaders did not sufficiently appreciate the addictive tendencies of paedophilia. This position is dismissed by Mackey as an 'opportunistic' discovery of fallibility on the part of a previously all-knowing authority. As such, it represented only 'a shabby excuse' for failing to do what would be expected of anyone with normal reasoning capacity when faced with evidence of crimes against the vulnerable and young.²²⁸ Again, Mackey argues, the 'explanation' relating to tensions relating to the precedence of Canon law over Civil law was ultimately a false polarity designed merely to protect offending clergy from facing the legitimate claims of civil jurisdiction, and, as such, amounted to a further cover-up.²²⁹ Significantly, in that regard, Willie Walsh, Bishop of Killaloe, announced to the National Conference of Priests in 1996 that the sexual scandals involving clergy and religious have 'shattered' the Catholic church in Ireland and that there was a 'perception that we, as bishops, and other religious authorities involved ourselves in a web of secrecy which was designed to protect the abuser rather than the abused.'²³⁰

Importantly, Eamonn Conway outlines that, in addition to the victims of clerical and institutional abuse, ordinary Church members also have experienced much pain, hurt and disappointment – not least, the fact that generations of young, and not so young, hungering for spiritual nourishment, are searching elsewhere. This could have been prevented if change had been freely chosen rather than forced upon the Church.²³¹ Another very practical consequence from the abuse scandals was the fall-out in terms of the financial loss facing Religious Orders. Thus, in January 2002, after intensive negotiation, CORI and the Irish Government agreed a once-off payment by the Orders to a compensation fund for abuse victims. This contribution, of €128 million, was designed to indemnify the orders against future claims arising from retrospective child abuse claims.²³² However, in the aftermath of the publication of the Ryan Report in May 2009 this arrangement proved unsustainable. Demands were made for an increased contribution from the orders relative to the payment

²²⁸ Ibid, 31.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Eamonn Conway, 'The Value of theology for the individual', *The Furrow* 53/6 (2002), 329-330.

²³² Dermot Lane, Vatican II: The Irish Experience, *The Furrow* 55/2 (2004), 67-81 at 73.

being made by the State.²³³ To this end the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy increased their personal contribution to €162,472,914.²³⁴ The Christian Brothers contribution was estimated at over €161,000,000.²³⁵

A further element attaching to the fallout of the child abuse scandals was evidenced in a tabloid mindset driving the coverage in Ireland of the scandals. This tended to focus so much on clerical abusers, to the virtual exclusion of most others, that it essentially engendered a common belief that the phenomenon of child abuse is primarily confined to Catholic clergy.²³⁶ Where acknowledgement of a broader context and problem is made, there is still a propensity to present the problem of child sexual abuse as it relates to Catholic clergy as proportionally worse than that found in other sectors of society.²³⁷ In that light Michael Breen, reflecting that child abuse is much more likely to occur within the home,²³⁸ holds that ‘it is clearly untrue, unjust and dangerous to suggest, even by volume of coverage, that clergy are the primary abusers of children’.²³⁹ Against that, it could be argued that the emergence of clerical and religious sex scandals has given rise to a measure of reaction and vilification of Church-based sexual misconduct disproportionate to that of such misconduct in other sectors of Irish life. Commentators reflect that such reaction is influenced by a broader context.

David Quinn talks of an anti-Catholic backlash to the imposition of ‘social totalitarianism’ by the Church in its attempts to mould the Irish State into the ‘perfect Catholic society’.²⁴⁰ Tom

²³³ At that time the total compensation bill was reported as €1.3bn. Cf. Shane Phelan, ‘Value of assets held by other orders unclear’, in the *Irish Independent*, November 25, 2009.

²³⁴ See http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/uploads/news/files/Congregation/Final_Statement031209.pdf [accessed March 2011].

²³⁵ John Walshe, ‘“Shamed” brothers handover €161m’, in the *Irish Independent*, November 25 2009.

²³⁶ Michael Breen, ‘The Good the Bad the Ugly: The Media and the Scandals’, *Studies* 89/356 (2000), 332-338 at 334.

²³⁷ See *Ibid.* Conversely, according to a survey by *The New York Times* in 2003, 1.8 percent of all priests ordained from 1950 to 2001 have been accused of child sexual abuse [Cf. Laurie Goodstein, “Decades of Damage; Trail of Pain in Church Crisis Leads to Nearly Every Diocese,” *New York Times*, January 12, 2003, Section 1, p 1]; Similarly, according to a 2002 survey by *The Washington Post*, covering the same time-frame, less than 1.5 percent of those who have served as Catholic clergy have been accused of child sexual abuse, [Cf. Alan Cooperman, ‘Hundreds of Priests Removed Since ‘60s; Survey Shows Scope Wider Than Disclosed’, *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2002, p A1]; A report issued by a British psychologist in the UK in August 2000, in the wake of anti-paedophile demonstrations there, reflected that ninety-eight per cent (98%) of abusers were related to their victims [Michael Breen, ‘The Good the Bad the Ugly: The Media and the Scandals’, 336].

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.* See also See Catholic Communications Office, Launch of *Time to Listen: Confronting Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy in Ireland*, 4th December 2003. Address by Most Rev Seán Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, President of the Irish Bishops Conference: ‘We now know that the majority of child sexual abuse happens within the home or in the child’s immediate environment, and is usually perpetrated by a family member or by someone known to the child.’

²⁴⁰ David Quinn, ‘Anti-Catholic backlash is past its sell-by date’, in the *Irish Independent*, 6th November 2004.

Inglis points particularly to the historical position and proclamation of the Church in regard to moral, predominantly sexual, deviancy, reflecting that one reason the Church has attracted so much attention is because 'for so long it spoke longest and loudest about the sacredness of marriage, the innocence of children and the need for strict sexual morality'.²⁴¹ Not unrelated, Louise Fuller talks of 'a sense of *Schadenfreude*, now that the Church was brought to its knees'.²⁴² Reflecting this, Kevin Myers wonders whether nowadays we are afraid to be seen to defend in any capacity men and women religious: 'Are we happy to see them corralled into the one great cattle-pen marked "abusers", and so to dismiss them from our history as no more than perverts and deviants?'²⁴³

Commissions of Investigation

Responding to the increasing catalogue of sexual abuse perpetrated by religious and clerical personnel, and the manner in which Church authorities dealt with these crimes, a series of State sponsored commissions were initiated.

The first statutory inquiry investigated how Church and State authorities addressed allegations of clerical child sex abuse perpetrated on children in the reformatories, industrial schools and orphanages in Ireland.²⁴⁴ The *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act* was passed in 2000 and the Commission itself was established in May of that year. It was chaired by Ms Justice Mary Laffoy. She resigned in 2003 due to lack of co-operation from the Department of Education and Church agencies.²⁴⁵ She was succeeded by Mr Justice Sean Ryan, whose report (colloquially 'The Ryan Report') was published on May 20th 2009.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 217.

²⁴² Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 253.

²⁴³ Kevin Myers, An Irishman's Diary, in *The Irish Times*, 13th August 1999. See also, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, 'Morale in Church and Society', 199: She holds that 'Ageing clergymen who might have expected their latter years to be surrounded with the respect verging on veneration their predecessors would have experienced found themselves, instead, dreading the possibility that they might be identified in the street as a priest or bishop'. See also, 'Goodbye reverence, hello hostility', in the *Irish Times*, 12th November, 1997: 'If the church and priests once prompted reverence, now the reaction is often hostility - a hostility very much related to perceptions of how the church handled recent child sex abuse scandals here.'

²⁴⁴ It was set up following the May 1999 apology on behalf of the State by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in the Oireachtas to those who had been residents of these institutions. The apology followed the broadcast of two parts of the three-part *States of Fear* series on RTÉ television.

²⁴⁵ Mary Raftery, 'The end of a decade of inquiry', in *The Irish Times*, 16th May 2009.

²⁴⁶ Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009*, July 2009. Available at <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/> [accessed March 2011].

The findings of the Commission are described as ‘the map of an Irish hell’, outlining, ‘a land of pain and shame, of savage cruelty and callous indifference’.²⁴⁷

Allegations against Fr Sean Fortune of the Diocese of Ferns ultimately gave rise to the publication of *The Ferns Report* in October 2005.²⁴⁸ Chaired by retired Supreme Court judge Mr Justice Frank Murphy, this Inquiry was set up in March 2003 to investigate how allegations of clerical child sex abuse were handled by Church and State authorities in that diocese between 1962 and 2002. The inquiry followed on from the BBC television documentary ‘Suing the Pope’. The report identified more than 100 allegations of child sexual abuse made against twenty-one priests operating under the aegis of the Diocese.

The *Commission of Investigation, Dublin Archdiocese*, chaired by Ms Justice Yvonne Murphy sat from March 2006 and furnished their report to the Minister for Justice in July 2009. This report was published in amended form on 26 November 2009.²⁴⁹ Again, reflecting the influence exerted by the court of public opinion, the commission came about in the aftermath of the RTÉ Prime Time programme ‘Cardinal Secrets’, broadcast in October 2002.²⁵⁰ Covering the period between January 1st 1975 and April 30th 2004, the report details a litany of abuse perpetrated by priests against more than 300 victims.²⁵¹ In that context, the move by the Archdiocese to take out insurance against potential compensation claims arising out of clerical abuse was, according to the report, an act proving knowledge of child sexual abuse as a potential major cost to the Archdiocese.

The report of the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin concluded that it has no doubt that clerical child abuse was covered up by the Archdiocese and other church authorities.²⁵² The fall-out from the report was devastating in its impact on

²⁴⁷ Editorial, ‘The savage reality of our darkest days’, in *The Irish Times*, 20th May 2009. ‘The sheer scale and longevity of the torment inflicted on defenceless children – over 800 known abusers in over 200 institutions during a period of 35 years – should alone make it clear that it was not accidental or opportunistic but systematic’ (ibid).

²⁴⁸ Department of Health and Children, *Report of the Ferns Inquiry*, 25th October 2005, Accessed March 2011 at <http://www.bishop-accountability.org/ferns/>

²⁴⁹ Department of Justice and Equality, *Report by Commission of Investigation into Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin*, 17th December 2010. Accessed at <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB09000504> [March 2011].

²⁵⁰ This programme investigated the handling of clerical child sex abuse allegations in the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin.

²⁵¹ The commission investigated allegations made against a sample of 46 priests, out of a total of 102 relevant to the period, and against whom 320 complaints had been made.

²⁵² Patsy McGarry, ‘Commission finds Church covered up child sex abuse’, in *The Irish Times*, November 26, 2009

the Irish Church, and unprecedented in its effect. Primary in this regard was the resignation from office of the Bishop of Limerick, Donal Murray, and the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Jim Moirarty (both previously auxiliary bishops in the Dublin Archdiocese), in addition to the proffered resignations of current auxiliary bishops Eamonn Walsh and Raymond Fields.²⁵³ That these resignations were issued in the week leading up to Christmas Day 2009 seemed only to accentuate the level of crisis endemic within Irish ecclesial life.

1.3.4 Influences Advancing the ‘Liberal Agenda’

There is little doubt that scandal within the Irish Church, and predominantly the scandal of paedophilia, has impacted considerably on the position and influence of the Church in the country. Thus, for instance, in response to a particular and devastating report on clerical abuse within the Irish Church, the observation was made that ‘Irish public life arrived this week at a point of no return: the final collapse of the Catholic Church’s ability to set its own authority against that of the State’.²⁵⁴ Against that, however, commentators reflect that to hold clerical and institutional church scandal as the primary catalyst in the recasting of the Church’s position within Irish society is a misreading of the situation.

In that regard, Dermot Lane holds that while scandals have played a part in this, much more influential has been the delayed arrival in Ireland of the Enlightenment – Church scandals merely paved the way for its uncritical adoption.²⁵⁵ What is certain is that its arrival coincided with, and perpetuated, social, economic, and cultural change, on a Copernican scale. Over a period of a generation the ethos of the Enlightenment, with its promise of endless progress, personal fulfilment, and individual freedoms, has taken a stranglehold on the collective Irish psyche.²⁵⁶ As such, it has impacted directly on the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland which, Gabriel Daly informs us, ‘had never, until the 1990s, encountered serious opposition

²⁵³ Pope Benedict XVI did not accept the resignations of Eamonn Walsh and Ray Fields.

²⁵⁴ Editorial, ‘A point of no return’, *The Irish Times*, October 26th 2002. The editorial was in response to ‘Cardinal Secrets’, a Prime Time production on RTE, on Thursday October 17th 2002. This dealt with the issue of paedophilia in the Archdiocese of Dublin. Indeed, such was the level of public outrage following the airing of ‘Cardinal Secrets’, that Justice Minister Michael McDowell announced the setting up of a State investigation into the Dublin archdiocese and how it had dealt with abuse cases. This investigation was published as ‘The Murphy Report’ in November 2009.

²⁵⁵ Dermot A. Lane, ‘Faith’ in *New Century New Society: Christian Perspectives*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2001), 159-173 at 161. Lane holds that what took place in Europe over a period of two hundred years, occurred in Ireland over a period of twenty years, ‘since the papal visit of 1979’.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

or hostility of the type which was commonplace on the Continent since the eighteenth century'.²⁵⁷

In addition, the emergence of the Irish enlightenment coincided with the evolution of the postmodern criticism of the modern project.²⁵⁸ In that regard Pat Collins outlines three characteristic effects of postmodern culture on religious attitudes, namely: experience is trusted more than authority; conscience is trusted more than the moral teaching of the Church; there is a movement from institutional commitment to spiritual seeking.²⁵⁹

Not unrelated to the encroachment of such influences in the Irish context were associated developments in the area of religion, and in particular, how it is given expression in the sacred and spiritual. The projected demise of religious practice in the face of an unrelenting encroachment of secularism proved somewhat misjudged.²⁶⁰ There has been, certainly, a diminution of traditional and institutional religious practice but this reflected more a transference of allegiances from it to a wide array of emerging religiosities and spiritualities.²⁶¹ Essentially this change emanated from a perceived inability of organised religion, especially Christianity, to provide spiritual nourishment.²⁶²

Against this background of philosophical, sociological, and religious transformation, the Ireland of the 1990s was marked by a series of confrontations between conservative and liberal forces on high profile law and morality issues. On each occasion the 'liberal' agenda

²⁵⁷ Gabriel Daly, 'Liberal Democracy, Crisis and the Christian Vision', 146.

²⁵⁸ This represents an ambiguous advance, in that what is 'postmodern' defines itself not in terms of what it is but in terms of what has ceased to be. Dermot Lane reflects that it is 'more a way of signalling dissatisfaction with the modern world than actually having a grasp of a clear alternative': see Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive* (New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 1996), 6. It represents an 'incredulity towards metanarratives: attributed to Jean-Francois Lyotard and quoted in James Corkery, 'Cultural Change and Theology in Ireland', *Studies* 88/352 (1999), 371-380 at 377. It further advocates the primacy of personal experience, thus establishing its prevailing ethos as pragmatism, not truth.

²⁵⁹ See Pat Collins, *The Broken Image* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2002), 106-107.

²⁶⁰ Jack Finnegan, 'Postmodern Spiritualities and the Return of Magic', *Milltown Studies*, 39/1 (1997), 5-26 at 5. Finnegan reflects how, in 1965, that Harvey Cox, reflecting on the unrelenting encroachment of secularist thought and practice, indicated as its legacy the demise of any credible allegiance to the practice of religion.

²⁶¹ See Pat Collins, *The Broken Image*, 108.

²⁶² Cf. Jack Finnegan, 'Postmodern Spiritualities and the Return of Magic', 21: It is a development that presents certain difficulties to the proclamation of Christian truth. For example, within the Irish context, it is noted that the ongoing search for alternative meaning systems in such as fortune-telling, astrology, clairvoyance, psychic 'phone lines, in addition to a growth in self-empowerment techniques, and the upsurge of interest in Body, Mind, and Spirit festivals, reflects a desire in people to find answers to some of life's deepest questions at a level which *de facto* excludes the supernatural dimension; See also Anne Thurston, 'A Not So Secular City', *Doctrine and Life* 50/10 (2000), 629-639 at 635: Thurston holds that while 'Celtic Spirituality' may have contributed to an upsurge of interest in spirituality, it has inspired this as 'an individualistic consumer choice' and not as a commitment to a faith community.

proved triumphant.²⁶³ This included a liberalisation of the law in relation to the availability of contraception,²⁶⁴ and the decriminalising of homosexual practices in Ireland.²⁶⁵ Also, in November 1995, a second referendum in relation to the constitutional ban on divorce was held, and the proposal was passed by an exceptionally narrow margin (50.28 per cent to 49.72). In a highly emotive campaign, the practice established in previous referendums (1983, 1986), whereby Catholic lay groups were to the vanguard in promoting the Church's viewpoint, continued. Again, as in previous referendums, a unified approach by the episcopal conference proved unsustainable, in that an agreed statement was added to by individual bishops, particularly Archbishop Connell of Dublin and Bishop Flynn of Achonry.²⁶⁶ The response of the hierarchy to the vote, indicative of their new role as the 'conscience of society',²⁶⁷ was to highlight the distinction between civil law and moral law.

The advance of the 'liberal' agenda continued into the new millennium. The 'Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act' was signed into law on 19th July 2010, giving same-sex couples rights and responsibilities comparable to civil marriage.²⁶⁸ In addition to changes wrought by legislative and electoral process, the role of the Irish Supreme Court became crucial and pivotal in the shaping of the moral agenda and landscape. The 'X Case',²⁶⁹ and the 'C Case',²⁷⁰ particularly demonstrated the impact of legal interpretation of the Constitution in the light of the new liberal-influenced environment.

²⁶³ Thus offering further evidence of the encroachment of the liberal agenda (in addition to a substantial urban/rural divide in regard to the reception of Church teaching). Cf. Tony Fahey, 'Ireland after Divorce – Is Individualism the Problem?', *The Furrow* 47/1 (1996), 17-23 at 17: Citing Professor Joe Lee, Fahey reports that Divorce is 'only one item on the agenda of "fundamentalist individualism"'

²⁶⁴ On 17th July 1992 the Health (Family Planning) Amendment was passed, liberalising the law in relation to the availability of contraception

²⁶⁵ In 1993, in light of a directive from the European Court of Human Rights, legislation decriminalising homosexual practices was passed into Irish law.

²⁶⁶ Moreover, clerical dissent from the official position of the Church was more vocal. For instance, theologian Gabriel Daly, addressing the issue of sacramental exclusion, argued that the absolutism of 'clinical bluntness' would not be the pastoral position of many priests. Fr Daly's comments were seen to be in response to those of Bishop Flynn who, in relation to Catholics who had divorced and remarried, stated that they 'may not receive the sacraments while living as husband and wife in a second union' (See Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 248).

²⁶⁷ A concept proposed by Liam Ryan and developed by Enda McDonagh. Cf. Patrick Hannon, 'Christian Values in a Pluralist Society', in Dermot A. Lane (ed.), *New Century New Society: Christian Perspectives*, 149-158 at 157.

²⁶⁸ There is no difference, in the Act, in the rights and obligations accorded to opposite sex cohabiting couples or same sex cohabiting couples.

²⁶⁹ In 1992 a case came before the Supreme Court of a fourteen-year-old Irish girl – referred to as X – who was pregnant as a result of unlawful carnal knowledge and was threatening suicide if she did not procure an abortion. The Court was asked to decide whether constitutionally the girl had a right to have an abortion and in a majority decision, issued on 5th March, judged that she did have that right. In December 2010, the European Court of Human Rights judged that the human rights of a woman had been breached by her inability to access abortion services in Ireland. The Court said that the government has failed to legislate for abortion under the 'X Case'.

To counter the momentum of the ‘liberal’ agenda, various laity led groupings emerged from the Catholic Community in Ireland. *Youth Defence* was founded in February 1992 (resulting from rulings on the ‘X Case’), to challenge the threat of abortion being legalised in Ireland.²⁷¹ The *Iona Institute*, dedicated to promoting ‘the place of marriage and religion in society’, was established in 2007.²⁷²

1.4 SYNOPSIS

The purpose of this opening chapter has been singularly focused. It seeks to establish a framework within which a reading of the current circumstances attaching to the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland might be advanced. Moreover, the rationale underpinning this focus is similarly clear: that any such reading be articulated from the standpoint of objective analysis, and not merely from the viewpoint of the subjective prejudice inherent in every argument. To that end, it has presented a synoptic reading of the Church in terms of its relationship to and within the society of Ireland. In that regard, it has marked, as its point of departure, the critical and imperative event of *an Gorta Mór*, the watershed experience of the Great Famine in the history of Ireland, and traced some of the pastoral and religious consequences attaching to that. In particular, cognisant of the originating impetus underpinning this thesis, this chapter has outlined a reading of the Catholic Church in Ireland in the pivotal timeframe 1990-2010. Going forward, these readings will inform any interpretations – sociological, ecclesiological, and theological – being applied to the positioning of Irish Catholicism at this time.

In advance, however, of moving to the application of any such interpretations, there is value in assessing generically the positioning of the Church in terms of its relationship to Irish

The requirement of the women (three applications had been lodged with the Court) to travel abroad to have the abortions carried out was ‘a significant psychological burden on each applicant’, the court ruled. The court further ruled that the *Irish* restrictions on abortion were a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which gives any person “the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence”.

²⁷⁰ In November 1997 the circumstances of another teenager seeking an abortion, pregnant after being raped, came before the court. Mr. Justice Geoghegan ruled that the girl could travel, not on the basis that the Constitution as amended confers the right to abortion outside of Ireland, but rather that it prevents injunctions against travelling for that purpose.

²⁷¹ See www.youthdefence.ie ‘Youth Defence is Ireland’s largest and most successful pro-life organisation.’

²⁷² See www.ionainstitute.ie The Iona Institute is headed by religious and social affairs commentator, David Quinn. See further, Maurice Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, 215. Curtis outlines other organisations established in these years ‘with similar aims’: ‘The Family and Media Association’, ‘The Mother and Child Campaign’. ‘Cóir’, the ‘John Paul II Society’.

society towards the end of the 1990s and into the new millennium. A useful starting point is the decision of the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, a Roman Catholic, to take Communion at a Church of Ireland service in Christ Church Cathedral on 7th December 1997. It was an action that led to some controversy, and much debate. Moreover, if the argument, objectively, was presented as concerning inter-church Communion, the subjective and underlying current was driven by many of the influences of the ‘liberal agenda’ discussed, and ultimately illustrated a developing chasm between the position of institutional Irish Catholicism and the society within which it is a part.

In response to the action of the President, the Catholic bishops issued a statement in which they reiterated Church teaching that it is not permissible for Roman Catholics to take communion in Protestant churches. The response by those advocating an alternative viewpoint to the bishops focused on the call to inclusivity and tolerance.²⁷³ Ultimately, and for a complexity of reasons, the position adopted by the Catholic hierarchy in terms of ‘winning’ the argument was a trivial pursuit. The more imperative aspect to the debate was outlined by Catholic commentator Breda O’Brien:

Why are so many Catholics completely unengaged by the theological issues about which Cardinal Connell feels so passionately? Or, why would so many Catholics have grave difficulty in explaining their own church's beliefs about the Eucharist, much less explaining what the Church of Ireland believes?²⁷⁴

Again, the publication of *One Bread, One Body*, on September 30th 1998, aroused similar tendencies and sentiments.²⁷⁵ Similarly, the publication on 6th August 2000 of *Dominus Iesus*, contending that ‘the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and

²⁷³ Responses to the letters pages of Irish broadsheet newspapers were thematically consistent in their exaltation of the values of inclusivity, tolerance, mutuality of respect, and, essentially, a confluence and promotion of the value of non-judgemental opinion. Concurrently, in the commentary sections of these newspapers, Archbishop Connell of Dublin, particularly, came in for much negative comment.

²⁷⁴ Breda O’Brien, ‘Why Cardinal cannot win in Communion row’, *The Irish Times*, 24th February, 2001.

²⁷⁵ See Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland, Scotland, *One Bread, One Body* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1998). The Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland, and Scotland jointly published *One Bread, One Body*, ‘a teaching document on the Eucharist in the life of the Church, and the establishment of general norms on sacramental sharing’. The responses were to its publication were significant, not only for their grounding in post-modern articulation, but also for the status of those commenting. For instance, the Taoiseach, Mr Ahern, argued that the timing of the document had ‘not helped *inter-religious* dialogue in Northern Ireland’. The president of the Irish Countrywomen’s Association, Mrs Eva Coyle, described the document as ‘*divisive* rather than *inclusive*’, adding that it was ‘*insensitive* and not consistent the current mood of *reconciliation* in the country’. A spokeswoman for the Church of Ireland talked of her community being ‘more sad than angry’, on the basis that ‘we do really feel that people on the ground were doing *what they felt was right for them*.’

the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense',²⁷⁶ came in for comment.²⁷⁷

Perhaps, colloquially and inadvertently, the validity of every argument in the various 'Communion' debates was established by the contention that the process of genuine dialogue demanded that 'both sides, from the *relative truths* of their respective positions, together seek a greater, more complete truth'.²⁷⁸ In that regard, and from the perspective of Catholic presence and position with and in Irish society, the arguments forwarded in refutation of the Catholic viewpoint illustrate an underlying and ambiguous dynamic. It suggests a particular disinterest, if not suspicion, of dogmatic reality, and points to the one absolute truth of postmodern thought, that there is no absolute truth.

Representing, in a sense, the anointed priesthood of, what he terms, this 'New Atheism', author and social commentator Malachi O'Doherty speaks of religion, addressing particularly the Irish context, as 'the inadequately reasoned response of stupid people to the mystery of life'.²⁷⁹ Yet, in the provocatively entitled 'Empty Pulpits', he discovers, as if for the first time, what some of these 'stupid people' have previously named (variously) as 'metaphysical unease',²⁸⁰ 'liberating grace',²⁸¹ and 'epektasis'.²⁸² Thus, advocating 'the revolutionary religious idea of our time',²⁸³ he outlines the pathway to 'spiritual well-being':²⁸⁴

²⁷⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of The Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, On the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, (Vatican Press, 2000), 17.

²⁷⁷ For instance, the Church of Ireland Primate, Dr Robin Eames talked of it in terms of 'a throwback to pre-Vatican II', and potentially 'insulting' as well as 'bitterly disappointing'. Further, addressing the Church of Ireland General Synod, Bishop John Neill, then of the Cashel diocese, argued that anyone adhering to such beliefs effectively disenfranchised themselves from the ecumenical movement. Domestically, not insignificantly given the symbolic import of her role, were the comments of Irish President Mary McAleese. Addressing the National Conference of Priests of Ireland she stated that 'we can all sense disappointment and impatience on many fronts - the mixed messages about ecumenical dialogue with sister Christian churches and respect for other faith systems'. Catholic commentator Irene Ni Mhaille talked of the document as reflecting a style of absolutism shot through with 'out-of-date, cosy, clerical assumptions', and representing primarily a distortion of faith, a rejection of pluralism, and confinement within 'a prison of arrogance'.

²⁷⁸ John Cleary, Letters, in the *Irish Times*, 21st June, 2001. [my italics]

²⁷⁹ Malachi O'Doherty, *Empty Pulpits: Ireland's Retreat from Religion* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2008), 201.

²⁸⁰ Gabriel Marcel, *Problematic Man*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 84.

²⁸¹ Peter C Phan, *Grace and the Human Condition* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), 286. This is the Augustinian quality of *libertas*, of free will put to good use.

²⁸² See Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, [Translation by Everett Ferguson and Abraham J. Malherbe], (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 6: Grounding his thesis on the image of the ascent of Moses to Mount Sinai, Gregory's apophaticism was distinguished by his doctrine of *epektasis*, a never-ending ascension into God in pursuit of the inexhaustible divine nature.

²⁸³ Malachi O'Doherty, *Empty Pulpits*, 243.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

The new prophet who would win interest would be a champion of the subjective life, would evoke truths about the human heart in language that we would recognise as authentic and natural. Such prophets are already among us. We call them singer-songwriters, poets and novelists. They don't summon us to church but into our bedrooms and down country lanes. There is no reason now why churches should take over that job from them. A community that really wants churches would not have empty pulpits. It would throw up enough clergy from itself to serve them. Ireland doesn't.²⁸⁵

Notwithstanding the somewhat Pelagian overtones attaching to this revelation, it marks a significant contribution in establishing the place of Catholicism in Ireland relative to the society in which it is present. In that context, questions concerning the veracity, or not, of such polemic is secondary. The fact that it is said is what is important. This is because of the insight it affords in terms of the impact of the changed circumstances of Irish Catholicism. As such, it draws comparison with the analysis of Pope John Paul, who, addressing the 'loss of hope' endemic in Western Europe, attributes it to '*an attempt to promote a vision of man apart from God and apart from Christ*'.²⁸⁶

In that light, given O'Doherty's subtext to his analysis of Irish Catholicism, 'Ireland's retreat from religion', the imperative need for an objective positioning of the Church relative to contemporary Irish society becomes obvious. Thus, relative to the 'recasting' of the Church, especially in the time period 1990-2010, it is necessary to establish evidence that is sustainable, factual, and analytical. It is to that task we now turn.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ John Paul II, 'Post-Synodal apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia In Europa*: On Jesus Christ Alive in His Church, The Source of Hope for Europe', 28 June 2003, 9.

Chapter II

A Sociological Reading of the Church in Ireland 1990-2010

2.1 ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT FOR ASSESSMENT

By any standards, the journey of the Catholic Church in Ireland as it progressed through the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium is recognised as a difficult one. We have explored different facets and circumstances that contributed in that regard. In turn, the events of this time have raised questions regarding their impact on the place of the Church in contemporary Irish society. The questions relate to such matters as the style of leadership operative within the Church, as well as to the levels of integrity and competence found there. They address the reworking of the metanarrative regarding the historical perspective of the role and influence of the Church in post-famine Irish history. Further, debate surrounding the timeframe and extent relative to the demise of the Church in Ireland is engaged in, in some circles as if such a development was essentially inevitable.

In response to such scrutiny an *a priori* understanding might presume that the very public and incessant negative presentation of Church-related matters, over such a prolonged period of time, can result only in the decline, possibly irreversible and possibly terminal, of the Church's influence and presence in Irish society.¹ Equally however, a contrary view might propose that such talk of demise is both exaggerated and premature. Against that horizon, and the evidential need for categorical information, a study of relevant sociological analysis is appropriate.

In that regard, and acting as a reference point to the position of Irish Catholicism at the advent of the new millennium, two series of international surveys present themselves as an authoritative measurement. The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) undertaken in 1998, and the European Values Study (EVS) from 1999, offer extensive and important assessment of trends in Irish religious beliefs and practices as it tracks the social, cultural and religious developments of Irish Catholicism throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Drawing on these sources, as well as later national surveys, it is possible to gain

¹ See Editorial, 'Culture, Religion, Society', *Studies* 82/326 (1993), 121-122 at 121.

perspective regarding the relationship between the Irish Catholic Church and the society within which it acts.

Moreover, in addition to these surveys, which benchmark the status of Irish Catholicism immediately relative to the cultural, ecclesial and sociological upheaval of the 1990s (particularly), it is possible to then further benchmark the status of the Church in Ireland at a certain remove from this context. This further perspective is established by reference to the national survey of religious attitudes and practices in Ireland authored by Micheál Mac Gréil in 2009.²

Collectively, the evidence of these research surveys, when applied to the context of this thesis – the analysis of Irish Catholicism, particularly within the timeframe 1990-2010 – constitute an objective commentary on the type and extent of sociological, political, ecclesiological and cultural transformation appropriate to that timeframe. Accordingly, we move now to address, chronologically, the profile of the Irish Church in that regard. That is,

- i. data relative to the immediate context of the ‘Recasting of the Church’;
- ii. a focus on the findings of the 2009 (Mac Gréil) Report.

The findings of this research will then contribute to the reading of any interpretive appraisal applied to the positioning of the Catholic Church in Ireland relative to, particularly, the defined time period.

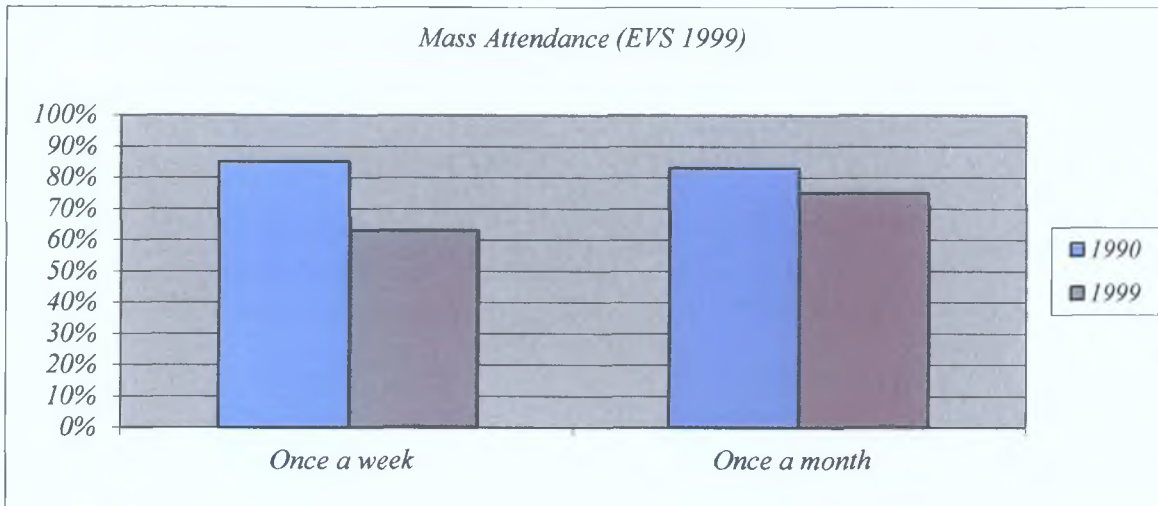
² Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference: A Need for Religious Revival in Ireland* (National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2009).

2.2 THE ISSP (1998) AND EVS (1999) SOCIAL SURVEY STUDY

2.2.1 Sociological Analysis³

Mass Attendance

Table 1



The most commonly employed indicator of attachment to Catholicism is to survey the numbers of people choosing to attend Mass.⁴ On that basis the 1990s have witnessed a substantial fall off in the levels of weekly attendance in Ireland (from 85% to 63%). While seeking to establish contributory factors behind this decline, commentators maintain that an important starting point is to recognise that the near capacity levels of Mass attendance traditionally attached to twentieth century Irish religious practice are, by any comparison, exceptionally high.⁵ From that perspective indicators point to a continuing and ‘exceptionally strong’ cultural valuation placed on the commitment to weekly Mass attendance.⁶ Indeed,

³ For a more detailed exposition of the data see Appendix ‘A’, 339-344.

⁴ Tony Fahey, ‘Is Atheism Increasing? Ireland and Europe Compared’ in Eoin G. Cassidy (ed.), *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2002), 46-66 at 50. On this see Desmond O’Donnell, ‘Faith is what really matters’, in *Reality*, January 2003: O’Donnell holds that making Mass attendance a primary measure of religious fidelity is inherently a mistake. See also Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help my Unbelief*, 35: He writes that ‘almost willy-nilly, one finds any discussion of religion and young people in Ireland being sucked into this narrow question of Mass attendance...[who] get the message that being a Catholic is defined by this one area’.

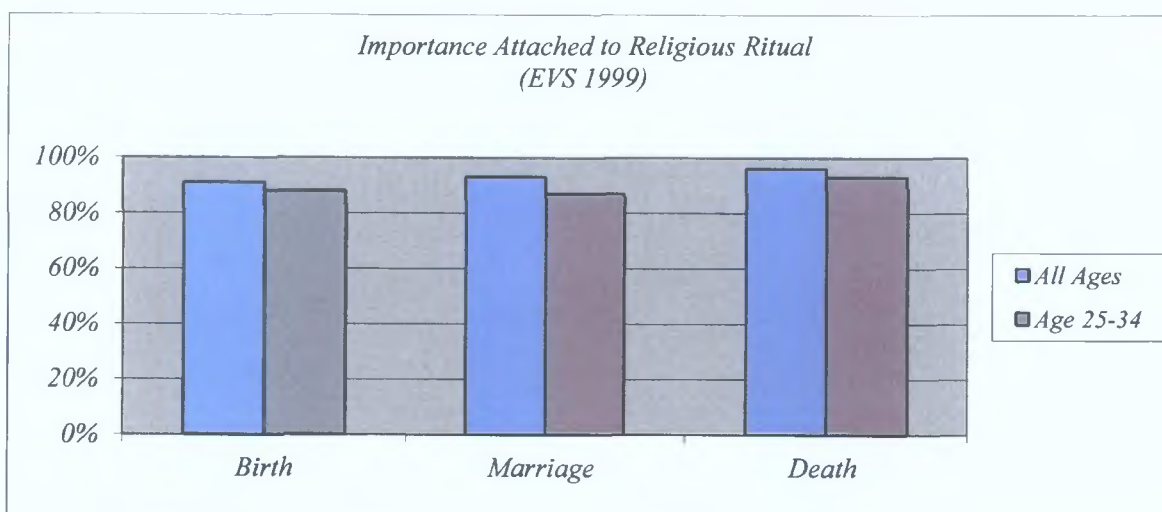
⁵ Eoin G. Cassidy, ‘Modernity and Religion in Ireland’, in Eoin Cassidy (ed.), *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2002), 17-45 at 26.

⁶ Tony Fahey, ‘Is Atheism Increasing? Ireland and Europe Compared’, 51.

given the inherent limitations on data analysis imposed by international levels of non-participation in communal Christian worship, the conventional definition of ‘regular’ church attendance is calculated not in weekly but in monthly terms.⁷ In that regard, Ireland registers (at 75%) as one of only three of the thirty-three European Countries surveyed (along with Malta and Poland) whose practice rate comfortably exceeds seventy per cent.⁸

Religious Ritual

Table 2



Figures relating to the importance that people attach to religious ritual offers tangible evidence of a strong religious awareness among Irish people in the marking of significant transitional moments in their lives. Further, they demonstrate an almost unanimous desire to give expression to such awareness through their public celebration of religious observance. This tendency suggests that the experience of exclusively secular symbolism and ritual offers only partial and limited satisfaction in giving expression to significant rites of passage. Accordingly, a propensity to invoke a religious dimension to mark times of transition such as birth, marriage, and death still registers strongly. In that regard, and in conjunction with the high numbers proclaiming Mass attendance, references to an increasingly privatised approach (outside of Catholic ritual) to religious beliefs and practices should be carefully analysed.⁹

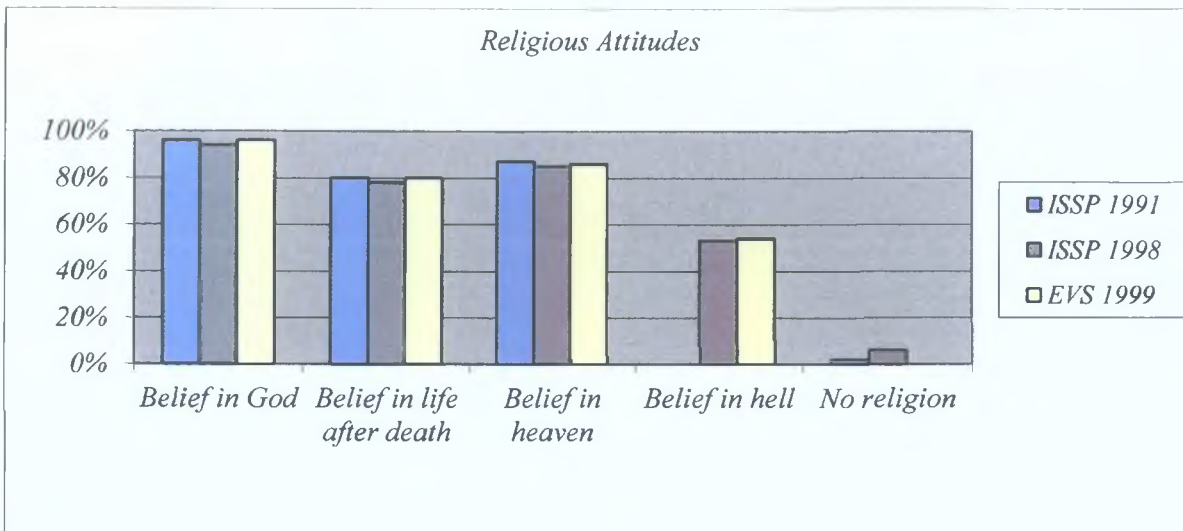
⁷ Ibid, 53.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Eoin G. Cassidy, ‘Modernity and Religion in Ireland’, 27.

Religious Attitudes

Table 3



Extrapolating information from a series of questions designed to measure the extent and influence of religious faith, and any changes in that regard that have occurred in Ireland throughout the 1990s, Greeley and Ward conclude that, with one exception (those who claim to have no religious affiliation), the decade has seen no statistically significant change.¹⁰ The Irish remain Catholic in terms of their acceptance of fundamental Church beliefs. Indeed, by the criteria of faith levels engaged by this survey, the Irish register as the most religious people in Europe.¹¹ These responses are mirrored in the EVS study of 1999.¹²

More detailed analysis, however, reveals considerable variation within the findings. For instance, statistics regarding weekly 'attendance at Religious Services' ranged from 90% in the oldest cohort consulted (age 69 and over) to 33.3% in the youngest cohort (age 18-28).¹³ Similarly, the percentage 'believing in God now' registers highest in the oldest age grouping (at 99%) and lowest in the youngest cohort (84%). Conversely, the percentage registering belief in a 'Higher Power' as against a 'personal God' was highest in the youngest cohort (14%) and lowest in the oldest age group (2%).¹⁴ This may indicate that a contemporary

¹⁰ Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', in *Doctrine and Life*, 50/10 (2000), 581-617 at 583.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 584.

¹² Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 23.

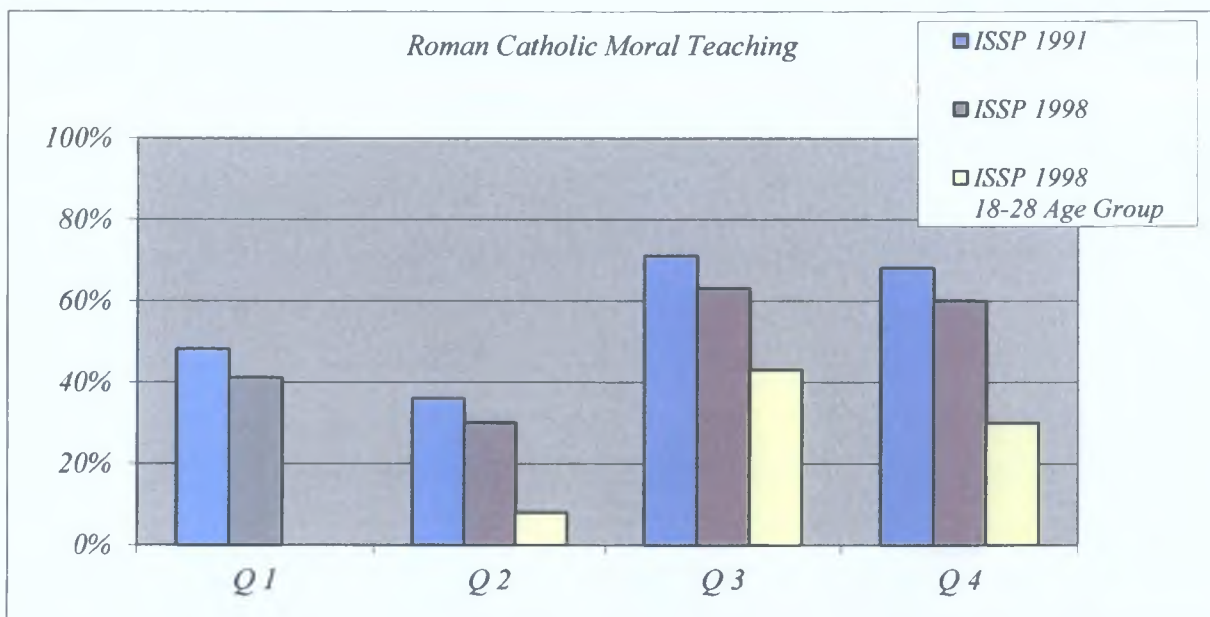
¹³ Conor Ward, 'Intimations of Immorality: An Analysis of the ISSP 1998', in Eoin G. Cassidy (ed.), *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2002), 67-93 at 77.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 69-70.

tendency to equivocally classify the term ‘God’ may render it so undefined such that attestation of belief in God may have little reference to the Catholic interpretation of the term.¹⁵

Moral Teaching

Table 4



Q1 Abortion is always wrong

Q2 Premarital sexual relations are always wrong

Q3 Extra-marital relationships are always wrong

Q4 Same sex relations are always wrong

The tendencies regarding ‘Religious Beliefs’ are continued when we examine the extent of ‘Acceptance of key aspects of Roman Catholic Moral Teaching’. These findings reflect that throughout the 1990s a significant shift away from Church principles has occurred across the whole spectrum of respondents, and again are more pronounced in the responses of the youngest cohort. Indeed, the survey indicates that, in matters of moral principle, autonomy of judgement rather than acceptance of authority ‘was general and almost total’ among 18-28 year olds.¹⁶ In general, the findings point to a widening rift between Church teaching and lifestyle choices in this area. While reasons accounting for such transformation in moral

¹⁵ Donal Harrington, ‘Implications for Pastoral Planning’, in *Doctrine and Life*, 50/10 (2000), 641-648 at 642.

¹⁶ Conor Ward, ‘Intimations of Immorality: An Analysis of the ISSP 1998’, 67.

priority are complex, some consideration of the philosophical and sociological influences would seem prudent. Thus, factors such as divisive argument on constitutional reform,¹⁷ legislative and legal interpretation, the endemic relativism of the postmodern mindset, the repercussions attaching to the series of Church based scandal, and a fundamentalist individualism generated by 'celtic tiger' principles, all contribute to a reprioritising of moral emphasis. In that regard, Tom Inglis understands the decline of the Church's authority in the moral sphere as, less a sign of secularisation, and more 'the Protestantisation of Catholic belief and practice'.¹⁸ His views are supported, somewhat intriguingly, by former Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, Walton Empey, when he comments that 'many Catholics simply don't toe the papal line on divorce, homosexuality, premartial sex, contraception, etc. They are more Protestant in their thinking'.¹⁹ Eoin Cassidy, however, holds that such findings should be interpreted as the growing nature of a secularist influence.²⁰ In that context, Liam Walsh contends that lay Christians, recognising in the secular world their particular area of competence, are indicating strongly that the bishops should 'mind their own business'.²¹ Perhaps though, working out of the informed reality of coalface pragmatism, the less complicated explanation is that, from a sociological and domestic perspective of many young people, the traditional Catholic sexual ethic 'has all the reality and immediacy of a fairy tale'.²²

¹⁷ Referendums in regard to the right to life of the unborn, (generically talked of as 'Abortion' referendums), September 7th 1983, 25th November 1992; Referendums in regard to Divorce, 26th June 1986, 24th November 1995.

¹⁸ Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 204. See also, 'Goodbye reverence, hello hostility', in *The Irish Times*, 12th November, 1997: The article traces the decline of religious practice to the introduction of free secondary schooling for all in 1967, seeing it as the catalyst which set Irish Catholics on the road to individual conscience. Thus, 'it made "Protestants" of them', in that they sought thereafter to make up their own minds about issues, rather than follow unquestioningly 'diktats from Rome, the bishop's palace, or the presbytery.'

¹⁹ Patsy McGarry, 'Dr Empey finds Vatican document confusing', in *The Irish Times*, 31st October, 2001. The Archbishop continues: 'that's that liberal wing ...It really is a mirror image of ourselves, in many ways'.

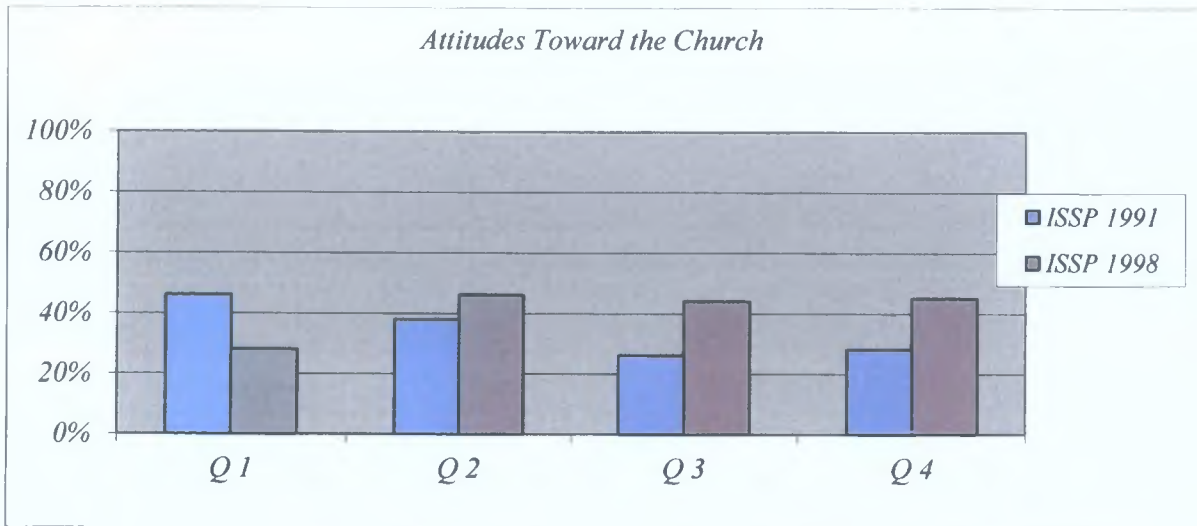
²⁰ Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 25.

²¹ Liam G. Walsh, 'Taking the Measure of the Spirit', in *Doctrine and Life*, 50/10 (2000), 619-628 at 623. He cautions, however, against any reading which presents Church life exclusively in terms of clergy /sacred and laity/secular, seeing such as a diminution of the role of each within the faith community, in that it is directly contrary to the understanding of the communion of the Church as outlined in *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 2 ('The People of God').

²² Orla O'Toole, 'A View from the Class-room' in *Doctrine and Life*, 50/10 (2000), 649-654 at 654.

Attitudes towards the Church

Table 5



Q1 Complete confidence or great deal of confidence in the Church

Q2 Churches have too much power

Q3 Disapprove of religious leaders trying to influence voting

Q4 Disapprove of religious leaders trying to influence government decisions

The decade has witnessed a marked critical change in levels of confidence placed in the Church. While this decline in approval ratings for the institutional model of Church reflected patterns throughout most of the twenty-six countries measured in the ISSP survey the results in Ireland were particularly conclusive.²³ Further, the loss of confidence in the Church is measured against an increase in confidence placed in institutions such as Dáil Eireann, in schools and the educational system, and no change in that allocated to the courts and legal system.²⁴ Moreover, analysed by age group, the figures register a steady decline in confidence from the eldest (over 69 years, at 59%) to the youngest cohort (18-28 years, at 7%).²⁵ Essentially it points to a much lower level of confidence in religious leadership at the end of the 1990s than at the beginning of the decade.²⁶

²³ Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 37: To the extent that 'Irish people's confidence in religious leadership and the Church as an institution' registered in the lower half of all countries surveyed.

²⁴ Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', 585.

²⁵ Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 37; Conor Ward, 'Intimations of Immorality: An Analysis of the ISSP 1998', 81.

²⁶ Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', 584: Consequently, 'unless there is some change in the perception of Church leadership in Ireland, the long-term outlook is for an Ireland in which less than a fifth of the population have "a great deal" of confidence in the ecclesiastical organization' (ibid, 585).

The strong conviction that religious leaders should remain electorally neutral may reflect a negative reaction to the experience of episcopal intervention in various referenda.²⁷ In that regard it indicates a perception that bishops' pronouncements on political matters are being less and less trusted. Conversely, a more positive reading is to recognise it as evidence of a growing maturity in 'Christian competence' of the Irish laity in 'the area of the secular'.²⁸ The understanding that the Church possesses too much power is often assessed by religious authorities as emanating directly from the exposure of people to 'various vaguely defined cultural trends' which act as counter-religious influences.²⁹ Such reasoning, in addition to its didactic value, has the added merit of deflecting attention from the possibility that ecclesial leadership itself may need to examine its own behaviour and attitudes.³⁰ Further, that this perception regarding Church power is shared by young people appears curious in that they have grown up in a culture that is clearly not dominated by Church.³¹ Moreover, they equally clearly have little trouble in disregarding Church teaching in relation to, for example, sexual ethics.³² In that regard, Anne Thurston holds that their perception is inextricably linked with the negative experience of Church leadership. They interpret this leadership as autocratic, authoritarian, and lacking in either transparency or accountability. The problem is therefore not with the power itself, but the manner in which it is used.³³

²⁷ Ibid, 585. See 'Advancement of the Liberal Agenda' .

²⁸ Liam G. Walsh, 'Taking the Measure of the Spirit', 623.

²⁹ Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', 586: outlined as 'consumerism, secularism, materialism, capitalism, humanism, pan-sexualism'.

³⁰ Ibid.

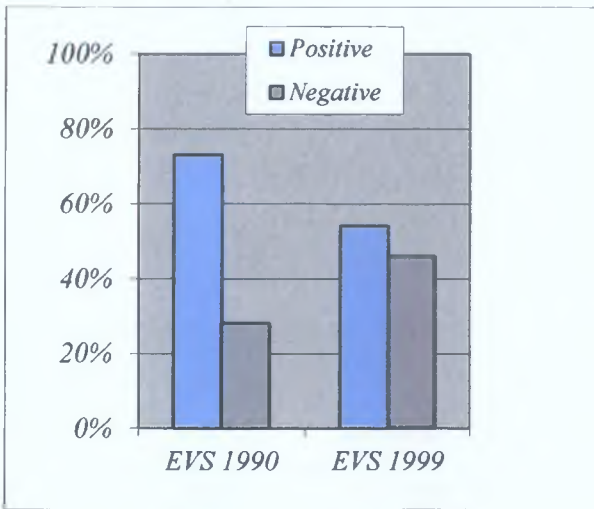
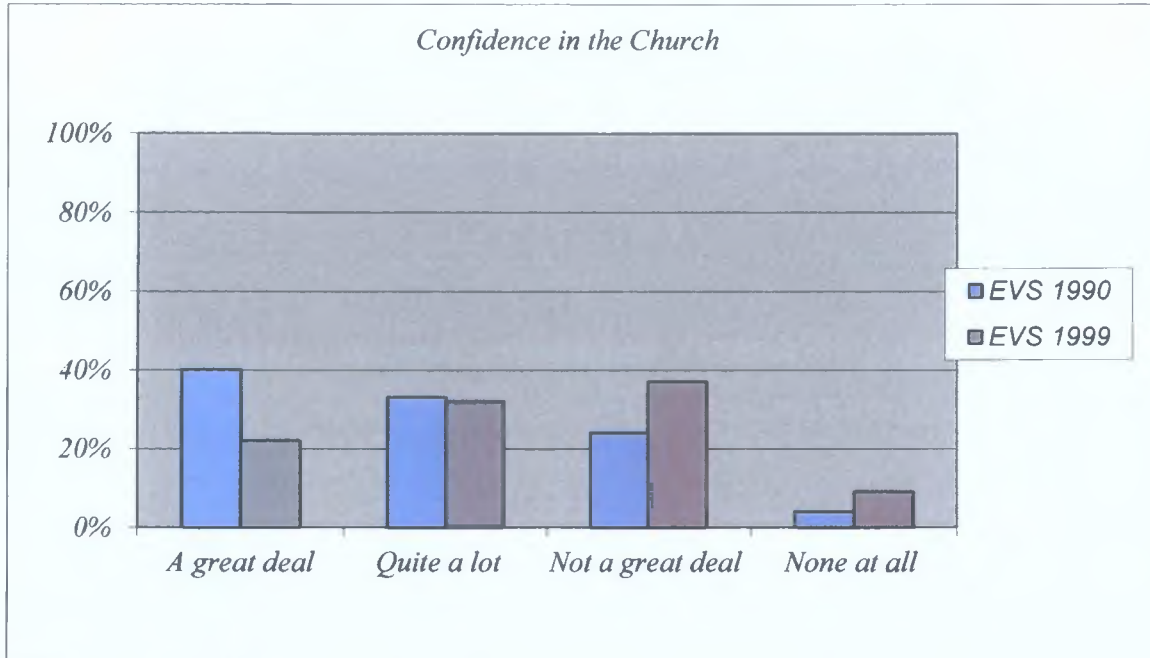
³¹ Anne Thurston, 'A Not So Secular City', in *Doctrine and Life*, 50/10 (2000), 629-639 at 633.

³² Cf. Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', 586.

³³ Anne Thurston, 'A Not So Secular City', 634: That is, it represents something more than a residual inheritance or an habitual postmodern suspicion of institutions (Ibid, 633).

Confidence in the 'Institutional' Church

Table 6



Taking the sum of the two highest (positive) options offered and comparing them against the sum of the two lowest (negative) options available the reversal in Church confidence levels is starkly illustrated.

This decline in those who register confidence in the Church is replicated in the EVS survey (1999) which offers a specific reading in that regard. It outlines that over the course of the decade a realignment of confidence levels saw a decline by 19 per cent in those professing a positive outlook on the Church (73% to 54%),³⁴ and a corresponding increase in those declaring a negative perception (28% to 46%).³⁵ However, an anticipated level of decline, given that the Church had 'taken quite a battering' in the aftermath of the succession of

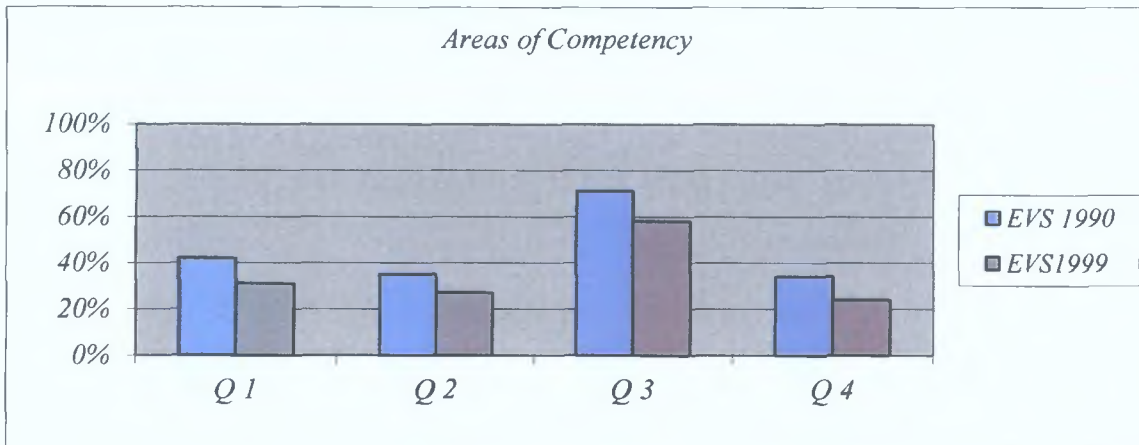
³⁴ Those who register 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence.

³⁵ Those who register levels of confidence as 'Not a great deal' or 'None at all'.

clerical scandals proved substantially unfounded, reflected in the fact that the levels of confidence registered compares favourably against relevant domestic and international assessment.³⁶

Confidence in declared 'Areas of Competency' by the Church³⁷

Table 7



Q1 To the moral problems and the needs of the individual

Q2 To the problems of family life

Q3 To peoples spiritual needs

Q4 To the social problems facing the country

Further analysis, drawing on 'one of the most valuable barometers of confidence'³⁸ namely, specific areas where the Church would claim a competency, confirms and informs the pattern of decline. It demonstrates that only in the area of spiritual guidance (at 58%) do levels of confidence in Church competency register higher than thirty-five per cent, and that the trend in all categories measured is downward.

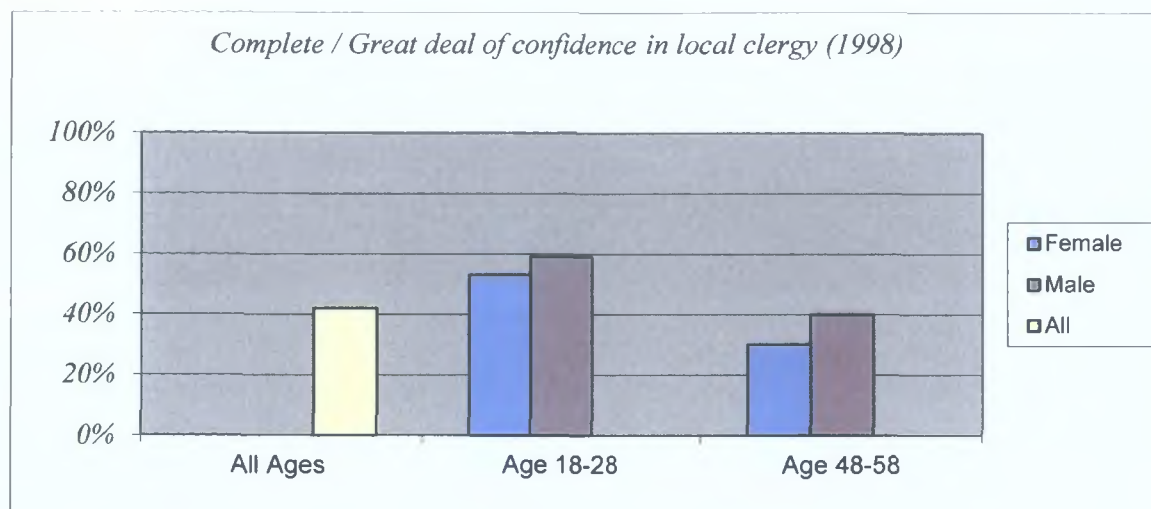
³⁶ See Tony Fahey, 'Is Atheism Increasing? Ireland and Europe Compared', 58.

³⁷ EVS 1999. Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 39.

³⁸ Ibid, 38.

Confidence in the Local Clergy of the Church

Table 8



Addressing responses regarding 'Attitudes towards the Church' Greeley and Ward elucidate their conclusions by revealing that 'so surprising was the finding that we recalculated it several times to make sure there were no mistakes'.³⁹ They are responding to figures which point to 'complete or a great deal of confidence' in local priests registering significantly higher (at 42%) than the comparable rate registered in the Church overall and in religious organisations (28%).⁴⁰ This suggests a negligible correlation for people between the evaluation of the Church as institution and the evaluation of local priests (and *vice versa*). Moreover, these findings indicate that the 'real strength of Irish Catholicism', the relationship of personal trust linking people with their priest, has not been significantly diminished by the experience of Church scandal, despite widespread and articulated disappointment with the nature of Church leadership.⁴¹ More striking in that regard was that the highest levels of such confidence were found in young adults (those born since 1970, at 57%) and those who could be their grandparents. Further, the single highest degree of confidence in this category is found among Irish women born since 1970.⁴² Greeley and Ward are animated that such 'chemistry' should exist between local clergy and the young adult community, and wonder

³⁹ Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', 591.

⁴⁰ Conor Ward, 'Intimations of Immorality: An Analysis of the ISSP 1998', 81.

⁴¹ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 65.

⁴² Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', 591, 612 (figure 17).

what it is that the designated priests are doing that is so effective.⁴³ Other commentators are more cautious in their interpretation.

For instance, Eoin Cassidy theorises that such a display of confidence is deeply rooted in the need of young people to find some antidote to the aggressive individualist and secularist doctrine to which they are constantly exposed. As such, reference to the communitarian dimension offered by the local parish (even if only a tenuous association) provides ‘anchor points’ that deepens their sense of purpose in life.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, such readings suggest a resistance to the extreme expression of individualist anthropology, and hence an openness to the core social character of Christian life.⁴⁵

Donal Harrington, proposes that the findings challenge a widely held impression that ‘the greatest pastoral problems concern the faith of younger adults’. Acknowledging it as a tribute to the positive dimension of young adult spirituality, he sees it also as a commentary on the ‘complacency’ of adult faith in the Irish Church, one that basks in a ‘culture of contentment’ while demonstrating neither interest nor understanding that anything should change.⁴⁶ He continues, to the extent that the call to mission impacts at all in this ‘older’ age-group, it revolves around the question ‘how can we bring them back?’ This indicates that, whatever the problems of the Church are, it ‘is them, not us’.⁴⁷ Not unrelated Anne Thurston outlines that the authentic Christian benchmark is not ‘chemistry’ but community, and concludes therefore that such findings point towards the privatising of religious experience.⁴⁸ The diversity in the findings relating to the youngest cohort (18-28), and those the sociologists may refer to as ‘in their middle years’ (48-58) is explained, Thurston argues, more by the indifferent absence of anti-clericalism in the younger group (intrinsic to the older grouping) than by any sense of religious commitment.⁴⁹ Substance to this argument is indicated by the ‘view from the class-room’, where teacher and analyst Orla O’Toole declares pointedly: ‘It has been my experience that few young people have any accurate idea of what it means to be

⁴³ Ibid, 592.

⁴⁴ Eoin G. Cassidy, ‘Modernity and Religion in Ireland’, 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 41.

⁴⁶ Donal Harrington, ‘Implications for Pastoral Planning’, 645.

⁴⁷ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal, (Volume 1): Reflecting on the Experience* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1997), 86. Moreover, reflecting specifically on the findings of the ISSP survey (1998), Harrington holds that the desire in the ‘adult’ Church to have the young people ‘come back’ indicates ‘little sense of how dissatisfied the younger people are with what they are being asked back to’ (‘Implications for Pastoral Planning’, 645-646).

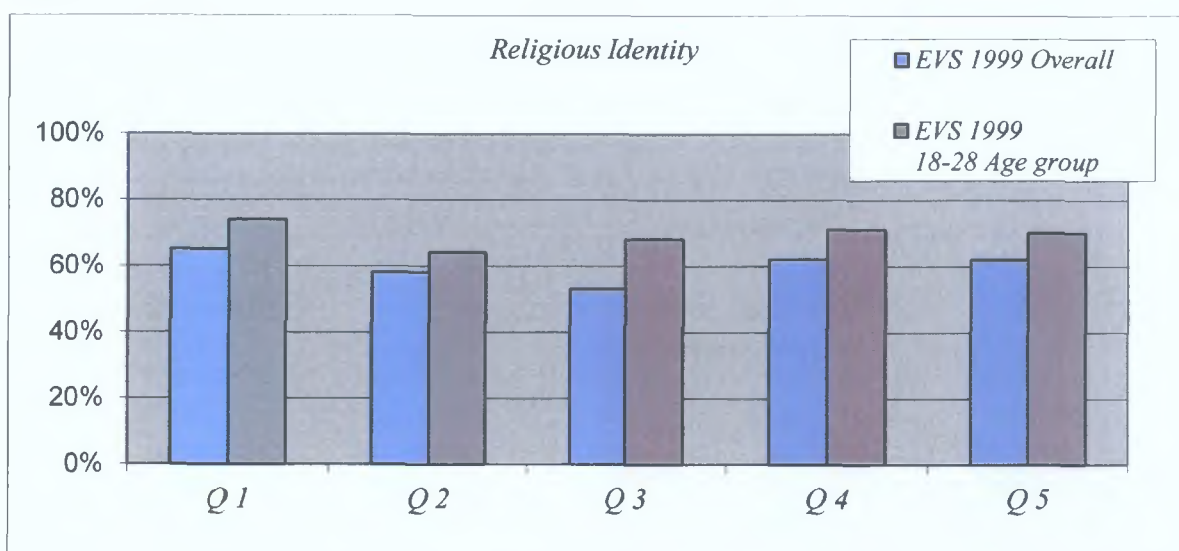
⁴⁸ Anne Thurston, ‘A Not So Secular City’, 633.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 629, 632.

a Catholic, what are the core Catholic teachings'.⁵⁰ A contrary viewpoint is offered by Liam Walsh who holds that, although canonically the Diocese is designated the 'local church', the relatively positive appreciation of the ministry of local presbyters demonstrates that, in effect, it is the parish which fulfils this role.⁵¹

*Religious Identity*⁵²

Table 9



Q1 Belief in 'Christ in the Eucharist'

Q2 Belief in 'having a Pope as head of the Church'

Q3 Belief in 'Mary, Mother of Jesus'

Q4 'Help for the poor'

Q5 Belief that 'God is with us in the Sacraments'

Measured on a visual analogue scale ranging from 'Not essential at all' to 'Absolutely essential' respondents were requested to outline their 'vision of what the Catholic faith is'.⁵³ In that regard, the most important components of Catholic religious identity (registering as 'absolutely essential'), were as recorded here (graph). The 'striking finding' is the scoring of

⁵⁰ Orla O'Toole, 'A View from the Class-room', 651.

⁵¹ Liam G. Walsh, 'Taking the Measure of the Spirit', 625.

⁵² Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" Is the Ireland We Live In', 592, 602 (Table 8), 24.

⁵³ Ibid, 599, 'Q. 19'

the youngest cohort, (the 18-28 age group), which consistently registered higher than all other age groups.⁵⁴ Based on these findings Greeley and Ward conclude:

If ‘sacramentality’, ‘community’, and ‘hierarchy’ are the essential components of the Irish Catholic heritage, then the Irish Catholics are surely an orthodox Catholic community and the younger are even more orthodox than the older.⁵⁵

Donal Harrington concurs, reflecting that, on the basis of the findings, in Ireland today ‘it is the younger adults who have the strongest and most orthodox sense of Catholic identity’.⁵⁶ However, while acknowledging the objective veracity of the survey, he outlines certain difficulties regarding the theological adequacy of the questionnaire in terms of pastoral analysis. In particular he notes the absence of any reference to the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, ‘even though catechists have been telling us for years that this is a core problematic in their work’.⁵⁷ Equally, he outlines similar deficiencies regarding questions on ‘a sense of belonging and commitment to Christian community’, as well as reference to the mark of that community being the orthopraxis of justice in addition to the orthodoxy of belief.⁵⁸ Similarly, Anne Thurston, registering a discomfiture with such conclusions, sees them as a rupture in the way of things, and indicates that they are unrepresentative.⁵⁹ As such, rhetorically wondering ‘What is going on here?’, she holds that it is ‘against the natural order’ for young people to be more conservative than their parents, but finds some resolution by hypothesising that ‘the parents of the 60s were too liberal and are paying the price’.⁶⁰

In particular, Greeley and Ward draw attention to the status that young adults accord ‘Mary the Mother of God’ as an essential aspect of Catholic religious identity and faith (68%, as against 53% of previous cohorts), seeing it as evidence that ‘the death of the Mary symbol in Ireland is patently premature’.⁶¹ Moreover, they infer that the presumption of intellectual or theological superiority among the ‘elite’ of the Irish Church militates against them

⁵⁴ Ibid, 592.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 592-593.

⁵⁶ Donal Harrington, ‘Implications for Pastoral Planning’, 642.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 643. Similarly, catechist Orla O’Toole maintains that young people’s understanding of specifically Christian doctrine may be ‘at best confused, and at worst non-existent’ (Orla O’Toole, ‘A View from the Classroom’, 652).

⁵⁸ Donal Harrington, ‘Implications for Pastoral Planning’, 643.

⁵⁹ Anne Thurston, ‘A Not So Secular City’, 630. It does not allow for analysis of Dublin/rest of Ireland divide, nor for a comparison of wealthy and deprived suburbs within Dublin.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 633. She further speculates that they are politically less active than their parents generation. Concisely, ‘they have a lot more disposable income and go clubbing rather than protesting’ (Ibid, 632).

⁶¹ Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, ‘How “Secularised” Is the Ireland We Live In’, 594. They also premise that such an assessment of Mary by younger people will ‘strike many as so impossible as to merit dismissal out of hand’ (ibid).

appreciating or relating to the symbolic power of the Marian cult.⁶² Again, Thurston sees it somewhat differently. Drawing on data from the survey which indicates a rise in the imaging of God as ‘Mother’, she hypothesises that a function of Mary is to attest to the feminine face of God.⁶³ It is a view supported by Séan Mac Réamoinn who, again like Thurston, postulates that it was more the objective formulation of the question than any particular subjective Marian devotion that illicited such a response.⁶⁴

2.2.2 Further Analysis

Beyond the scope of the international surveys analysed (ISSP and EVS), national surveys too continue to outline patterns regarding the position of the Catholic Church and faith within Irish society.

Thus, for instance, an analysis of a Prime Time/TNS MRBI poll of September 2003 showed that Catholics who attended Mass at least once a week had declined to 44%, with the greatest rate of decline, significantly, in rural areas. Fintan O’Toole interprets this as the crossing of a rubicon because, for the first time, ‘a detailed and respectable opinion survey’ showed that practising Catholics were now a minority in the Republic of Ireland.⁶⁵ Moreover, it was argued, a more involved reading of the poll makes the demise of the Catholic Church in Ireland clearly apparent. Reflecting on distinguishing features of Catholic identity, marking the church’s teachings from those of other Christian faiths, the poll shows that less than 25% agree with basic teachings such as the ban on artificial contraception, the belief that divorce is morally wrong, and the exclusion from the presbyterate those who are married and those who are women.

Further, it indicated that among Irish Catholics an extreme liberal position was more likely than those who profess orthodox conservatism. Thus, it is reported that 35% of Irish Catholics think that gay couples should be allowed to marry in a Catholic church, and 30%

⁶² Ibid. This concept draws support from Pat Collins who, locating Marian devotion in the sphere of popular piety, suggests that the ‘theological erudite’ are closed to the experiential core of such devotion on the basis that ‘they have the meaning, but miss the experience’ (See Pat Collins, *The Broken Image*, 116).

⁶³ Anne Thurston, ‘A Not So Secular City’, 635.

⁶⁴ Séan Mac Réamoinn, ‘Secularisation, not Secularism’, in *Doctrine and Life*, 50/10 (2000), 655-662 at 662. Indeed all five contributors asked to reflect on the findings of the survey as outlined by Greeley and Ward indicate difficulties with formation of the questions: cf. Liam Walsh (621), Anne Thurston (631), Donal Harrington (648), Orla O’Toole (652), Séan Mac Réamoinn (662).

⁶⁵ Fintan O’Toole, ‘Practicing Catholics a minority’, *The Irish Times*, 30th September, 2003.

think that abortion is not morally wrong. This compares to 20% who think that divorced couples should not be allowed to re-marry in a Catholic church, and a similar number who think that artificial contraception is morally wrong.

Moreover, combining the Prime Time poll with an *Irish Times* Youth Poll, O'Toole holds that, from the point of view of Catholic orthodoxy, things only get worse. It demonstrates the degree to which orthodox Catholicism depends on the older cohort of its members. This is on the basis that 55% of Irish people between 15 and 24 don't regard themselves as Mass-goers at all, a figure that reaches 70% in Dublin.

More positively, for Church adherents, the Prime Time poll indicated that Ireland is still a highly religious country. Most Catholics still pray at least once a week, and nearly three-quarters regard religion in general as very or fairly important in their lives. However, even such morsels of consolation harbour a worrying appendage. To the extent that there is a demand for the 'particular brand' (*sic.*) the Catholic Church has to offer, it is a demand that is patently not being met. Thus, drawing an analogy between the Irish Catholic Church and the experience of League of Ireland soccer clubs, O'Toole contends that 'the fact that there is a vast appetite for soccer in this country makes their failure to attract big crowds all the more stark'.⁶⁶

A response to Mr O'Tooles interpretation of the poll findings was issued by the *Catholic Communications Office* by way of a letter to *The Irish Times*.⁶⁷ There is value in reproducing the response verbatim.

Madam, - Fintan O'Toole inaccurately claims (Opinion, September 30th) that "practising Catholics are now a minority in the Republic of Ireland" because last week's Prime Time/TNS mrbi poll "showed that just 44 per cent of people who regard themselves as Catholics attend Mass at least once a week".

However, he fails to take into account the poll's findings that a further 6 per cent attend Mass daily, making a total of 50 per cent who attend Mass either daily or weekly, not to mention that a further 18 per cent also attend Mass regularly (5 per cent once a fortnight, 7 per cent every three to four weeks and 6 per cent every two to three months). Only 17 per cent say that they "rarely/never" attend Mass.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See 'Letters to the Editor', in the *Irish Times*, 3rd October, 2003.

Indeed, even the poll finding of 50 per cent for those who attend Mass at least weekly is out of line with most recent surveys (including the RCSI figure of 63 per cent reported in *The Irish Times* on November 6th, 2002) which consistently indicate a weekly practice rate of at least 60 per cent. In last week's survey from the Diocese of Killaloe, 96.6 per cent of respondents described themselves as practising Catholics, and 61.6 per cent as regular Mass-goers.

As Archbishop Dermot Clifford stated on Prime Time, no one in the Church should be either complacent or despondent about current trends. But is it not significant that over 240,000 people on this island (more than twice the current circulation of *The Irish Times*) now attend Mass daily, not to mention the 2 million-plus who attend weekly?

And with almost *nine out of ten* parents (87 per cent) preferring to have children raised in the faith, perhaps Ireland is not quite as "post-Catholic" as some would lead us to believe? - Yours, etc.,

Rev MARTIN CLARKE,
Director, Catholic Communications Office, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

Further assessment, drawing on national surveys, is offered by 'The Irish Association for cultural, economic and social relations'. Its report of 11 October 2003 is entitled 'Irish Religion: The Empirical Situation' and in that context it outlines developmental trends in Irish religious practice.

Thus, it traces patterns in the national census figures (Republic of Ireland) among those registering an option regarding religious identity. In accordance with other reports it records a discernable but not hugely significant decrease among those identifying with Catholicism as a lifestyle choice. Again, the rise in those identifying with no institutionalised religion is clearly evident and noteworthy.

Census Figures: Percentage

	1981	1991	2002	2002
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	92.50%	91.60%	88.40%	3,462,600
<i>Church of Ireland</i>	2.77%	2.53%	2.95%	115,600
<i>Presbyterian</i>	0.41%	0.37%	0.53%	20,600
<i>Methodist</i>	0.17%	0.14%	0.26%	10,000
<i>Others, no religion and not stated</i>	3.61%	5.40%	7.86%	307,860
<i>Total Population</i>	3,443,405	3,525,719	3,916,800	

Again, the report, by combining the 2001 Census Results for Northern Ireland and the 2002 Census Results for the Republic of Ireland, specifies the numbers registering as Roman Catholic in the twenty-six Irish dioceses, and offers comparisons with 1991 figures:

Census Figures: Numbers

	1991	2001	2002
<i>Northern Ireland</i>	605,639	678,462	
<i>Republic of Ireland</i>	3,228,327		3,462,606
<i>Total</i>	3,833,966	4,141,068	

2.3 THE CHALLENGE OF INDIFFERENCE (The 2009 Mac Gréil Report)

From the 1970s onwards, a central element in the statistical measuring of the place and status of Catholicism within the Irish context has been the contribution of Micheál Mac Gréil. Consistent with that, in 2009 he authored a significant and important addition to the profile of the Catholic Church in Ireland. This was a national survey which addressed religious practices and attitudes based on data collected in the period November 2007 to March 2008. In addition to evidencing the context of Catholicism at the end of the first decade of the new millenium, the large-scale quantitative nature of the survey allows for important areas of comparison with earlier sociological analysis.

In that regard, it shows the rate of ecclesial attachment, as defined by weekly attendance at Church, continuing to decline. Confirming the downward trend of the 1990s (from 85% to 63%),⁶⁸ by 2008 it had fallen to 42.1%.⁶⁹ Moreover, among those aged 18-25 years, the figure registered at 19.7%. Mac Gréil holds that, notwithstanding the variable nature of these years as a particular life-cycle transitional period, it does point to a deeper ‘cultural de-radicalisation’ of young people away from religious practice.⁷⁰ Related to the attendance at

⁶⁸ Cf. Appendix ‘A’, *Exposition of Survey Data*, Table 1, ‘Mass Attendance’, 339.

⁶⁹ Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference*, 12 (Table No. 3.2.).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 22. That is, ‘it would be expected that as this age cohort grows older it will bring its low Mass-attendance with it’.

Mass, the report addresses the propensity to receive Holy Communion. In line with figures relating to monthly Mass attendance a strong positive correlation between age and receiving Holy Communion is established:⁷¹

Holy Communion by Age

Age (years)	Monthly Mass Attendance	Monthly Holy Communion	Never Receive Holy Communion
18-25	30.9%	24.5%	26.6%
26-40	41.2%	29.9%	21.2%
41-55	58.7%	41.3%	14.8%
56-70	79.1%	66.4%	10.6%
71 +	91.0%	84.1%	4.5%
Number	498	390	150

Interpreting these figures, and referencing the failure to receive Holy Communion as a state of spiritual deprivation,⁷² Mac Gréil identifies the one-in-four (26.6%) of young adults who never participate in sacramental communion as ‘an enormous challenge to pastoral leaders in the Church’.⁷³ Again, naming as one of the most ‘traumatic’ findings of the report Fr Mac Gréil reflects on the decrease in the frequency of sacramental confession.⁷⁴ One third (32.9%) of respondents stated that they never went to confession,⁷⁵ a figure that rises to nearly half of 18-40 year olds.⁷⁶ Moreover, it is logical to interpret this response among this age cohort, as well as a substantial proportion beyond this group, as an abandonment of sacramental confession for life.⁷⁷

Beyond the boundaries of public worship as an indicator of engagement with religious belief, Dr Mac Gréil references also the importance attached to the private manifestation of this belief in terms of a personal ‘closeness to God’.⁷⁸ While acknowledging that the capacity to measure this relationship is ultimately outside the remit of empirical research, he points to a tendency towards personal prayer as an important indicator in that regard. Thus, to the extent that subjective reference to the Godhead is defined by a commitment to personal prayer time, it becomes apparent that, *apropos* the benchmark of 1990, the rate of decline in the frequency

⁷¹ Ibid, 38.

⁷² Ibid, 37.

⁷³ Ibid, 38.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 45.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 155.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 47.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 56.

of personal prayer generically in Ireland presents as ‘a matter of serious concern’.⁷⁹ This is manifest in figures that show an adherence to pray ‘daily or more often’ has declined by a quarter (1989, 71%; 2008, 47%), while, correlatively, those who indicate ‘never’ in regard to personal prayer time has increased over that time by 18%.⁸⁰ Moreover, ‘rarely’ would one find such a ‘correlation as between age and frequency of prayer’.⁸¹

Personal Prayer by Age

Age (years)	Daily or more often	Never
18-25	23.4%	25.1%
26-40	34.2%	10.6%
41-55	45.8%	7.3%
56-70	72.7%	4.0%
71 +	90.7%	1.0%
Number	478	104

Interpreting these figures Mac Gréil holds that they point to a complex amalgam of factors:

- a) That a measure of the maturing process is an increase in our frequency of prayer;
- b) That they indicate the emergence of a generation of women and men who are moving away from the faith and practice of their parents and forbearers;
- c) That they represent a failure in the transmission of the basic tenets of the faith;
- d) That they point to the influence of the secularist media in the religious de-radicalisation of teenagers and young adults.

Corresponding to these findings, and evidencing the relational faith dynamic of the believer, respondents were surveyed as to their ‘Perceived Closeness to God’. An interesting (and revealing) aspect in this regard is the relatively small number (3.9%) of those who professed to have no belief in God.⁸² However, while this indicates that six of every seven respondents volunteered some level of ‘closeness to God’, when benchmarked against the 1990 levels, the degree of closeness expressed has declined.⁸³ This tends to support previous indications of a

⁷⁹ Ibid, 56.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 59. Cf. *Personal Prayer by Age* (Table No. 5.2).

⁸² Ibid, 69. Measured on the personal variable scale those aged over 70 years responding as not believing in God registered at 0.0% (ibid, 71).

⁸³ Ibid, 69. Comparing 1989 and 2008 findings those naming the relationship to God as ‘Extremely Close’ or ‘Somewhat Close’ reduced cumulatively by 12.1%, while, correspondingly, among those naming the relationship as ‘Not Very Close’ or ‘Not Close at All’, increased cumulatively by 9.8%.

move to a more vaguely structured classification of the term 'God', and thus a move away from a specific Catholic interpretation in that regard.

Perhaps the most telling of indicators regarding the status of religious affiliation, relative to the personal and communal identity with one's faith, is not found in the attachment to sacramental practice (or in times of personal prayer) but, rather, in the felt need to pass on that identity to the next generation. In that regard, Dr Mac Gréil posits the question regarding the handing on of one's religion: 'How important would you say it is for children to be brought up with the same religious views as their parents?'⁸⁴ Relative to the benchmarking year of 1990, the response to that question in 2008 reflects 'a fairly serious drop in the level of the people's identity with their religious affiliation'.⁸⁵ This reflects that, while two thirds of respondents (65.5%) attach a degree of importance to the handing on of religious views, this marks a substantial decrease (of 17.2%) since the corresponding question was asked in 1989.⁸⁶ Moreover, measured against findings from 1973 (when the question was first surveyed), the level of respondents recognising the task as 'very important' has more than halved (71% - 33%).⁸⁷ The most striking feature regarding the handing on of one's religious views is the proportion of respondents who opted to 'let them make up their own minds'. This marks a corresponding increase of a factor greater than five (1989, 4.4%; 2008, 23.65%).⁸⁸ Collectively, this points to a rise in the individualistic mindset, a weakening in the identity with the communal ethos, and a recognition of a new level of indifference towards religious affiliation.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference*, 84.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* See Table No. 6.2. 'The Importance of Children Being Brought up in the Same Religious Views as their Parents Since 1968.'

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

2.4 RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS

The *raison d' être* of sociology is to find out 'what people actually do, say, believe and value – as opposed to speculation or presumption'.⁹⁰ In that regard the information provided by the two series of international based surveys (ISSP, EVS), in addition to other contributors, offers important information on what is done, said, believed and valued by members of the Catholic Church in Ireland at the conclusion of 'The Scandal Decade of the '90s'.⁹¹ From that, it has been possible to extrapolate various trends in relation to the pathways undertaken by the Church in that decade.

Thus, it is noted that the experience of the sex abuse scandals has impacted negatively on the Church, particularly in relation to confidence levels. However, given that other institutions facing similar public scrutiny appeared to suffer proportionally less condemnation than the Church, and the fact that a pattern of decline in levels of confidence in the Church was discernable well before the scandals emerged, the contribution of other factors is indicated.⁹² Again, Cassidy holds, the increasingly pluralist and relativist moral circumstances of Western culture tends to condemn the Catholic moral ethic for its inherent lack of pragmatism, and, as such, marginalise its claim to moral authority.⁹³ Not unrelated, however, Tony Fahey holds that 'the presumed dominance of secularisation' in Ireland has been challenged to the extent that an alternative reading of trends in religious affiliation is both valid and apparent.⁹⁴ This reading interprets detachment from Church religion as relatively minor in number, holds that the vast majority of people continue to believe in God, still identify themselves with Church membership, and think it important to mark significant rites of passage religiously.

Similarly, drawing on the EVS survey of 1999, Fahey concludes that, despite an obvious decline in terms of participation in Church ritual, in the levels of confidence people are

⁹⁰ Tom Inglis, 'Searching for Truth, Revealing Power, Hoping for Freedom', in Eoin G. Cassidy (ed.), *Measuring Ireland*, 152-175 at 171.

⁹¹ Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, 'Morale in Church and Society', at 195.

⁹² Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 44. Cf. also Tom Inglis, *The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church*, 98, 256: In that regard, any analysis of a decline in religious affiliation, whether in terms of Mass attendance or ecclesial authority, must take into account that the cultural and political imperative of the 'long 19th century of Irish Catholicism' (a term used to describe the experience of the post-famine 'Cullenisation' of the Irish Catholic Church, and the position and influence of that model of Church, referring generically to the period 1850-1970s), has become essentially redundant. See further Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 43: Thus, what had traditionally acted as a key motivating factor in conventional religious Irish custom has become increasingly seen as anachronistic in nature and irrelevant in practice.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Tony Fahey, 'Is Atheism Increasing?', 47.

prepared to place in the Church, and a generic negativity surrounding institutional Catholicism stemming from the scandals of the 1990s, the survey demonstrates ‘a positive valuation of formal religious practice which shows remarkable durability’.⁹⁵ Others are more hesitant. For instance, Liam Walsh unequivocally announces the inherent paradox attached to the Church’s resistance to the advance of secularism, namely that it has acted as ‘one of the principal artisans of secular Irish society’.⁹⁶ His argument rests on the belief that historically the Irish Church depended on social patterns, by their very nature secular, to enforce its teaching and practice, a state of affairs that went unchallenged on the basis that it had ‘such a comfortable Christian shape’.⁹⁷ The reality that the social patterns today are being formed by forces beyond the influence of Church leaders has the capacity, depending on the operative mindset, to be interpreted as either a problem or an opportunity for the Church.⁹⁸

Further, Eoin Cassidy argues that the surveys do indeed indicate a growth of a secularist mindset within Irish society, as well as the embracing of standard liberal doctrines such as an individualist anthropology and pluralist approach to ethical interpretation.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, he suggests, the figures also offer resistance to an uncritical adoption of a universal expression of modernism, and, in that regard, indicate openness to a sense of the spiritual, to acceptance of traditional core Christian doctrines, and to the value of Christian ritual in the lives of Irish people.¹⁰⁰ Anne Thurston believes that the findings are somewhat inconsistent, but ultimately point to an inherent deficiency within Irish Catholicism, namely an absence in the levels of confidence, energy or imagination required to ‘carry the story forward’.¹⁰¹

Questions remain, however, surrounding the catechetical proficiency of believers, in that the drafting of the questions makes it difficult to establish whether people’s professed beliefs are in fact confessionally Christian, or simply generically religious.¹⁰² Evidence tends to support a degree of hesitancy. For instance, if the data relating to rates of practice and belief patterns indicate a resistance to secularising tendencies, the fact that twenty per cent of respondents

⁹⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁹⁶ Liam G. Walsh, ‘Taking the Measure of the Spirit’, 627.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 628.

⁹⁸ Ibid: Walsh argues that if the Church reacts as if its very existence depends on its ability to shape the societal social patterns then it has a ‘real problem’ – it has lost sight ‘of the distinctive, life-giving power that resides in the spiritual gifts of the members of Christ’s body’.

⁹⁹ Eoin G. Cassidy, ‘Modernity and Religion in Ireland’, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 41.

¹⁰¹ Anne Thurston, ‘A Not So Secular City’, 639.

¹⁰² Ibid, 621.

also believe in reincarnation indicates at least an increasingly vague understanding of God.¹⁰³ Further, on matters of conscience, particularly regarding matters of sexual ethics, the trends indicated a shift from the experience of obedience to the obedience of experience, again most pronounced in the youngest cohort – pointing towards the privatisation of religious practice and experience. Perhaps, however, Irish theologian James Mackey offers a greater degree of clarity when he points out that Mass is meant to be a ‘symbolic occasion for the presence of Jesus as life-giving Spirit, inspiring participants to take life as a gift and to share it in love and gratitude with others’.¹⁰⁴ Drawing on that, Desmond O’Donnell anticipates that ‘a survey to discover how many of us – priests and people – really believe this would be useful’.¹⁰⁵

Entering the debate regarding the influence exerted by a secularist incursion on Irish societal life, and offering perspective on the first decade of the third millennium, Micheal Mac Gréil too is hesitant to identify the ‘concrete situation of secularisation’ directly with the decline in religious practice.¹⁰⁶ This is not to deny, he holds, that Ireland has become more secular than it was – or to deny its impact on ‘the role of the family and the local community’ – but, rather, to interpret any weakening in Irish ecclesial life as informed by a more complex correlation of factors. Thus, throughout his report, Mac Gréil outlines particular attitudes, trends, and understandings which, cumulatively, point to the influence of these factors. In that regard, he speaks of ‘peer-pressure’,¹⁰⁷ ‘cultural de-radicalisation’,¹⁰⁸ ‘urbanisation’,¹⁰⁹ ‘a weakening of a sense of sin’ (indicative of a loss of faith),¹¹⁰ ‘deterioration in the spiritual formation or nourishment of the faithful’,¹¹¹ and ‘evidence of disinterest and apathy’.¹¹² He further questions ‘the role of education and the successful transmission of religious beliefs’,¹¹³ the challenge of ‘integrated religious pluralism’,¹¹⁴ and the unfreedom of many (13.7% of Catholics) to attend Sunday Eucharist due to work commitments.¹¹⁵ Moreover, critical to the findings was the universal application of criteria of designation in terms of

¹⁰³ See Eoin G. Cassidy, ‘Modernity and Religion in Ireland’, 22, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Desmond O’Donnell, ‘Faith is what really matters’, in *Reality*, January 2003.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference*, 173.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 155.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

eight specific variables: ‘age, gender, marital status, area of birth, place of rearing, region of residence, education and occupational status’.¹¹⁶

The involved nature of these ‘attitudes, trends, and understandings’ contribute to the overall context of the report. Thus, not unrelated, Archbishop Michael Neary, responding to the findings outlined by Dr, Mac Gréil, holds that they help elucidate reasonings behind what has been called the persistence of ‘believing without belonging’ type of secularisation attaching to Irish Catholicism.¹¹⁷ This, collectively, is the background against which the status of Catholic practice and identity in the Ireland of 2008, as named in the report, is measured.

Concluding his findings Micheal Mac Gréil acknowledges that they present as a major practical challenge to the Church. Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the research authored by him is found in the overarching title he applies to it. Referencing it as ‘a need for religious revival in Ireland’, he names the content of his findings as ‘The Challenge of Indifference’.¹¹⁸ To an extent, this suggests that it is not so much that people are staying away from the Church in Ireland, it is just that they are not coming. Whatever the reasoning behind such indifference, Mac Gréil holds that it tells us much about the nature of the problem of the Church in Ireland. He also names the dilemma inherent in the encounter with indifference – namely that it is more difficult to counteract than either outright hostility or opposition.¹¹⁹ In that context, he reflects accordingly: ‘The first challenge facing concerned persons in pastoral roles would be to find out the cause of the indifference’.¹²⁰ It is in that context that we move now to introduce an interpretative key to the reading of the contemporary event of Irish ecclesial life.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference*, 37. Moreover, see in this regard Abraham Maslow addressing the call of spiritual longing within the ‘hierarchy of needs’. That is, the understanding of how personal circumstances collectively issue in a freedom (or unfreedom) that attaches to our ability to seek fulfillment of those needs. On this see Gerald G. May, *Will & Spirit* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982), 91.

¹¹⁷ Archbishop Michael Neary, ‘Foreword’ in Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference*, vii-xi at viii.

¹¹⁸ Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference: A Need for Religious Revival in Ireland*, (National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2009).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 99.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

Chapter III

An Interpretive Key – 40 Days

3.1 A THEOLOGICAL READING – INTRODUCTION

The overview (in chapter two) of current trends in Irish Catholicism, and its relationship to and within Irish society, offers a background from which to undertake a broader analysis of the transformation that is ongoing within the Irish Church. The purpose of such analysis is to draw out the significance and the implications of this change from a theological perspective. In that light, Avery Dulles, in his representation of *Models of the Church*, provides a context out of which a reading of contemporary Irish Catholic experience might be benchmarked:

Sociologically, the Church is a fact of observation, accessible to persons who do not have faith. Theologically, the Church is a mystery of grace, not knowable independent of faith.¹

Based on that, the prejudice out of which secularist commentary reads the contemporary experience of Irish Catholicism allows familiarity with only a sociological reading related to the institutional model of Church. Consequently, a prevailing questioning of the Church's capacity to survive is pursued as relevant and imperative. However, the prejudice out of which faith based commentary reads the contemporary experience of the Irish church should render speculation on the terminal demise of the Church as an inaccurate prognosis 'for *Jesus is present, alive and at work in his Church*. He is in the Church and the Church is in him (cf. *Jn 15:1ff.; Gal 3:28; Eph 4:15-16; Acts 9:5*)'.² 'Indeed, Jesus Christ continues his presence and his work of salvation in the Church and by means of the Church (cf. *Col 1:24-27*)'.³ Thus:

By the power of the risen Lord, she [the Church] is given strength to overcome, in patience and in love, her sorrows and her difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without, so that she may reveal in the world, faithfully, however darkly, the mystery of her Lord until, in the consummation, it shall be manifested in full light.⁴

¹ Cf. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976), 115.

² John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 22.

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dominus Iesus*, 16.

⁴ Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, (1964), 8.

Accordingly, the issue is not whether the Church will survive but rather what form or image of Church is being called into prominence at this time in its history.⁵ This indicates that a particular theological reading of contemporary Irish church experience is called for, one that acts as an interpretive key to reading that experience. In that regard a representation of the paschal cycle outlined by Ronald Rolheiser is helpful.

In his model Rolheiser nominates five clear and distinct moments within the paschal cycle Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the 40 Days leading to the Ascension, the Ascension, Pentecost – and presents them as a single, organic process of transformation leading to new life and new spirit.⁶ Colloquially and sequentially he addresses them in terms of,

1. 'Name your deaths'
2. 'Claim your births'
3. 'Grieve what you have lost and adjust to the new reality'
4. 'Do not cling to the old, let it ascend and give you its blessing'
5. 'Accept the spirit of the life that you are in fact living'

In the broader context this echoes the thinking of Pope John Paul II who, having spoken of the cycle of the paschal mystery as the Holy Spirit's 'masterpiece',⁷ reflects that

The newness of God is already found in Jesus' Pasch. It is this which brings the Church to birth, inspires her life, and renews and transforms her history⁸

In that light, any reading which presents the current demise of the Church as a purely sociological and anthropological fact is, based on theological and ecclesiological evidence, only a partial reading. That is, if the Church in Ireland is now seen to be undergoing a crucifixion, it could be in order that it may rise again to new life. Moreover and specifically, it can be argued that an aspect of the paschal cycle to the fore at this time in the Irish Church

⁵ Cf. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 192: 'Under the leading of the Holy Spirit the images and forms of Christian life will continue to change, as they have in previous centuries'.

⁶ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), 139.

⁷ At the General Audience of Wednesday, June 10, 1998 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/1998].

⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 106.

is that represented by the 40 Days between Easter Sunday and Ascension Day, what Rolheiser talks of as 'a time of readjustment to the new and for grieving the old'.⁹

In that regard, the task for the Irish Church, as Rolheiser presents it, mirrors that faced by Mary of Magdala on that first Easter morning. Confronted with the temptation to cling to an old body even as she is looking at a new reality (cf. Jn 20:11-18),¹⁰ she was called to a transformation in perspective and orientation. Similarly, this thesis proposes that the Catholic Church in Ireland, in a way that is parallel to the Easter experience of Mary of Magdala as paradigmatic of the 40 Days encounter, can take precedence and perspective from that experience of encounter.

Specifically, it holds that the Irish Church too faces the temptation to cling to a reality that is no more, to an expression of Church that has died. Alternatively, drawing on the life cycle of the paschal mystery, it can recognise that while a particular expression of Church has died, a different expression of Church has been called to life. To do this, Rolheiser, addressing it expressly as the task of the 40 Days, outlines the parameters of the task:

Grieve what you have lost and adjust to the new reality.¹¹

Acknowledging and claiming new life is the issue of choice at hand. It is a choice not to be undertaken arbitrarily but demands fidelity to the spirit of pasch. This is because anything else acts as an impediment to the paschal cycle, to the experience of Ascension and Pentecost – that is, it acts to impede our ability to receive the Spirit of the expression of Church we are in fact already living.¹²

In that context, the current 'demise' of the Church acts as an implicit challenge to Irish Catholicism. This challenge, outlined succinctly, argues that the Church can react in either of two ways: 'It can follow the wretched precedent of circling the wagons and resentfully nursing its wounds, or it can recognise that here is a God-given opportunity to experience and speak of the deepest Christian truths with greater authenticity and effectiveness than it was

⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 139.

¹⁰ Ibid, 151. Cf. especially, v 17: 'Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father'.

¹¹ Ibid, 139.

¹² Ibid, 152.

able to do when it was unchallenged and confident'.¹³ The assumption must surely be that the latter is the authentic path, charts the way of Paschal Journey, and, as such, is a Gospel process.

Having referenced the specific paschal period of 40 Days, and introduced how that may resonate with contemporary Irish Catholicism, we move now to explore the 40 Days in their initial context, the life of the early church. This will serve as our key in any re-reading of the contemporary situation of the Irish Church.

3.2 THE POST RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

3.2.1 40 Days – Analysis

The consensus among scholars is that the origin of the use of the number 'forty' in scriptural terms is uncertain.¹⁴ What is certain, however, is that within biblical symbolism the number occupies a significant place. At the very least there are remarkable coincidences in the use of the number. The concept of '40' is encountered liberally and frequently in the Old Testament.¹⁵ In the New Testament, reference to the number 'forty' is dominated by two instances. Firstly, in the gospels it is exclusive to the synoptic writers, when it occurs in reference to the experience of the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:2; Mk 1:12; Lk 4:2). Secondly, it is found in the introductory comments of Acts (Ac 1:3). This latter reference marks the immediate context of the paschal dimension of the 40 days, covering the period linking the resurrection of Jesus from the dead until his Ascension into heaven. Authors agree that the intent of the 40 days here is not chronologically driven in that its purpose is not to date the ascension.

Gerhard A. Krodel points out that this 40 day period between Easter and the ascension is, apart from this verse (Ac 1:3), unknown in the New Testament and in early Christian

¹³ Gabriel Daly, 'Liberal Democracy, Crisis and the Christian Vision', 147-148.

¹⁴ Cf. For example: Richard J. Dillon and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'Acts of the Apostles', in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy, (eds.) *The Jerome Biblical Commentary II* (Geoffrey Chapman Ltd: London, 1968), 165-214 at 168; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987), 5; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Doubleday: New York, 1998), 202; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts* (Augsburg Publishing House. Minneapolis, 1986), 55.

¹⁵ For an outline of the use of 40 in the Old Testament see Appendix 'B', 'The use of 40 in the Old Testament', 345.

literature.¹⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson proposes that the period of 40 days, during which appearances took place, represents a distinctive Lukan contribution to the resurrection traditions.¹⁷ Hans Conzelmann regards the concept of the ‘40 Days’ as a round number for a vague interval and links it to the reference by Luke to Christ’s appearances ‘for many days’ in Acts 13:31.¹⁸ Richard Dillon argues that the 40 Days construct in Acts is a symbolic figure of Luke’s own fashioning, metaphorically acting as a form of validation in terms of the apostles commissioning as the representatives and witnesses of the risen Jesus.¹⁹ That is, the apostles’ teaching is shown to be authentic and authoritative because it was received in normative instruction from the risen One,²⁰ a thesis strengthened by the fact that the subject matter of the apostles’ instruction mirrors that of Jesus’ own preaching, and the defining theme of his earthly ministry, namely the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk. 4:43).²¹

The use of ‘forty’ makes its way only slowly into church tradition, not appearing again until Tertullian (*Apol.* 21.29) around A.D. 200, when the book of *Acts* had entered the canon:²²

He spent forty days with some of His disciples down in Galilee, a region of Judea, instructing them in the doctrines they were to teach to others. Thereafter, having given them commission to preach the gospel through the world, He was encompassed with a cloud and taken up to heaven²³

The apparent discrepancy relative to the chronology of the ascension used by Luke finds resolution in the particular context.²⁴ In that respect authors hold that pedantic accuracy was not the primary concern of Luke, but rather the ability to place a different emphasis in each of the accounts. In the first account (Lk 24), the ascension functions as the conclusion of the earthly ministry of Jesus, after which the disciples return to Jerusalem and spend their time in

¹⁶ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, 55.

¹⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992), 25. He outlines also how some apocryphal gospels expand this time of special revelation to the apostles even further; see, for example, the *Epistula Apostolorum*, *The Apocryphon of James* (550 days), and especially *Pistis Sophia* 1, “...after Jesus was raised from the dead, he spent eleven years discoursing with his disciples...” (ibid).

¹⁸ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 5.

¹⁹ Richard J. Dillon, ‘Acts of the Apostles’, 168.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 9:2, 11, 60, 62; 10:9, 11; 11:2, 20; 12:31-32; 13:18, 20, 28-29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20-21; 18:16-17, 24-25, 29; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16; 18’ 29-30; 23:42). The apostles will continue this proclamation (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

²² Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, 56. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 5.

²³ Cf. Tertullian, *The Apology* ch 21: Early Church Fathers: [accessed March 2011 at]

http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-05.htm#P253_53158

²⁴ The impression in Luke 24:50-51, where Jesus gives his farewell blessing and is lifted up into heaven, is that the ascension occurred on Easter Sunday in Bethany. The account outlined in Acts 1:1-11 indicates that the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples for forty days before his final ascension from the Mount of Olives.

the Temple praising God (Lk 24:50-53). In this way Luke places the context of the Jesus story within the promises made to God's chosen people. Thus, as the Gospel begins in the Temple with the people's hopes for a messianic deliverer (Lk 2:25-38), so it ends in the Temple with the disciples praising God for the messianic deliverance that has taken place in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.²⁵ Conversely, in Acts 1:9-11 the ascension functions as the precursor to the Spirit's coming upon the church, which remains forever dependent upon the apostolic resurrection witness. This witness is based on Jesus' appearances during the 40 days, and not just during one day or during an indefinite period of some years.²⁶

Both accounts bear witness to Luke's understanding of salvation history, namely that the ascension marks 'the end of the time of Jesus and signals the beginning of the time of the church'.²⁷ Given these introductory comments it is proposed to structure the parameters and outline of the analysis of the '40 Days' in their immediate context accordingly:

- i. An overview of the resurrection appearances during the 40 Days. This will include the drawing out of patterns of encounter (Section 3.2);
- ii. A systemic analysis of the initial post-resurrection encounter to establish possible linkage with a contemporary reading of that experience, including the context of contemporary Irish Catholicism (Section 3.3).

3.2.2 The Pauline Context

From an historical perspective a reasonable point of departure regarding the resurrection event is to agree that, following the death of Jesus 'something happened'.²⁸ In that regard a foundational text, and the earliest canonical testimony to the resurrection, is the 'tradition' referenced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8:

The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve; and next he appeared

²⁵ William S. Kurz, S.J., *Reading Luke-Acts* (Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993), 21.

²⁶ Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, 57.

²⁷ American Catholic Bishops: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts1.htm#foot2> [accessed March 2011].

²⁸ Cf. W Pannenberg, 'Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead', *Dialog* 4 (1965), 128-35. Quoted in David M. Stanley and Raymond E. Brown, 'Aspects of New Testament Thought', *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 768-799 at 792.

to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still with us, though some have fallen asleep; then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Last of all he appeared to me too, as though I was a child born abnormally.

The text makes two essential affirmations. Firstly, it demonstrates that there are a great many witnesses to the resurrection and accordingly, should the need arise, their accounts can still be verified. The purpose in that regard is not to 'prove' the resurrection but rather to refer to the chosen witnesses, among whom Paul counts himself.²⁹ Secondly, it demonstrates, even in this most ancient formula, that the death on the cross and the burial are intrinsically linked with the resurrection and the appearing of the Risen One in a single profession of faith.³⁰

In proclaiming here the certainty of the resurrection, Paul outlines both a credal formula adopted by the early church and a chronology of appearances by the risen Christ.³¹ The formula indicates influence and inspiration beyond the revelation granted to Paul on the road to Damascus and offers clear evidence of a dependence on an apostolic tradition developed by the early church.³² In that context, Paul's emphasis is not on the life of the historical Jesus but rather on the salvific effects of the passion, death and resurrection of the risen Jesus.³³ Thus it is that he outlines first this credal formula, namely, the fact that Jesus died, was buried, and was 'raised to life' (1 Cor 15:3b-4). As used here by Paul, the aphorism that Jesus was 'raised to life' is essentially indicative of a 'transition from one mode of existence into a new mode of existence'.³⁴ Therefore, this transition involves more than a mere revivification of a corpse in that the 'something' that happened involves more than a return to the ordinary mode of human and earthly existence, it involves a personal transformation. In other words, whereas New Testament accounts of the restoration to life, such as that of Lazarus, or Jairus' daughter, or the son of the widow of Nain, are descriptive of a returning to the ordinary mode of human existence, and therefore no suggestion that they were glorified or that they would not have to die again, the raising of Jesus from the dead is portrayed as an event that must be

²⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1990), 193. Cf. Acts 10:40-41, 'On the third day God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses that God had chosen beforehand.'

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (New York: Alba House, 1991), 23. The earliest formulations regarding the resurrection are found in the Pauline texts, of which 1 Cor 15:3-8 (written 25-30 years after the death of Jesus) is understood to be the most complete kerygma.

³² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'Pauline Theology', in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 800-827 at 804. See also Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1975), 46: probably catechetical or liturgical formulae drawn up in the very early life of the church.

³³ *Ibid.*, 804.

³⁴ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 47.

described metaphorically in terms of ‘change, difference, newness’.³⁵ Concisely, Jesus is portrayed as conquering death.³⁶

Paul places strong emphasis on this characteristically transforming nature of the resurrection: that what dies is perishable, weak, and mortal, and that what rises is imperishable, glorious, and immortal (1 Cor 15:42-43, 52-54). The premise that Jesus was ‘raised to life’ (1 Cor 15:4) is attested to by appeal to his post-resurrection appearances (1 Cor 15:5-8).³⁷ In appealing to the testimony of those who saw the Risen Christ, Paul locates the definitively trans-historical event of the resurrection within the historical dimension of human experience.³⁸ Thus, von Balthasar contends that ‘the forty days during which the risen Christ showed himself on earth belong both to his earthly time and to his eternal time’.³⁹ It is, moreover, a time when Christ’s interaction with his disciples continues in a way that demonstrates and renews for them the redemptive, loving, and intimate dynamic now characteristic of his presence.⁴⁰ In that context, the most faithful translation from the Greek account that ‘he appeared’ (*ôphthê*) is to say that ‘he was made manifest’.⁴¹ Exegetically this indicates both that the initiative for the appearances comes from Jesus, and that for those to whom he appeared a new revelatory experience of Jesus issued.⁴² It is in that context that we now consider the post-resurrection accounts regarding the appearances of Jesus.

3.2.3 The Gospel Context

Whereas in each of the four Gospels the presentation of the Passion Narrative is essentially and sequentially analogous, accounts relating to their presentation of the resurrection event suggest less in terms of overt cohesiveness and more in terms of variety and apparent inconsistency. Joseph Ratzinger sets parameters for the debate:

³⁵ Ibid, 48.

³⁶ David M. Stanley, Raymond E. Brown, ‘Aspects of New Testament Thought’, 791.

³⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 231.

³⁸ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 50.

³⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 83.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ibid.

⁴¹ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 48. Cf. also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 218: Von Balthasar interprets it as an action of Divine initiative whereby ‘the bridge of knowledge has been thrown across the subject-object divide’

⁴² Ibid, 48-49.

It is so difficult, indeed absolutely impossible, for the gospels to describe the encounter with the risen Christ; that is why they can only stammer when they speak of these meetings and seem to provide contradictory descriptions of them. In reality they are surprisingly unanimous in the dialectic of their statements, in the simultaneity of touching and not-touching, or recognizing and not-recognizing, of complete identity between the crucified and the risen Christ and complete transformation.⁴³

The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus can be divided into those addressing the appearances in Galilee (Mt 28; Jn 21; Mk 16:1-8), and those concerned with his appearances to the eleven in Jerusalem (Lk 24; Jn 20; Mk 16:9-20).⁴⁴ Neither of the two traditions shows any awareness of appearances in the other locale, and attempts at mutual harmonisation have proved essentially improbable. The more practical approach is to accept the discrepancies as inevitable and to focus on the overarching unifying factor common to all accounts: the critical experience that ‘Jesus of Nazareth is reported as having appeared to his disciples after his death’.⁴⁵

3.2.3.1 *Mt 28:1-10*

Mary of Magdala and the other Mary

The New Testament does not claim that anyone saw the resurrection and makes no attempt to describe it.⁴⁶ The evidence for the resurrection is therefore based on the post-resurrection appearances and the empty tomb, with the greater import given to accounts of the encounters with the risen Jesus.⁴⁷ In that regard, the women are commissioned by ‘an angel of the Lord’ both to witness to the vital fact that the tomb is empty, and to witness to the fact that Jesus is risen (Mt 28:6-7). This corresponds with the immediately preceding account regarding the request by the chief priests and the Pharisees to Pilate that a guard be placed at the tomb (Mt

⁴³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 235.

⁴⁴ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 50.

⁴⁶ See Raymond E. Brown, ‘Apocrypha; Dead Sea Scrolls; Other Jewish Literature’ in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* II, 535-560 at 546. A description is found however in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*. Strongly apologetic this description seeks to establish the fact of the resurrection by recording that it took place before the soldiers and the Jewish authorities. Contemporary generic interpretation of this text holds that it is an imaginary midrash based on gospel materials.

⁴⁷ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 55. See further Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2007), 613: Mullins observes that the women who saw Jesus crucified were the same the same women who saw him buried and discovered the empty tomb. He holds that their witness to the death burial and resurrection is most likely ‘the evangelists’ primary reason for referring to their presence at the crucifixion’.

27:62-66), an account that points to the belief among Jews and disciples that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb on the third day.⁴⁸

3.2.3.2 *Mt 28:16-20*

The eleven disciples

Through all the resurrection stories there runs the idea that those who saw Jesus did not recognise him (Lk 24:16, 37; Jn 20:25; Mk 16:11, 13, 14).⁴⁹ In this instance it is referenced by the fact that, although the generic impulse inspired by the very sight of Jesus was veneration, there were still some who ‘hesitated’ (Mt 28:17).

The encounter of the eleven disciples with Jesus is couched in terms of the experience of the early Church, and in that regard, the apostolic commission is central to their sense of identity:⁵⁰

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you (Mt 28:19).

This formula marks ‘an unusually clear presentation of what the apostolic church understood itself to be’.⁵¹ That is, the Church acts at the behest of and under the authority of the risen Jesus, an authority that is neither territorially or prejudicially restrictive but rather empowering of the Church’s mission to go to the ends of the earth in pursuit of its task to baptise and to teach (cf. Ac 1:8). Thus, it is the ‘great missionary command’, and it embodies the fulfilment of the promise made by Jesus during his earthly life, the fullness of apostolic authority.⁵² The call to Trinitarian baptism reflects more the liturgical usage established later by the primitive community, while the object of the teaching, ‘to observe all the commands I gave you’, echoes the Matthean understanding of Jesus, the ‘new Moses’, as the author of a new form of life.⁵³ The formulation of the passage makes clear that the apostles are

⁴⁸ John L. McKenzie, ‘The Gospel According to Matthew’, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 62-114 at 113.

⁴⁹ Carroll Stuhlmueller, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 115-164 at 162.

⁵⁰ Cf. John L. McKenzie, ‘The Gospel According to Matthew’, 113.

⁵¹ John L. McKenzie, ‘The Gospel According to Matthew’, 113

⁵² Michael Schmaus, *Dogma 4: The Church – its Origin and Structure* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972), 31.

⁵³ John L. McKenzie, ‘The Gospel According to Matthew’, 114.

commissioned by Jesus as ‘the empowered agents of the heavenly Father’,⁵⁴ a task that demands a continually renewed decision for Jesus who is with them ‘to the end of time’ (Mt 28:20).⁵⁵

3.2.3.3 *Lk 24:13-35*

Cleopas and one other

In the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and consistent with the pattern of resurrection encounter, it is Jesus who takes the initiative and enters into their world of darkness. He then accompanies them along the way and eventually they come to recognise him in the breaking of bread. Further, the culmination of the journey in community (Lk 24:33) and missioning (Lk 24:47ff.) establishes their journey as one steeped in Eucharistic and redemptive analogy. Von Balthasar nominates specifically this episode as crucial in demonstrating the fact that the risen Christ and the apostolic witnesses exist ‘contemporaneously in the same time’.⁵⁶ This is established by the colloquial presentation of sensory experience: walking, talking, seeing, hearing, encountering.⁵⁷

Unlike accounts depicting resurrection encounters with ‘the Eleven’ the two men are not presented as leaders of the community, but rather as representative of all followers of Jesus.⁵⁸ Accordingly their story, although ‘simple’ and ‘charming’,⁵⁹ offers important insight regarding the collective and individual ‘journey’ as set against the ultimate horizon of the divine mystery. In this way it recalls thematically the Lucan propensity to see the image of ‘journey’ as paradigmatic of the way of discipleship.⁶⁰

Contextually, the disclosure that the men were talking on their journey about ‘all that had happened’ (Lk 24:14) invites comparisons with the encounter experience of John 21. Thus, as the disciples in that encounter laboured fruitlessly because the Lord was not present (Jn 21:3), so the disciples on the way to Emmaus talked fruitlessly because they did not understand the

⁵⁴ Michael Schmaus, *The Church*, 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 84.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Carroll Stuhlmueller, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’, 162.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cf. Robert J. Karris, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’ in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 675-721 at 720. Particularly as enunciated on the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-19:27).

report of the resurrection by the women and the apostles. The inference is that they had abandoned the way of Jesus because he had not met their expectations (Lk 24:21).⁶¹ Against that, the movement from the hope-less despair of unbelief (Lk 24:17) to the hope-filled elation of belief (Lk 24:32) is rooted in a transformation that ‘sparkles with Lucan themes’.⁶² Foremost among these is the concept of ‘faith as seeing’.

Throughout his gospel Luke has juxtaposed the disposition of those ‘who have eyes but see nothing’ (Ps 115:5) with that of those who recognise God’s activity and presence in Jesus. Among the optically challenged are his disciples (Lk 9:45, 18:34),⁶³ Herod (Lk 23:8),⁶⁴ and the religious leaders (Lk 23:35).⁶⁵ This contrasts with the Gentile centurion who ‘saw what had taken place’ and, moved by the free gift of faith allowing recognition of the inner significance of Jesus’ actions, understands that ‘God’s mercy and power for the benefit of human beings occur in the death of a powerless individual, Jesus of Nazareth’.⁶⁶ It contrasts too with the fidelity of the women who ‘had accompanied him from Galilee and saw all this happen’ (Lk 23:49), a journey not merely geographical and physical but also discerning and faithful in the path of discipleship.⁶⁷

This theme of ‘faith in seeing’ is articulated by Luke as he reports how the risen Christ opens the eyes of the two disciples on their journey in order that they could see his true meaning in God’s plan, a vision made possible in the light of hospitality given to the stranger (Lk 24:23-

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Carroll Stuhlmueller, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’, 142: pointing to the necessity of the gift of the Spirit (ibid, 130), Stuhlmueller reads the disciples imperceptiveness as a ‘delicate’ indication of ‘providential design’.

⁶⁴ Robert J. Karris, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’, 718. In the single verse (Lk 23:8), Luke references ‘seeing’ three times. The import is to situate the type of seeing that Herod brings to Jesus as against the type of seeing required for faith.

⁶⁵ Carroll Stuhlmueller, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’, 161. The religious rulers who at the foot of the cross ‘jeered at him’. The allusion here is to Ps 22:7 which describes the indiscriminate ridiculing of the one who suffers.

⁶⁶ Robert J. Karris, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’, 719. Cf. also 43:191 (ibid.). This is thematically reinforced by the reports of those who, inspired by what they see at the crucifixion, repent of their rejection of Jesus (Lk 23:48).

⁶⁷ A recurring theme in Luke is the understanding that Jesus’ ministry brings sight to the blind in fulfilment of God’s promises (e.g. 4:18, 7:22). In addition he cautions of the responsibility of inviting the blind to share the bounty of one’s table (14:13, 21). Especially this analogy is realised in the account of the persistence and faith of the blind man (18:35-43), in contrast with the obduracy of his apostles. Thus, Luke teaches that it is only the sight of faith which opens eyes to see who Jesus is and to follow him (Cf. Robert J. Karris, ‘The Gospel According to Luke’, 711). Further, Karris illustrates that the failure of disciples to see in faith may be an expression of Luke’s ‘suffering secret’: that is, the belief that it is only after Jesus’ resurrection and his gift of insight that the disciples are empowered to understand (cf. Ibid. 700). In that regard it is not unrelated to the concept of the ‘messianic secret’ in Mark, the understanding that Jesus is recognised in the darkness of the cross.

24, 31, 32, 35).⁶⁸ Further, it becomes apparent that on the journey a mere credal recitation of facts regarding Jesus (Lk 24:19-20),⁶⁹ even when complemented by validating experiential and evidential witness (Lk 24:22-24),⁷⁰ is not in itself sufficient for creating the sight of faith. There is the need 'to do one thing more' (Mk 10:21).

Regarding this 'one thing', Carol Stuhlmüller identifies the naming by Jesus of 'Moses', the 'prophets', and the 'scriptures' (Lk 24:27), as a direct reference to the entire Hebrew Bible,⁷¹ thus establishing Jesus' interpretation of his life as the fulfilment of all God's promises. It is an interpretation that demands a response (Lk 24:28). It is a response that the ever more enlightened disciples wish to pursue and thus 'they pressed him to stay with them' for 'it is nearly evening' (Lk 24:28).⁷² Authors caution against automatically interpreting the covenantal terminology used by Jesus (Lk 24:30)⁷³ as specifically and sacramentally Eucharistic, although the liturgical formula of such is irrefutable.⁷⁴ Rather, they refer to the Lucan focus on table fellowship, a conduit used by Luke as a sign of the presence of God's Kingdom in Jesus.⁷⁵ Moreover, read in the light of the pronouncement of Jesus at the Last

⁶⁸ Robert J. Karris, 'The Gospel According to Luke', 723.

⁶⁹ 'All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified.'

⁷⁰ 'Some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us that they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

⁷¹ Cf. Carroll Stuhlmüller, 'The Gospel According to Luke', 163. Stuhlmüller records that these references correlate exactly to the tripartite division of the Jewish Bible, namely the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

⁷² The analogy is common in Lucan, Johannine and Pauline texts – the contrast of darkness and light. (e.g. Lk 22:53, Jn 1:5, Rm 13:12). Moreover it is a task established as the mission of Christian witness: 'to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light' (Acts 26:18).

⁷³ 'While he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them.'

⁷⁴ Cf. Carroll Stuhlmüller, 'The Gospel According to Luke', 163: And was also absorbed into the story as it was retold at liturgical gatherings.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Robert J. Karris, 'The Gospel According to Luke', 723. The concept of table fellowship occupies an important position in the ministry of Jesus in emphasising what his kingdom message is about. In that context, meals in Luke's Gospel are always inclusive events: Jesus eat with sinners (5:30, 15:1-2) and the poor have a special place at table (14:13). Jesus indeed seeks out such opportunities and uses them as a means of liberation (e.g. Zacchaeus, 19:1-10). In the same way he takes the initiative and enters into a world of darkness and despair, and transforms it to one of hope and celebration as, (e.g., 24:13-35). A significant and important aspect of table fellowship for Luke is the stress on role reversal. Thus, at table Jesus demonstrates that a primary characteristic of leadership is the ability to serve (22:26-27). Again, in 7:36-50, he contrasts the attitude of love, humility and self-knowledge in the woman (the 'sinner') with the hypocrisy, pride, and blindness of the Pharisee. Furthermore those who take the places of honour at table are humiliated while the lowly are invited higher (14:7-11, cf. 1:52, 53). In a particular way the image of the banquet as specifically mediating the reign of God is demonstrated when Jesus states that 'many will come from East and West to sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom' (Mt 8:11). In this way Jesus brings us to a particular understanding of the nature of God – as the benevolent and loving Father (Abba) who calls all people to salvation and who never tires in this quest. Further, the 'Last Supper', recalling as it does the death and resurrection of Jesus as the

Supper, that he would not share food with his disciples until God's Kingdom came (Lk 22:16, 18), his actions indicate that God's kingdom has come,⁷⁶ and that the hospitality of Eucharist is now established as the centre of the spiritual life in that kingdom.⁷⁷ That the disciples recognise Jesus in the 'breaking of the bread' (Lk 24:35) is interpreted grammatically as the experience of a deeper form of revelation, one which negates the need for his 'miraculous appearance' on the basis that his presence is known in the celebration of Eucharist.⁷⁸

Further, the considered and affective reflection on that presence – 'did not our hearts burn within us' (Lk 24:32) – reveals and encapsulates the foundational paradox of Christian experience, a paradox that empowers the transformation of perceived failure into the freedom of certain victory. Moreover, grounded in an awareness of that victory, the Christian is empowered (like the two disciples) to continually recommit to the journey of Christian faith, to set out and return to Jerusalem (Lk 24:35).

3.2.3.4 *Jn 21*

Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, two more disciples

Hans Urs von Balthasar treats of this chapter as symbolically paradigmatic of the task and nature of the Church.⁷⁹ From the outset Peter is seen as the one who has the initiative, yet an initiative that remains fruitless until it dialogues with the Lord. Moreover, the initial encounter of the disciples with the Lord demands of them obedience to his counsel, even though they do not yet recognise his presence (Jn 21:4-7). Further, while the miracle of the catch of fish spurs the one named as closest in love to Jesus to recognise him (Jn 21:7), the precedence of action rests with the office of Peter (Jn 21:7b-8). There follows a litany of ecclesiological symbolism all of which are confirming of the Petrine ministry. Thus, the meeting of the Lord and Peter on the shore suggests the 'symbol of eternity',⁸⁰ while incorporated with that is the image of the other disciples coming to Jesus and Peter with their

founding event of the reign of God on earth, initiates in the Eucharist 'the Sacrament of the messianic banquet of the Reign of God' (Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 51).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Lk 22 'e'. See also Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 261: Brown speculates that the experience of the disciples at the breaking of the bread (in conjunction with the experience of other post-resurrectional meals) may well have been at the root of Christian belief in the presence of the risen Lord in the Eucharistic celebration.

⁷⁸ Carroll Stuhlmueller, 'The Gospel According to Luke', 163.

⁷⁹ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 259-261.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 259

‘catch’ (Jn 21:8). The significance, however, that it is Peter who ‘dragged the net ashore’ (Jn 21:11) symbolises his role as the overseer of apostolic endeavour.⁸¹

Bruce Vawter holds that the meal prepared by Jesus (Jn 21:9-14) recalls the Eucharistic allegory of the multiplication of the loaves in Jn 6:9 and by implication, therefore, the life-giving presence of the Spirit.⁸² Similarly, the thematic referencing to fishing (Jn 21 *passim*) holds overtones marking the central and core principles of the Church, namely those of mission, unity, and completion. Thus, for example, the directive issued by Jesus to ‘bring some of the fish’ (Jn 21:10) stresses the role of fishing as symbolic of the apostolic mission.⁸³ Jerome interpreted this catch of fish, numbering 153 in total (Jn 21:11), as equivalent to the ancient calculation of the total existing variety of fish, and symbolic, therefore, of both the universal nature of the Church’s mission and the successful completion of that mission.⁸⁴ Vawter draws a link connecting this interpretation to Jesus’ portrayal of the kingdom in the parable of the dragnet (Mt 13:47-50), namely ‘a haul of all kinds of fish’ (Mt 13:47) which, in due time, will see ‘the good ones’ separated from those ‘that are no use’ (Mt 13:48).⁸⁵ The implication of the unbroken net, despite the enormity of the catch (Jn 21:11), points to the underlying and fundamental unity of the Church, a unity that will ultimately survive and not be torn by schism.

A constant throughout Johannine theology, in agreement with broader New Testament custom, is the practice of ascribing to Peter the position of primacy in the apostolic Church.⁸⁶ The author of John 21 authenticates that practice and develops it by drawing Peter into the deeper reality and pastoral dimension of true discipleship, that the essence of discipleship is the relationship of love. Thus, through his encounter with the risen Jesus (Jn 21:15-22), Peter comes to understand that love must be established before he can be entrusted with his mission. In that regard, the threefold questioning begetting a threefold profession of love (Jn 21:15-17) culminates in Jesus conceding his own office of shepherd to Peter and the task of caring and ruling the flock in his name.⁸⁷

⁸¹ See *The New Jerusalem Bible*, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1985), Jn 21 ‘c’.

⁸² Bruce Vawter, ‘The Gospel According to John’, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 414-466 at 465.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Jn 21 ‘f’.

Further, the dialogue between Jesus and Peter concerning the position of the ‘beloved disciple’ (Jn 21:20-22) indicates the divergent role of discipleship within the apostolic Church.⁸⁸ Thus, the directive of Jesus to Peter to ‘Follow me’ (Jn 21:19) recalls his counsel to Peter after the washing of the feet (Jn 13:35),⁸⁹ but also links with the call experienced by the first disciples (Jn 1:35-51). In that context, the admonition of Jesus to Peter, ‘What does it matter to you’ (Jn 21:22), colloquially interprets as ‘look to your own calling’ and invites parallels with the experience of the same two disciples at the empty tomb on the Easter morning (Jn 20:3-10). In that instance, while John must defer to the precedence of Peter in entering the tomb, his proclamation of Easter faith – ‘he saw and he believed’ (Jn 20:8b) – is established before that of Peter. Thus, the role of Peter, as leader and shepherd, is contrasted with the role of the beloved disciple, as witness, and establishes a context from which the case for different and complimentary roles within the Church can be argued.⁹⁰

3.2.3.5 *Jn 20:11-18*

Mary of Magdala

The Johannine account of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to Mary of Magdala is typically Christologically centred and incorporates a thematically important soteriological focus. Authors have nominated these themes variously as, the meaning of the resurrection,⁹¹ the correlation of resurrection faith to intimacy with Jesus,⁹² the call to Christian witness,⁹³ and the conferring of identity on Christians as the sisters and brothers of the Risen One.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Cf. Bruce Vawter, ‘The Gospel According To John’, 466: The context is the reference to the martyrdom (by crucifixion) that Peter will face (a factual and historical event for the Christians for whom the gospel had been written). Thus, Peter’s question ‘What about him?’ (21) must refer only to the kind of death that the beloved disciple will face. Further, the context, by implication indicates that the ‘beloved disciple’ had recently died.

⁸⁹ Jn 13:35: Simon Peter said, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus replied, ‘Now you cannot follow me where I am going, but later you shall follow me.’

⁹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 258. Von Balthasar interprets this incident as an allegory on the relationship between the ‘Church of office’ (Peter) and the ‘Church of love’ (John). He observes that the two disciples run together (Jn 20:4) and, if the unfettered experience of love runs ahead to reach the tomb first, it cedes the title of hierarchical precedence to Peter by allowing him to enter first (Jn 20:6). There follows the entering of love to attain faith (Jn 20:8). Contextually, it demonstrates two facets of Church in ‘harmonious tension’, ‘the official function working for love’ and ‘love respectfully allowing first place to office’ (Ibid, 259). See also Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 523, n 8: Moloney references other dualistic interpretations pertaining to the relationship of Peter and the Beloved Disciple – Jewish Christianity and the Gentile Church (Bultmann); pastoral ministry and prophetic ministry (Kragerud); official Church and contemplative Church (Brodie).

⁹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 194, 250-251.

⁹² Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 359.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of St. John and the Johannine Epistles* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 94.

The episode communicates the journey into Christian faith, enunciating it as a journey from the darkness of grief to the joy of Easter. Concisely, Mary had to learn to relate to Jesus in a new and deeper way. In that regard, it is observed that neither her discourse with the angels at the empty tomb (Jn 20:12-13), or the sudden appearance of Jesus whom she mistakenly understands to be the gardener (Jn 20:14-15) is sufficient to bring Mary to Easter faith.⁹⁵ Rather it is in the calling of her name by Jesus that Mary recognises his presence (Jn 20:16).⁹⁶ This recalls the axiom of the Good Shepherd, whereby he calls his own by name and they know his voice (Jn 10:3-4). This voice recognition is evidenced in the response of Mary, 'Rabbuni!' (Jn 20:16), a variant of the more common title 'Rabbi'.⁹⁷ Caught up in 'the language of love',⁹⁸ Mary throws herself at the feet of Jesus to embrace him but, unlike the report in Matthew (cf. Mt 28:9), she is prevented from doing so by Jesus (Jn 20:17). Rather she receives her commission from him as the *apostola apostolorum*,⁹⁹ to report to 'the brothers' that, in the light of the resurrection and ascension, Jesus' Father becomes their Father (Jn 20:17b).¹⁰⁰

This change in emphasis von Balthasar rates as 'of the highest theological importance',¹⁰¹ because Jesus, 'not yet ascended to the father' (Jn 20:17) was understood therefore, in the context of the resurrection event, as being between death and life. Accordingly, to this

⁹⁵ Bruce Vawter, 'The Gospel According To John', 419. John routinely associates the enunciation of profound religious truth by Jesus being met with misunderstanding on the part of its recipients (3:4; 4:11; 6:52). It is a misunderstanding that Jesus then uses to draw his listeners into a deeper revelation of his message. It is a catechetical device that echoes with the experience of Mary in this instance.

⁹⁶ In this meeting Jesus asks Mary the same question asked by the angels, 'Woman, why are you weeping?', but immediately he focuses it further: 'Who are you looking for?' This question, the first recorded words of the risen Jesus says, echoes the very first thing he said at the beginning of the Gospel (1:38).

⁹⁷ A title that bears 'some approximation to Thomas' profession of faith' (Jn 20:28). See *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Jn 20, footnote 'e'. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 221, talks of it as 'a divine title'.

⁹⁸ Bruce Vawter, 'The Gospel According To John', 463.

⁹⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 359, n.66. It was a title ('Apostle to the apostles') ascribed to Mary Magdalene in the later church. It is significant that the message she is to deliver is not 'I have risen from the dead' but 'I am ascending to my Father' (Jn 20:17). Jesus focuses on himself only in relation to his Father. He had spoken of his going to the Father, both in his general teaching (Jn 7:33-36) and in the farewell discourse to his disciples (Jn 13:3; 14:2-4, 12, 28; 16:5, 10, 17, 28). The Father is his centre of reference, and to return to him is his greatest joy and therefore the joy of his disciples (Jn 14:28).

¹⁰⁰ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 359. See also Bruce Vawter, 'The Gospel According To John', 463. Vawter holds that Jesus here distinguishes the foundational relationship concerning the Father of Christ and the Father of Christians ('My Father and your Father'), for although they are the one and the same the Christian acquires her progenic identity through the Son who has it by right. This recalls the language of the Prologue where Jesus empowers those who believe in him to 'become children of God' (Jn 1:12). Further, this is the first time in the Gospel that Jesus refers to his disciples as his brothers (cf. Mt 12:50, Lk 8:21). This implies not only that Jesus has not put off his humanity in his resurrected state, but that he has inaugurated a new level of intimacy between himself and his disciples.

¹⁰¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 251.

resurrectio in fieri Mary must give her consent by ‘not holding back the Risen One’.¹⁰² This transformed relational dynamic marks a central principle of Johannine post-resurrection interpretation and, hence, his need to establish clarity around the concept of the ‘return’ of Jesus. Thus, he seeks to ground unequivocally the understanding that the post-crucifixion ‘return’ of Jesus is not to the disciples but to his place of exaltation with the Father.¹⁰³ Theologically, the place of ascension is manifestly correlated with the event of the resurrection. That is, marking the glorification of Jesus’ humanity in his Father’s presence, an occurrence experientially beyond the capacity of human consciousness, it is inseparably the completion of the resurrection.¹⁰⁴ For John, therefore, Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation, and return to heavenly glory with the Father are understood as part of one composite event.¹⁰⁵

Against that, von Balthasar holds that to reduce the testimonies to the Resurrection to a colloquial understanding of the word ‘appearances’ is to misinterpret them ‘in the grossest fashion’.¹⁰⁶ Given that Jesus has passed into an entirely different reality, a literal interpretation of his ‘appearances’ is to misunderstand the substance of resurrection faith. Rather, the appearances should be understood as ‘encounters’ with the living person of Jesus Christ, recognised in the unity of his identity with the ‘Crucified One’, and manifestly the Presence of the ‘definitively realised Word, as really and truly the completed Covenant between God and man’.¹⁰⁷ It is this relational dynamic that underpins Mary’s report to the disciples (Jn 20:18), thus recognising her as the first person in the Johannine texts publicly to proclaim Easter faith.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Ibid, 250.

¹⁰³ PHEME PERKINS, ‘The Gospel According to John’, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 942-985 at 983.

¹⁰⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of St. John and the Johannine Epistles*, 95. In that regard the Lucan account of the Lord’s ‘ascension’ after forty days (Ac 1:3, 9) represents no more than his visible departure from the world, and the effective conclusion to his post-resurrection appearances (ibid).

¹⁰⁵ PHEME PERKINS, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 983. See also von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 194: This concept addresses what von Balthasar terms ‘the meaning of the Resurrection’, a perspective he grounds in Pauline definition: ‘Christ has been raised from the dead, and will never die again. Death has no power over him anymore. For by dying, he is dead to sin once and for all, and now the life that he lives is life with God’ (Rom 6:9-10).

¹⁰⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 209.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Accordingly, the disciples’ encounters with Christ give witness ‘to the central event which unites heaven and earth’ (ibid 210).

¹⁰⁸ PHEME PERKINS, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 61: 233. She represents her role as emissary of the Encounter with ‘traditional resurrection language’, ‘I have seen the Lord’.

3.2.3.6 *Jn 20:19-23*

The disciples without Thomas

This episode is presented as the conclusion to the history of the exaltation of Christ.¹⁰⁹ Literally and metaphorically the portrayal of the place and mindset of the disciples prior to the appearance of Jesus to them in the ‘upper room’ is grounded in post-crucifixion context and expression. Thus, corresponding to the generically discernable pattern attached to the appearances, the disciples are shown as a group dispirited by events, paralysed by fear, and devoid of hope, all this on the day of Easter (Jn 20:19a). Again, typically, it is into this setting, and by his initiative, that the Risen One enters.¹¹⁰

The greeting follows.¹¹¹ Echoing his counsel of Jn 14:27 and Jn 16:33¹¹² Jesus extends the presence of his peace, the ‘shalom’ (Jn 20:19b). However, this common Jewish formula of greeting, when used in the person and language of the resurrected Christ, reveals a significance much deeper than mere salutation. Drawing on eschatological and messianic expectation¹¹³ it is an expression of ‘the harmony and communion with God’ marking the confirmation of covenantal relationship.¹¹⁴ In conjunction with his greeting Jesus shows the disciples his hands and side, establishing both his identity as the Crucified One and the fact that it is as the One who suffered that he presents himself.¹¹⁵ It is, moreover, proof for the disciples that the figure they see before them is the same Jesus of Nazareth they had followed and with whom they had lived before his Passion.¹¹⁶ This ‘proof’ that it is indeed the Risen Jesus that is among them brings ‘joy’ into the darkness of the disciples (Jn 20:20), thus fulfilling the prophecy of Jn 16:20.¹¹⁷ Further, this moment of recognition, always the

¹⁰⁹ Bruce Vawter, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 463.

¹¹⁰ See Robert Kysar, *John* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 303. Kysar contends that the emphasis is not on the fact that Jesus can pass through locked doors but rather that he comes to believers in the midst of their human condition.

¹¹¹ Cf. Five point pattern of encounter. See Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51-52.

¹¹² 14:27, ‘Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give’; 16:33, ‘I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me.’

¹¹³ See Bruce Vawter, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 454. In the Old Testament peace is closely associated with the blessing of God, especially the salvation to be brought by the Messiah. Bruce Vawter connects the ‘shalom’ of the Christ to the enthronement designation of Is 9:6, (‘Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace’).

¹¹⁴ See *ibid.* As established for instance in the concluding axiom of the triadic covenantal blessing: ‘May Yahweh bless you and keep you. May Yahweh let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May Yahweh show you his face and bring you peace’ (Nb 6:24-26). Moreover, it is this ‘spiritual tranquillity’ that Jesus brings, a gift that has no equal because Christ is the gift that he gives (*ibid.*). See also, Robert Kysar, *John*, 303: Kysar holds that ‘the wholeness and fulfilment of Christian life is summarized in this word’.

¹¹⁵ D. Moody Smith Jr., *John*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 379.

¹¹⁶ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 531.

¹¹⁷ Jn 16:20b, ‘Your sorrow will turn to joy’.

climactic point within the recurring pattern in the appearance tradition,¹¹⁸ in evoking such joy in the disciples, manifests also their redemption from the ‘fear’ that had controlled them (Jn 20:19).¹¹⁹

For the embryonic Church this identification of the Risen Jesus with the Crucified Jesus established the centrality of the resurrection as the *sine qua non* of their continuing fellowship with him, albeit transformed to a new level.¹²⁰ In that regard we are reminded that the appearance of Jesus to the disciples is concerned with more than the bringing of peace and the evocation of joy – it also issues in mission.¹²¹ In particular, the disciples are to be the witnesses of the news and the fruits of Jesus’ victory to the world. This is the basis for the second eirenic greeting (Jn 20:21), a reminder to the disciples that their call to witness is both sourced and informed in the peace of the risen Lord.¹²² It also marks the link to the commissioning of the disciples as witnesses (Jn 20:21-23).¹²³

Three points characterise the commissioning ceremony:¹²⁴ the commission is formal;¹²⁵ the commissioned are to preach repentance and forgive sins;¹²⁶ and the commission is confirmed by Jesus’ sending of the Holy Spirit.

While the sending of the Son by the Father is a common Johannine motif, the sending of the disciples by Jesus, although alluded to during his earthly ministry (cf. Jn 4:38; see also Jn 13:16, 20; *esp.* 17:18), concerns the time after his departure, and ‘now is the actual hour of the sending’.¹²⁷ Moreover, it remains the sending of the Son by the Father – the disciples

¹¹⁸ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52.

¹¹⁹ Recalling Jesus’ promise to the disciples in 16:22, ‘You are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy.’

¹²⁰ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John - Volume 3* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1982), 323.

¹²¹ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51-52: Lane outlines a 5 point pattern of encounter.

¹²² Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John*, 324.

¹²³ Robert Kysar, *John*, 304: a commissioning which for John refers to all believers. See also Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John*, 324: That John nowhere refers to the disciples present as ‘apostles’ in the specific sense indicates that they represent for him the entire body of believers.

¹²⁴ John J. Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus, Cycle A* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 71.

¹²⁵ Robert Kysar, *John*, 304. The sending is understood in terms of a Christological model: ‘As the Father sent me, so am I sending you’ (21).

¹²⁶ John J. Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus*: In general John speaks of ‘sin’ as the failure to believe in Jesus as the one sent by the Father. In this context however (vv 22-23) it refers to the task of bringing new members into the community, and thus echoes the instructions of Jesus in Mt 28:19 and Lk 24:47.

¹²⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John*, 324.

receive merely a share in the earthly continuation of the Son's work.¹²⁸ However, that the disciples are to be to the world what Jesus has been to the world (cf. Jn 13:20, 17:18),¹²⁹ means that they must share in the relationship of Jesus to and with the Father (cf. Jn 17:11b-16). It is a union made possible only through the presence of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 14:16f, 26; 15:26f).¹³⁰ Thus, the 'sending' is followed by the giving of the Spirit, externally symbolised by Jesus 'breathing on' the disciples and his verbal invocation that they 'receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn 20:22). Symbolically the 'breathing on' (literally 'blowing in') is an action that recalls Old Testament references to the conferring of life (Gen 2:7; Ez 37:9; Wis 15:11),¹³¹ and points therefore to a sharing in the life of the risen Christ who possesses the Spirit and now assigns it to his disciples. Moreover, the giving of the Holy Spirit was contingent on the 'glorification' of Jesus (Jn 7:39), upon his return to the Father (Jn 15:26, 16:7). The gifting of the Spirit is indicative that the ascension had now taken place.¹³²

Directly related to the bestowal of the Spirit is the power to forgive and retain sins.¹³³ It is a parallelism that recalls the authority conferred on the community of binding and loosing in Mt 18:18 (and on Peter, cf. Mt 16:19), thus indicating a strong Johannine link with the synoptic tradition.¹³⁴ Debate has focused on whether the power of forgiveness is concerned exclusively with the redemption of sins through baptism or if it allows for the forgiveness of

¹²⁸ Ibid. 'The fellowship of the disciples is to make him present in the world and to continue his ministry of salvation' (ibid).

¹²⁹ 13:20, 'Whoever welcomes the one I send, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me'; 17:18, 'As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.'

¹³⁰ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 531. Contextually also it recalls the words of the narrator in Jn 7:39, 'He [Jesus] was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified.'

¹³¹ Gen 2:7, 'Yahweh God shaped man from the soil of the ground and blew the breath of life into his nostrils, and man became a living being'; Ez 37:9, 'He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man. Say to the breath, The Lord Yahweh says this: Come from the four winds, breath; breath on these dead, so that they may come to life!"'; Wis 15:11, 'For he has misconceived the One who has modelled him, who breathed an active soul into him and inspired a living spirit'.

¹³² Bruce Vawter, 'The Gospel According to 464. See also Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John*, 325. See further Robert Kysar, *John*, 304: 'As such it is an action that fulfils the promise of the Spirit referenced throughout John's gospel, 1:33; 7:39; 16:7. See also Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 535: Discounting interpretation of Jn 19:30b ('bowing his head he gave up his spirit') as anything other than a euphemism for the death of Jesus, Moloney holds (with 'most scholars') that 20:22 is the sole Johannine reference to the gifting of the Spirit, and is analogous to the Lucan Pentecost. Indeed, in that regard Schnackenburg (ibid) nominates this 'Johannine Pentecost' as the 'definitive bestowal of the Spirit...[and, as such] this expression may and must be chosen'. Further, contradiction with the Lucan Pentecost (Ac 2:1-4) is not implied given that in New Testament authorship the primacy of 'historical mysteries' over and against 'chronologies and statistical circumstances' is always presumed (Bruce Vawter, 'The Gospel According to John', 464).

¹³³ Robert Kysar, *John*, 304.

¹³⁴ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John*, 326.

sins after baptism, and also whether the exercise of that power is granted only *ex officio* within the church or if it is an empowering of the whole community.¹³⁵ Broader interpretation allows for compatibility between the two positions. That is, the text may be interpreted as the basis for the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation,¹³⁶ and may also be seen to provide the generic understanding of Reconciliation as referencing a fundamental task of the Kingdom – the healing of wounds and of all forms of division.

The commissioning rite makes it clear that the mission of the church can only be understood in the light of the mission of Christ.¹³⁷ The relational dynamic concerning the Father and Son now images the relationship at the heart of the community of Jesus' disciples. Thus, as the sending of Jesus by God meant that to encounter the words, works, and person of Jesus was to encounter God himself (Jn 1:18; 14:9), so too the encounter with the apostolic mission of the church is an encounter not merely with a human institution but with Jesus the Son of God (Jn 13:20; 17:18). Thus it is that the ultimate sin for which one needs forgiveness is the rejection of Jesus (Jn 9:41; 15:22-24; 16:9). The disciples are to bear witness to Jesus (Jn 15:26-27), not merely by representing Him but by actually being the presence of Jesus through the Spirit. In this way they will be the agents of the Spirit's confrontation of the world (Jn 16:8-11), which is a continuation of Jesus' own confrontation.

Drawing together the different strands of this appearance event, Robert Kysar concludes that four results can be inferred:¹³⁸

- i. That the eschatological peace is given as a sign of the believers' life in 'the newly formed creation of God';
- ii. That a mission which grows out of a proper understanding of Christ is bestowed;
- iii. That a gift of authority and power for that mission is given, namely, the Holy Spirit;
- iv. That with the mission and authority comes the responsibility to bring about the divine will within humanity in the form of forgiveness.

¹³⁵ Ibid. See also PHEME PERKINS, 'The Gospel According to John', 984. Perkins interprets the text as the generic bestowal of 'this "power" of forgiveness' on believers who join the community as a result of the disciples mission.

¹³⁶ Cf. BRUCE VAWTER, 'The Gospel According to John', 464. Vawter unequivocally holds that 'Catholic tradition has rightly seen in this act the origin of the Sacrament of Penance'.

¹³⁷ ROBERT KYSAR, *John*, 304.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 305.

The consequence of these gifts and activity working in tandem is that ‘the risen Christ transforms fear into joy’.¹³⁹

3.2.3.7 *Jn 20:24-29*

The disciples with Thomas

The characteristic slowness in embracing Easter faith, paradigmatic of the appearance tradition, is reserved by John for the Lord’s appearance to Thomas (20:24-29). This episode, which marked the original culmination and conclusion to the Gospel of John, is premised in typically Johannine fashion – that the essence of discipleship is to witness to what has been seen, and to come to belief on the basis of that.¹⁴⁰ This is referenced, for example, in the summons to become a believer (Jn 20:27), in Thomas’ confession of faith (Jn 20:28), and the blessing on future believers (Jn 20:29).¹⁴¹ Against that, the tone of the encounter is set both by the other disciples reporting to Thomas what had happened, telling him that they had seen the resurrected Jesus, and the fact that Thomas does not believe on account of their testimony. Undoubtedly, part of their testimony referred to the wounds of Jesus (cf. Jn 20:20). This, however, was insufficient for Thomas: he did not just want to see the wounds, but to touch them. Even visual proof was not enough, he required tangible proof as well. Thomas, in fact, was being afforded the opportunity to be the first to believe without seeing. It was an opportunity that proved beyond him and, as such, Jesus, who had entered into the grief of Mary Magdala (Jn 20:11-18), and into the fear of the disciples (Jn 20:19-23), now enters into the doubt of Thomas (Jn 20:24-29).

Thus ‘eight days later’ (Jn 20:26) Jesus appears again to the disciples.¹⁴² The setting is broadly identical with the previous appearance, the only difference being that this time Thomas is present with the others.¹⁴³ Jesus, who is portrayed as knowing precisely what Thomas had said previously about what it would take to make him believe, now addresses him. Thomas is essentially reproached for demanding a sign before he will believe, and not

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Jn 1:32; 34; 41; 45.

¹⁴¹ PHEME PERKINS, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 984

¹⁴² The timeframe indicates that by John’s time Sunday (the day of resurrection) was established as the day of Christian assembly and ritual.

¹⁴³ Again, the disciples were gathered behind closed doors (26); Once more Jesus came and stood in their midst and offers his ‘shalom’ (26).

coming to faith on the basis of the witness and word of the other disciples (Jn 20:27).¹⁴⁴ This contrasts, for instance, with the approach of the ‘pagan’ royal official, who does not require a sign in order to believe that Jesus can cure his son (Jn 4:48-49). Further, it draws on the high priestly prayer of Jesus in consecrating ‘those who through their teaching will come to believe in me’. The encounter with Jesus, in the showing of his wounds and the exhortation to believe, brings Thomas to faith and he utters his famous resurrection kerygma, ‘My Lord and my God’.

Paradoxically, therefore, it is the self-proclaimed sceptic and ‘doubter’ who makes the most complete affirmation of Christ’s nature to be found in the Gospel. Indeed, he is the one who utters the highest Christological confession in all the Gospels.¹⁴⁵ Significantly Jesus does not reject or modify Thomas’ confession, but rather grounds it as the reference point of future disciples who would believe without the benefit of seeing. In that regard, the concluding benediction (Jn 20:29b) demonstrates that the status of faith embraced by ‘those who have not seen and yet believe’ is not different from that of the first disciples.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, and importantly, the episode with Thomas illustrates that, significant as the resurrection appearances are for the testimony of the early Church, it is the Word itself, the Gospel, which grounds the power of evangelisation in the bringing of non-believers to faith.¹⁴⁷ In the testimony of the convert Paul, ‘it was God’s own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the Gospel’ (1 Cor 1:21).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ PHEME PERKINS, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 984.

¹⁴⁵ RAYMOND E. BROWN, ‘An Introduction to the New Testament’, 360. See also PHEME PERKINS, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 984, regarding comparison with other Johannine titles: ‘Son of God’ (1:49); Saviour of the world’ (4:42); ‘The Holy One of God’ (6:69); ‘The Christ, the Son of God’ (11:27); ‘The one who came from God’. In addition John opens his Gospel with many other titles for Jesus: ‘the Lamb of God’ (1:29, 35); ‘Rabbi’ (1:38); ‘Messiah’ (1:41); ‘the King of Israel’ (1:49); ‘the Son of Man’ (1:51). The acclamation of Thomas was to become the common Christian confession regarding the Christ (e.g. Acts 2:36; Tt 2:13; Heb 1:8f.). Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ PHEME PERKINS, ‘The Gospel According to John’, 984. See also DERMOT LANE, *Christ at the Centre*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1990), 90-94: Lane holds that the original and foundational experiences, given testimony in the resurrection kerygmata and narratives, are ‘unique and unrepeatable’ (92) and *de facto* exclusive to the witness of the first disciples. Concurrently, however, drawing on the thought of Karl Rahner, Lane further holds that ‘we must insist on some continuity between the experiences of the first disciples and our experience of Jesus today’ (92). This continuity he grounds in ‘our primordial experience of hope’, and ‘our experience of the Spirit of the risen Christ today in the Christian community’ (92).

¹⁴⁷ RAYMOND E. BROWN, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 360.

¹⁴⁸ The product of such folly is outlined: ‘You have not seen him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described; and you are sure of the goal of your faith, that is, the salvation of your souls’ (1 Pet 1:8-9).

3.2.3.8 *Mk 16:9-20*

Mary of Magdala, two disciples, the Eleven

The consensus of opinion is that the appearance tradition in Mark (16:9-20) represents the appended work of a later author.¹⁴⁹ As such it is an addition designed to counter the imperfect cadence effect of the original ending (Mk 16:8), whereby the witnesses to the empty tomb, despite the directives of the 'angel', (Mk 16:4-7) 'said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (Mk 16:8). Composed originally as a catechetical summary of post-resurrection events,¹⁵⁰ the Markan appendix draws its inspiration from the resurrection appearances found in the other gospels.¹⁵¹ Thus, definite parallels can be established between the references to the appearances in Mark and their accounts as outlined elsewhere.¹⁵²

A major theme of the text, in line with the generic pattern pertaining to post-resurrection appearances, is the slowness to believe shown by the eleven (cf. 16:11, the report of the appearance by Mary of Magdala; 16:13, the report of the appearance by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus). When Jesus makes his appearance to the eleven themselves he reproaches them 'severely' for their 'incredulity and obstinacy' (16:14).¹⁵³ This stress on the disciples' slowness to believe points to a lack of faith and a hardness of heart on their part and parallels the experience of Thomas (Jn 20:24-29). The directive of Jesus to 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation' (16:16), demonstrates the universality of the disciples' mission. Furthermore, the importance of believing is emphasised, and the response to belief, the reception of baptism, is once more stressed (Mk 16:17).¹⁵⁴ Further, the signs 'associated with believers' (Mk 17-18) are those recorded in the Synoptics and Acts.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 148. Cf. Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991), 382: It is probable that this section (9-20) was added to Mark some considerable time after the gospel was written, probably in the second century.

¹⁵⁰ Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989), 433.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Wilfrid Harrington O.P., *Mark* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 245: Marks' gospel was written for a community where knowledge of the appearances of the Lord had long since been established.

¹⁵² For example regarding the appearance to Mary Magdalene (16:9-11) see Lk 24:10-11, Jn 20:14-18; regarding the appearance to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (16:12-13) see Lk 24:13-35; regarding the commission to the eleven remaining apostles to proclaim the gospel to 'all creation' (16:14-18) see Mt 28:16-20, Lk 24:36-49, Jn 20:26-29; regarding the ascension of Jesus (16:19-20) see Lk 24:50-51, Acts 1:9-11.

¹⁵³ See Wilfrid Harrington, *Mark*, 250.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Mt 28:19.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Mk 3:15, the power to drive out devils; Acts 2:3-4, the power to speak in different languages; Lk 10:19, the power to tread down serpents and scorpions; Mk 6:13, the power of the twelve who 'cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them. The only new feature is the drinking of deadly poison without harm.

A brief summary of the ascension (19) echoes the kerygmatic language of New Testament confession of faith in Jesus as Lord. That it is followed immediately by reference to the praxis of apostolic witness indicates, moreover, a period of missionary activity. Again, suggesting comparisons with the ‘fruitless’ activity of the disciples in Jn 21:13 and Lk 24:14, 21, fruitless because of the exclusion of reference to the resurrected Christ, the evangelical labours of the disciples are seen to be successful because the Lord Jesus himself cooperates with his witnesses in their preaching of the gospel (20).

3.2.4 The Context in Acts

Joseph Fitzmyer, drawing on the account in Acts, reflects on the appearances by Jesus and on his instruction during the 40 Days. In that regard the hermeneutical scriptural key is Acts 1:3. Referencing this text, and the subsequent verses (4-8), Fitzmyer argues that for Jesus these instructions represent his ‘last will and testament to his chosen followers’.¹⁵⁶ As such, they deal with four things:

- i. The kingdom of God (v 3)
- ii. The command that the apostles not depart from Jerusalem (v 4a)
- iii. The explanation of “the promise” of the Father (v 4b-5)
- iv. The commission of the apostles as his witnesses (v 8)

The kingdom of God (Ac 1:3)

He had shown himself to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God.

The essence of the message of Jesus is found in what he chose to say and in what he chose to do. It is a balance of proclamation and challenge that are encapsulated in the inaugural comments of his mission: ‘The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel’ (Mk 1:15. Mt 4:17; cf. Lk 4:43). Against that, the proclamation (who Jesus is) holds that the power and presence of God is about to become manifest in the world ‘in a way that will establish the absolute kingship and lordship of God.’¹⁵⁷ The challenge (response to Jesus)

¹⁵⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Doubleday: New York, 1998), 199.

¹⁵⁷ Dermot A. Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 19.

is for his hearers ‘to accept that their experience of the here and now is an experience of grace’.¹⁵⁸ This gives rise to the consensus among informed opinion that the controlling motivation of the mission and ministry of Jesus, the centre of his teaching and preaching, is the single guiding principle – the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.¹⁵⁹ In that context, Karl Rahner makes the observation that ‘Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, not himself’,¹⁶⁰ an argument elucidated by Jon Sobrino who reflects that ‘the topic of Jesus’ preaching was not himself nor was it just God; it was God in relation to the world.’¹⁶¹

The effect of Acts 1:3 is to show that the ‘Kingdom’ is to continue to be the theme of the witness of followers of Jesus, although there will inevitably be new elements for ‘Christ not only proclaimed the kingdom, but in him the kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled.’¹⁶² In that regard it is apparent that the substantive issue is the kingdom and not the resurrection.¹⁶³

The command that the apostles not depart from Jerusalem (Ac 1:4a)

While at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem.

The command to remain in Jerusalem sets forth Luke’s idea about the church. Here he links the beginning of Acts to the end of his Gospel thus demonstrating how ‘Jerusalem represents the continuity between Israel and the Church’.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, it establishes continuity between the mission of Jesus and the work of the Church: in his Gospel Luke never presents Jesus at work among Gentiles – that was to be the undertaking of the Church.¹⁶⁵ Reflecting this parallelism, Jerusalem is the city from which testimony must be carried by witnesses and from which the word that they will carry must go forth. Further, ultimately the Church, as the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 20.

¹⁵⁹ John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc, 1993), 4.

¹⁶⁰ K. Rahner and W. Thüssing, ‘Christologie systematisch und exegetisch’ in John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 4.

¹⁶¹ Jon Sobrino, ‘Jesús el Reino de Dios significado y objetivos últimos de su vida’, in John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 4.

¹⁶² John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio, On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate* (Vatican Press, 1990), 18.

¹⁶³ Andrew M. Greeley, *The Jesus Myth* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1971), 183. Further, the resurrection is the ‘supreme vindication’ of the kingdom, and the promise that ‘the kingdom will be fulfilled for all of us’ (ibid).

¹⁶⁴ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 163.

body of Christ, 'will be revealed as the new Jerusalem: this is its destiny, and each of us makes a particular contribution to it'.¹⁶⁶

The explanation of "the promise" of the Father (Ac 1:4b-5)

But to wait there for what the Father had promised. "It is", he had said, "what you have heard me speak about: John baptised with water but, not many days from now, you are going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

Related to 'the promise' of Luke 24:49,¹⁶⁷ the Spirit will be the power given to disciples, the dynamic principle of their existence as Christians and of their role as witnesses.¹⁶⁸ Thus it is that 'Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit'.¹⁶⁹ This third instruction clarifies how the apostles are to be 'clothed with the power from on high' (Lk 24:49): The baptism they are to receive will not be a water baptism such as John the Baptist administered, but the one that he also announced: 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, who is more powerful than me...he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Luke 3:16). This more powerful baptism is applied not just to the earthly Jesus of Nazareth, but the risen Christ, who now makes known Spirit baptism.¹⁷⁰ In this way the Acts of the Apostles is presented as the continuation of the Lucan Gospel, not in the sense that it relates what Jesus continued to do, but how his followers carried out his commission under the guidance of his Spirit.¹⁷¹ The Spirit thus becomes the dynamic principle of Acts in that, essentially, it is the Power behind all that the witnesses will do or proclaim.¹⁷²

The commission of the apostles as his witnesses (Ac 1:8)

You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end.

This instruction Fitzmyer holds as the most important, because it not only relates the Spirit to the power to be received, but also explains the commission that Christ gives to the apostles –

¹⁶⁶ Anthony Philpot, 'The Church will rise again', in *The Tablet*, 3rd October 1998 .

¹⁶⁷ Lk 24:49: 'And now I am sending upon you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.'

¹⁶⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 200.

¹⁶⁹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 75.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 200.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Mark Allan Powell, *What are they saying about Acts?* (Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, N.J.), 63.

¹⁷² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 200.

that they are to be witnesses of him as risen.¹⁷³ Further, it is argued that Acts is a book about mission and, in that regard 'It is not unfair to take 1:8 as a summary of its contents'.¹⁷⁴

This statement of commissioning sums up the main theme of Acts: the apostles are to give testimony to all people about what Jesus had 'done and taught' (Ac 1:1). It reflects the commissioning in Luke's first volume: 'In his name repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this' (Lk 24:47-48). The purpose of the Christian Church is to bear witness to Jesus. This was in a special sense the task of the Twelve, who had been with Jesus during his earthly ministry and had seen him raised from the dead (Ac 1:21f). But the task was by no means confined to the apostles, and many other Christians also engaged in the mission.¹⁷⁵

The Ascension (Ac 1:9-12)

The narration of Jesus' ascension sets the stage for both Pentecost and the return of Jesus (Ac 1:11). Moreover, the emphasis on the disciples looking on as Jesus was lifted up and taken by a cloud grounds the event in literary allusions to Elisha watching Elijah being taken up before receiving Elijah's spirit and continuing his mission (2 K 2:9-15).¹⁷⁶ In Acts the disciples too were to receive Jesus' spirit and carry on his mission, beginning at Pentecost. Returning to Jerusalem, they prepared for this by remaining in the upper room with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers and devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:12-14).

The import of this is underscored when we consider that what Luke has outlined in his double work (Gospel and Acts) is to assign the Church 'its era and its tasks between the taking up of Jesus into heaven and his return'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 200.

¹⁷⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, England, 1980), 25.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ William S. Kurz, S.J., *Reading Luke-Acts* (Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993), 22.

¹⁷⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (London and Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1974), 63.

3.2.5 Reflection on the Appearance Experience

A Time of Formation

While the mystery of Jesus as the Christ is a reality that took hundreds of years to fully evolve into a clearly defined doctrine,¹⁷⁸ the evidence points to some form of revelatory experience for those who were called as eyewitnesses to the presence of the risen Jesus. Moreover, while these accounts of revelation are marked by apparent inconsistencies, what is equally clear is that the appearances tend to correspond to an underlying pattern.¹⁷⁹ This pattern may be outlined as follows:

1. The prevailing mood of those to whom Jesus appears is one of despondency and disappointment (Lk 24:21)
2. The initiative for the appearances comes from Jesus (Jn 20:19)
3. There is some form of greeting from Jesus (Mt 28:9).
4. A moment of recognition follows (Jn 21:7).
5. The revelation is concluded by a form of missioning from Jesus (Mt 28:19)

In that context, commentators reflect that the disciples' encounter with the risen Jesus is not arbitrary but has a particular focus – it represents for them a time of formation in identity and in mission. Thus,

The band of Jesus' disciples assembled (again) after Easter and, on the basis of divinely effected events of Jesus' resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit, formed itself into Christ's community.¹⁸⁰

And further,

The action of God in resurrecting the crucified Christ and in pouring out the Spirit, turned the group of those who believed communally in the risen Jesus into a community of those who, in contrast to the unbelieving ancient people of God, could claim to be the new eschatological people of God.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ See Donald J. Goergen, 'Christ' in Michael Downey (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993) 152-163 at 157: The Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. defined Christ as 'one *hypostasis* or person subsisting in two *physeis* or natures', a definition which became 'paradigmatic for later discussions'.

¹⁷⁹ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

¹⁸⁰ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, 12.

¹⁸¹ Hans Küng, *The Church* (Kent: Search Press Ltd., 1968), 76. See further *Lumen Gentium*, 5: 'When Jesus, having died on the cross for men, rose again from the dead, he was seen to be constituted as Lord, the Christ, and as Priest for ever (cf. Acts 2:36; Heb. 5:6; 7:17-21), and he poured out on his disciples the Spirit promised by the Father (cf. Acts 2:23). Henceforward the Church ... receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing

Moreover, this formation in identity and mission Hans Urs von Balthasar holds is grounded in what we might call the very *raison d'être* of the 40 Days – the new relational dynamic now operative between Jesus and his followers (that is, it is not just more of the same). Essentially von Balthasar's argument contends that the disciples had to be transformed and raised up from a bodily love directed to the humanity of Christ, to a spiritual love directed towards his divinity. In his view the resurrection appearances are a training in just such a transformation.¹⁸² To that end, and incorporating the appearance 'proofs' motif from Acts 1:3, he nominates five such proofs. These, he argues, are intended to formulate the 'concrete content' of the encounters of the apostles with the Risen Christ.¹⁸³ The proofs are outlined as follows.

1. The necessary expression relative to the post-crucifixion experience of the disciples is to understand that experience in terms of 'encounter'.¹⁸⁴ Commonly used as a concept for theophanies and angelophanies, particularly the appearance of the 'Glory of God',¹⁸⁵ the recurrence of *ôphthê* at decisive moments in the appearance narratives points to 'the high-point in the covenantal action of God' whereby for the first time 'the quite determinate "I" of the One encountered is recognised'.¹⁸⁶
2. In the second place von Balthasar points to the conversion experience of the apostles, demonstrated in the Copernican like transformation of their lifeless faith into one of pure paschal joy. It is a journey of renewal possible only in the encounter with the Risen One, an encounter marked circumstantially and experientially by a whole gamut of human emotion and experience ranging from fear (Mk 16:8; Lk 24:37), rapprochement (Lk 24:25; Mk 16:14), sadness (Jn 21:17), to astonishment (Mt 28:8; Lk 24:41) elation (Mt 28:8; Lk 24:32), and paschal joy (Lk 24:52; Jn 20:21; Ac 13:51).

among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom' (Flannery, 353).

¹⁸² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 214: 'The disciples had to be transformed and raised up from a *carnalis amor ad Christi humanitatem*, that Christ who *videbatur esse quasi homo unus ex eis*, by being carried, entranced, into the sphere of the Spirit, to a *spiritualis amor ad eius divinitatem*. The Resurrection appearances are themselves a training in just such a transformation.'

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 217.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 219.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 218.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 219. Regarding the recurrence of *ôphthê* at decisive moments see: 1 Cor 15:3ff; Lk 24:34; Ac 13:31; and regarding appearances to Paul, Ac 9:17; 16:9; 26:16.

3. Grounded in the experience of encounter and the affectivity of conversion, the disciples are brought, for the first time, to ‘the confession of the divinity of the Risen One’.¹⁸⁷ Such encounter confirmed for the disciples the presence in Jesus of the living God, the one who ‘brings down to Sheol and draws up’ (1 Sam 2:6). This is reflected in the homage accorded Jesus (Mt 28:9, 17; Jn 20:16, 28), which in Johannine writing is predicated in the Prologue and thus to the pre-existing Word ‘in whose total premundane sovereignty Jesus is now, with Easter, once again installed’.¹⁸⁸

4. Acting as the catalyst in a redrawing of the disciples’ perception, the Easter event allowed for a synthesis of meaning to occur between their encounter with the Risen One and the significance of Jesus’ earlier life. It allowed, moreover, this synthesis to extend to the body of scripture as a whole.¹⁸⁹ Thus, Jesus applies the entirety of the scriptures to himself – ‘all that the prophets have spoken’ (Lk 24:25), all that had been written in ‘the law of Moses and the psalms’ (Lk 24:44), found fulfilment in Jesus. However, drawing on Johannine interpretation, von Balthasar concurs that such scriptural evidence is merely supplemental to the truth of Christ.¹⁹⁰ That is, Jesus is so much the ‘fullness’ of the ‘promise-fulfilment’ relationship that, notwithstanding the circumstantial needs of the embryonic Christian community to locate scripturally Jesus’ ‘definitive position’, henceforth, Jesus alone is sufficient.¹⁹¹

5. As his last ‘proof’ von Balthasar introduces what is intrinsically and symbolically ‘the four characteristics of encounter’.¹⁹² In pun-like fashion he holds that the four-fold incorporation by Jesus of the word ‘all’ at the end of Matthew’s Gospel points to the ‘last all-pervasive Easter motif’, that of *mission*.¹⁹³ Thus, the proclamation that ‘All authority in heaven and on earth’ (Mt 28:18) rests with the Lord corresponds to ‘the enabling ground of mission’; The commission to go to ‘all nations’ (Mt 28:19) defines the extension of the mission in space and time; the instruction to ‘observe all I have commanded you’ (Mt 28:20) represents the ‘catholicity’ of the mission now entrusted; and the promise that ‘I am with you always’ (all days) acts as the guarantor of the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 221.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 222.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 223.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid, 225.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 224.

mission. Moreover, the mission is the chief goal of the appearances, and it is the initiative from which derives the founding of the Church.¹⁹⁴

3.3 SYSTEMATIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE RISEN CHRIST

3.3.1 The Impact of Encounter

In a helpful analysis Dermot Lane outlines the impact of the encounter experience on the followers of Jesus. The New Testament evidence, established in both the resurrection kerygmata and resurrection narratives, reveals the extent of the transformation in the mindset and perspective of the disciples.¹⁹⁵ Grounded in the desolation experience of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, the post-crucifixion appearance narratives demonstrate a Copernican-like recovery and renewal of faith, as well as a significant change of vision and praxis.¹⁹⁶ Reflecting on the appearance narratives as the developed and evolved response of the early Church to real, historical, and personal encounters with the risen Christ, Lane extrapolates the effects of the resurrection appearances of Jesus on his followers. These effects include:¹⁹⁷

- The establishment of a continuum linking the historical Jesus and the early Christian communities;
- The institution of an intrinsic connection between the resurrection and the foundation of the Church;
- The *de facto* grounding of the Church as a discipleship of equality among women and men;
- The legitimation of the mission and ministry of the Church in the world;
- The acknowledgement that the Eucharist acts as the primary conduit for Church members to the Presence of the risen Jesus.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 225.

¹⁹⁵ See Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 84. The resurrection narratives are as we have outlined: Mt 28, Mk 16, Lk 24, Jn 20, Jn 21. The resurrection kerygmata are short credal proclamations asserting the resurrection of Jesus: e.g. 'God raised him from the dead' (Gal 1:1, Col 2:12); 'God exalted him' (Ph 2:9, Ac 2: 33); Christ died and lived again' (Rm 14:9, 2:Co 13:4).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 86.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 89.

Further, and significantly, given its correlation with Rolheiser's thesis on the 40 Days, the appearances illuminate the inter-relatedness of the resurrection within the paschal mystery, particularly as the pathway to ascension and the reception of the Spirit of Christ.

The analysis further discusses the linkage of the experience and faith of contemporary Christian encounter with the risen Christ in relation to the experiential horizon of the first disciples. This analysis points to the 'axis of Christian faith' as the affirming dynamic of the reigning presence of the historical Jesus within the world and the Church.¹⁹⁸ For 'it is ultimately the same Spirit of the risen Jesus that touched the minds and hearts of the first disciples which touches the minds and hearts of Christians today.'¹⁹⁹ However, while areas of commonality interconnect along the axis of faith, there are aspects pertaining to the foundational experience of the first disciples that are separate and unique to them.

Gerald O'Collins nominates two distinct and unrepeatable features attached to the first post-resurrection meetings with Christ. Firstly, those disciples who had been with Jesus during his public ministry, and who therefore recognised the risen Christ as the one they had known and followed, act as the 'bridge persons' linking the period of Jesus' ministry with the post-resurrection situation.²⁰⁰ Secondly, the apostolic witnesses who met the risen Christ (including Paul) are charged with the task of giving witness to that experience through the inauguration of mission and the founding of the Church. Accordingly, their function for Christianity differs from subsequent generations of believers in that they alone have this task and this responsibility. It is the task and responsibility of future believers, grounded in the testimony of those who have seen the risen Lord and believed (1 Jn 1:1-4), to continue the mission and to keep the Church in existence.²⁰¹

In that context, and drawing on Thomas Aquinas, Kereszty points out that access to the transcendent eschatological reality of the Risen Lord is beyond the capacity of mortal perception, *ergo* the experiential perception attached to the encounter of the first post-resurrection witnesses acted merely as signs in order that the reality of the risen Christ be

¹⁹⁸ Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 92.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁰⁰ Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 92.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

communicated to them.²⁰² That is, the appearances were effective because they adapted to the imagination, understanding, and sense experience of the disciples in a manner that facilitated the revelation of the risen Christ. However, as the pervasive inability of witnesses to recognise the presence of the risen Jesus among them testifies,²⁰³ the signs, of themselves, were insufficient to bring to Easter faith. Also needed was the grace of God to transform the hearts of the recipients of the revelation such that they would look on the risen Christ *oculata fide*, ‘with eyes made perceptive through faith’.²⁰⁴ Thus, on the basis that the first disciples brought the mindset and expectation of their Jewish faith in God to the encounters with the risen Jesus,²⁰⁵ the appearances are not understood as the single, or even primary, source of Easter faith. Against that, we are reminded that we come to belief in the message of the resurrection ‘with God’s “grace” and with the interior witness of the experience of the Spirit, ...[and] by gazing upon the risen Jesus who comes before us in the apostolic witness’,²⁰⁶

3.3.2 The Eternal Presence

The consequence attaching to the resurrection of Jesus has been described variously as the ‘permanent active presence in our history’,²⁰⁷ the ‘continuing experience of the presence of the Spirit of Jesus’,²⁰⁸ and ‘a divine presence in the lives of believers’.²⁰⁹ Underpinning all these approaches, and the entire spectrum of Christian apologetics, tradition, and belief, is the understanding that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead has initiated a comprehensively new life-giving sharing of his presence whereby his ‘loving, reconciling activity remains definitively and universally present’.²¹⁰ Against that, the critical nature of establishing a correlation between the biblical tradition of the resurrection of Jesus and the contemporary experience of that event is demonstrated when we consider that failure in that regard

²⁰² Ibid, 48. Cf. also *S.T.* III, q.55, a.5: ‘Christ is said to have demonstrated his Resurrection by proofs, inasmuch as by most evident signs he showed that he was truly risen’ (referenced in *ibid.* 395, n 79).

²⁰³ For example: Mt 28:17; Mk 16:13; Lk 24:16; Jn 21:4.

²⁰⁴ Roch Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 49.

²⁰⁵ Gerald O’Collins, *Christology*, 95: O’Collins proposes that as this faith perspective included the hope for a general resurrection at the end of time, even though the resurrection of Jesus was an entirely new departure, the concept of resurrection *per se* was not alien to disciples. Regarding the source of Easter faith see also *ibid.*, 93: O’Collins invokes the empty tomb tradition as a ‘secondary sign’ – ambiguous by itself but, combined with the appearance tradition, confirming of the resurrection.

²⁰⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978), 275.

²⁰⁷ Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 50.

²⁰⁸ Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 93.

²⁰⁹ Gerald O’Collins, *Christology*, 316.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 315.

contrives to render the concept of Jesus' resurrection as merely an 'abstraction in the history of ideas'²¹¹ manifesting itself as 'a dead dogma of the past'.²¹²

The inherent distortion of such an interpretation is clearly evidenced by appeal to the original representation of the encounter experience. There, in response to the post-crucifixion encounter with the risen Jesus, the instinctive and predominating focus is on life, and life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10b).²¹³ In this way Jesus is understood as the actively present source of eternal life, a presence not merely with us and for us but in us.²¹⁴ Moreover, it is a presence that invites a response (Col 1:27). Essentially, we need to name the experience of self-transcendence as an experience of the Lord, although unrecognition does not invalidate the experience.²¹⁵

The need, therefore, is to experience a present-tense encounter with the Jesus proclaimed in the gospels and in the emerging Christian community, for beyond this, Christian belief is either stunted or else impossible.²¹⁶ In that regard, criteria of adequacy and appropriateness establish parameters for such an encounter.²¹⁷ These indicate that it is not inaccurate to

²¹¹ Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 82.

²¹² *Ibid*, 94.

²¹³ Thus, for instance, the authorship of Luke draws copiously on the language of life: For example: Lk 24:5b, 'But the two said to them, "Why look among the dead for someone who is alive" '; Lk 24:22-23 'Some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us that they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive'; Acts 1:3, 'He had shown himself to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God'. Similarly, Johannine tradition outlines a uniformity of relationship identifying Jesus with life: For example: Jn 11:25, 'Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" '; Jn 14:6, I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me'. Paul understands that 'I am alive, yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me' (Gal 2:20). He further holds that by faith Christ becomes in a sense the subject of all the living acts of a Christian: Rm 8:2, 10-11; Ph 1:21; Col 3:3.

²¹⁴ Gerald O'Collins, *Christology*, 315-316.

²¹⁵ Tad Dunne, 'Experience', in Michael Downey (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 368. A constant in all subjective experience, including the experience of encounter, is an abiding search for harmony, peace and fulfilment. Dunne argues that authentic religious experience develops only when we notice that the presence of such desire is a 'transcendental invitation' and purposely 'search out the One who calls us by this gift of desire' (*Ibid*, 369).

²¹⁶ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Free to Believe* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), 92.

²¹⁷ See Dermot A Lane, *The Experience of God* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1985). Drawing on David Tracy, Lane outlines certain criteria for recognising and evaluating an authentic religious experience. *Criteria of Adequacy*: This is premised on the basis that there is only one source of truth and therefore any claim of religious experience should not contradict the established discoveries of the empirical sciences but must be adequate of the secular experience of others (23-25); *Criteria of Appropriateness*: This is premised on the basis of the efficacious nature of religious experience, 'you will be able to tell them by their fruits' (Mt 7:16). Reflecting that God is no one's personal possession he claims that a religious experience should both relate a sense of trust, love, commitment etc. to the Power and Presence of Transcendent Reality, and bring about a conversion in sensitivity regarding the claim of orthopraxis relative to orthodoxy (26).

preface the discussion by referencing that such encounter 'is chiefly a matter of wanting to notice'.²¹⁸

The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work.²¹⁹

3.3.3 Sacramental Presence

Drawing on the post-resurrection appearance narratives authors derive various clues and indications that point to the mode and manner of the presence of the Spirit of the risen Jesus in the contemporary world.²²⁰ It is shown for instance that the structure of many of the post-resurrection encounters are imbued with sacramental overtones. In that regard, the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:13-25; Jn 21:1-14), the power to forgive sins (Jn 20:21-23), the communication of the Spirit (Mt 28:16-20; 20:2 2), and the call to baptismal conversion (Mt 28:19-20), act as archetypal pathways to the visible verification of the invisible but actively real presence of the risen Jesus.²²¹ Concisely, 'the appearances prepare us for the sacramental presence of Christ'.²²² Thus, if we adhere to even a basic definition of sacrament, 'the revelation of divine things by a visible sign that brings with it what it signifies',²²³ the consequences of talking of the sacramental presence of Christ becomes apparent. It is in that context that Kereszty draws a structural analogy (as opposed to an identity) linking the two modes of presence, the original 'first-hand' experience of the early disciples and the sacramentally grounded religious experience of contemporary Christians.²²⁴

In the first place, he argues, both modes of presence act as effective signs of Christ's presence and activity. That is, they enable the recipient to recognise and encounter Christ in a manner that is possible for them. Further, both 'signs' are communicated through sense experience and faith. Thus, agreeing with St Bernard, Kereszty maintains that the risen Christ adjusts himself to our way of knowing through the senses, appearing in the *forma servili* so that we

²¹⁸ Tad Dunne, 'Experience', 367.

²¹⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, at the close of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, (Vatican Press, 2001), 58.

²²⁰ Cf. for instance: Dermot A. Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 93-94; Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 49-50; Gerald O'Collins, *Christology*, 315-317.

²²¹ Gerald O'Collins, *Christology*, 316.

²²² Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 49.

²²³ Michael Tynan; *Catechism for Catholics* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1985), 39.

²²⁴ Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 49.

can perceive him.²²⁵ Moreover, in that context, and echoing the resoluteness of the axis of Christian faith, the initial apostolic testimony to the post-resurrection appearances establishes the faith through which the sacraments are communicated as signs of Christ's power and presence.²²⁶ Thus, again concisely, wherever the sacraments are celebrated 'the risen Christ is personally and effectively present'.²²⁷

Espousing this position Edward Schillebeeckx asserts that 'personally to be approached by the man Jesus was, for his contemporaries, an invitation to a personal encounter with the life-giving God'.²²⁸ Moreover, he holds that Jesus, through his incarnation, points to the reality that sin and death have been conquered, that eternal life with the Father is a reality.²²⁹ Further, Jesus, the 'efficacious sign', not only points to these realities he makes them possible for us to achieve.²³⁰ That is, Christ makes his presence among us actively visible and tangible by extending to us on earth 'the function of his bodily reality which is in heaven'.²³¹ This is what the sacraments are.²³² Again, because Jesus is a sacrament,²³³ distinction is made between the 'primordial sacrament'²³⁴ and the 'separated sacraments'.²³⁵ Drawing insight from the understanding that none of the Twelve apostles who enjoyed immediate contact with the 'primordial sacrament' was baptised, and yet Paul, the 'thirteenth apostle' was, Schillebeeckx holds that the economy of sacramentality thus bridges the gap between the Christ of heaven and the constraints of unglorified humanity.²³⁶ The corollary of this teaching is that Christ lives and bodily so, we are present to the risen Christ not simply in a spiritual or subjective way but in a physical way. The body of Christ, however, is not an earthly one but a

²²⁵ Ibid, 395.

²²⁶ Ibid, 50.

²²⁷ Gerald O'Collins, *Christology*, 316.

²²⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 15.

²²⁹ Ibid, 21.

²³⁰ Aidan Nichols, *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catholicism*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 272.

²³¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 41.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

²³⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 44. See also Aidan Nichols, *Epiphany*, 273: Through the mediation of the Holy Spirit we come to know the risen Christ in our lives. The visible demonstration of this encounter with the glorified Jesus is in the seven ritual sacraments. These signs/symbols re-enact and re-present what has taken place in the past in the sense that they make present and real today what Jesus has accomplished in his redemption and glorification. In this way Schillebeeckx demonstrates that Christ is to be understood as the central (primordial) sacrament, manifesting God's love to the world – that is, the seven ritual sacraments are the expression and realisation of the original sacrament.

²³⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 44.

²³⁶ Ibid.

sacramental one, and thus the life of the risen Christ 'is touched and enjoyed in the very physicality of the sacramental life'.²³⁷

Further, this draws us into what is understood as one of the 'most important and permanent contributions' of Vatican Council II,²³⁸ the proclamation that 'the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament',²³⁹ that it is, moreover, the body of Christ.²⁴⁰

3.3.4 Ecclesiological Presence

The sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet establishes a framework of Presence:

The Absent One is present in his 'sacrament' which is the Church: the Church rereading the scriptures with him in mind, the Church repeating his gestures in memory of him, the Church living the sharing between brothers and sisters in his name. It is in these forms of witness by the Church that Jesus takes on a body and allows himself to be encountered.²⁴¹

This supports the argument of Karl Rahner who posits that such a presence is not unintentional but is evidenced in the acts of Jesus in the founding of the Church. Thus, the gathering of his disciples, the formation and missioning of the circle of the Twelve, their participation in the healing power of Jesus, all were indicative that, in Jesus, the eschatological kingdom was operative in the here and now.²⁴² The legitimacy of representing the collective of believers as a prologue in the foundation of the Church by Jesus is corroborated by the fact of their staying together after the rejection of Jesus by the majority of the Jewish people (cf. Jn 6:67-69).²⁴³ Again, their incorporation into the mystery of Jesus' suffering (Mt 16:21-26), the prophecy regarding impending persecution (Jn 16:1-4), the recognition of their election by God (Mt 16:17-19; Jn 15:15-16; Ac 20:28), all indicate that Jesus retained the idea of a community of salvation which gathered around him, and which

²³⁷ David Ranson, 'Meeting the Resurrected Christ', *The Furrow* 41/5 (2005), 610-616 at 611.

²³⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146.

²³⁹ *Lumen Gentium* 1. Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146. Rahner talks of being 'astonished that this statement was made at the Council quietly and spontaneously without opposition.'

²⁴⁰ *Lumen Gentium* 7.

²⁴¹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament; A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, quoted in David Ranson, 'Meeting the Resurrected Christ', 612.

²⁴² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 333.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* Jn 6:67-69, 'Then Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God".'

called people to conversion and belief.²⁴⁴ Moreover, these acts of foundation issue from Jesus' sense of self prior to the resurrection, that is, as the 'absolute mediator of salvation, the inauguration of God's kingdom, and the eschatological climax of salvation history'.²⁴⁵ Against this horizon the institution of the Eucharist points towards the new order of salvation, the new covenant.²⁴⁶ Thus, at the Last Supper, Jesus directs his disciples to celebrate the new covenant, to be made between God and humankind in his blood, by a sacramental representation of his sacrificial death (1 Cor 11:23-27).²⁴⁷

He thus entrusted to the Church, his beloved spouse, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal meal in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory given to us.²⁴⁸

Rahner further establishes the direct intention of Jesus to found a church by referencing the 'ecclesiological mandate' attached to the sayings of the risen Christ. Thus, such as the authorisation to effect Trinitarian baptism (Mt 28:18-19), to act as the *apostola apostolorum* (Jn 20:17-18), the investiture as the shepherd of Christ's flock (Jn 21:15-17), the commissioning as witnesses to Christ's resurrection and his public life (Ac 1:8), all bestow definitively the powers of Jesus upon the disciples for the continuation of his work in the world.²⁴⁹

In that light, we ground the underlying precepts governing the relational dynamic of apostolic witness, relative to contemporary Christian experience, as follows.

The church was founded in the first place on the basis that the followers of Jesus believed him to be the 'absolute saviour' and God's 'historically irreversible and historically tangible offer of himself'.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, this soteriological reading attached to Jesus of Nazareth would be rendered obsolete were this offer not to remain present in the world in an 'historically tangible profession of faith in Jesus'.²⁵¹ The conundrum facing Jesus was, in the light of the impending rejection of the good shepherd (Jn 10:14) by the majority of the lost

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 322.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 333.

²⁴⁷ Aidan Nichols, *Epiphany*, 98.

²⁴⁸ Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, Instruction on Eucharistic Worship, (Vatican Press, 1967), 3 (a).

²⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 333.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 329.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 330.

sheep of the house of Israel (cf. Ez 34), how is God's plan of salvation to be effected and realised?²⁵² This problem found resolution in the absolute belief of Jesus that the inbreaking of God's kingdom (the eschatological message of salvation present in him),²⁵³ would not be disavowed by his death. Rather, it would be ultimately and definitively vindicated by that act.²⁵⁴ Thus, his death becomes the chrysalid imbued conduit of the new covenant,²⁵⁵ the catalytic dynamic issuing in a new messianic people of God gathered and existing in his name and presence.²⁵⁶ The institutional expression of this religion of 'the absolute mediator of salvation' is what we call church.²⁵⁷

Furthermore, access to God's 'historically irreversible and historically tangible offer of Himself' is now intrinsically bound up with abiding faith in Jesus.²⁵⁸ Moreover, this faith is not expressed as a private devotion only, but professed publicly and communally as part of a faith community. It is this faith community, 'the people gathered around Jesus and believing in him,' that constitutes the Church.²⁵⁹

In that light, we posit a foundational principal relative to the abiding originality of encounter *apropos* the axis of Christian faith:

Today too...*Jesus is present, alive and at work in his Church.* He is in the Church and the Church is in him (cf. *Jn* 15:1ff.; *Gal* 3:28; *Eph* 4:15-16; *Acts* 9:5). In the Church, by virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit, he unceasingly continues his saving work. With the eyes of faith we are enabled to see the mysterious presence of Jesus in the different signs that he has left us.²⁶⁰

²⁵² Ibid, 328.

²⁵³ Ibid, 327.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 328.

²⁵⁵ See E Allison Peers (trans), *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946) 2/253-256: describing the journey of the soul into a progressively deeper intimacy with God, Teresa of Avila uses an image whereby she likens the experience of union to that of the silkworm that dies in the cocoon to be born a butterfly. See further, Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 116: Lane, supporting this analogy, offers further comparison – 'the flower and the gardener, the acorn and the oak tree, the plant and the forest'. He cautions however that all such symbolic representation of the resurrection is subject to the limitations relative to the *via negationis et eminentiae*.

²⁵⁶ Michael Schmaus, *The Church*, 16. See also Hans Küng, *The Church* 81: Küng demonstrates how, from the earliest times, those gathering in the name of the risen Jesus took upon themselves the great title of the Old Testament, the *Kahal Yahweh*, the 'Community of God'.

²⁵⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 322.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 330.

²⁵⁹ Michael Schmaus, *The Church*, 20.

²⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 22.

3.3.5 Introducing the Irish Context

The import of this third chapter, grounded in the theological imperative of establishing a reading applicable to the contemporary Irish Church, has focused on that aspect of the paschal journey designated by the 40 Days linking Easter Day and Ascension Day. As such, interpreting the dynamic of the experience and faith of contemporary Christian encounter with the risen Christ in relation to the experiential horizon of the first disciples, we have reflected in terms of a critical element in the incorporation of the paschal dimension of new life – a coming to awareness marked by the encounter with the Risen Jesus.²⁶¹ Furthermore, holding that the response to the Holy Spirit's 'masterpiece' of the paschal cycle is not neutral in consequence,²⁶² Pope John Paul petitions the need for a continual recommitment to the mandate named by the initial resurrection encounter:

Now, the Christ whom we have contemplated and loved bids us to set out once more on our journey: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). The missionary mandate accompanies us into the Third Millennium and urges us to share the enthusiasm of the very first Christians.²⁶³

It is in that context that we move to position the event of contemporary Irish Catholicism relative to the symbolic import of the 40 Days.

Initial Parameters

Drawing on the initial experience named by the 40 Days, Joseph Ratzinger, offering a compelling analysis, considers the paschal ritual of death and resurrection as encompassed within the story of the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). He represents the affective mindset and bearing of the two disciples as both literally and metaphorically on a journey dominated by loss, emptiness, disturbance and death.²⁶⁴ Indeed, for them, it is akin to the death of their God, for it is their testimony that their 'own hope' (v 21) had been taken from them, had been seen as illusory. Therein, Ratzinger holds, is found the key to resurrection and new life. That is, reflecting the paradoxical allegory of the wheat grain dying so that it may yield to the abundance of life (cf. Jn 10:10) so the disciples' image of God – or more properly the image

²⁶¹ We recall the mark and manifestation of Easter faith – 'They were filled with Joy'! (Mt 28:8; Lk 24:32, 41, 52; Jn 20:20).

²⁶² Pope John Paul II, at the General Audience of Wednesday, June 10, 1998, 6: 'The Holy Spirit's "masterpiece" is the paschal mystery of the Lord Jesus, a mystery of suffering and glory'.

²⁶³ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 58.

²⁶⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225.

they had formed of his promise – had to die ‘so that he could live on a bigger scale’.²⁶⁵ In that regard Ratzinger posits unequivocally: comparing this prevailing image of the disciples (which essentially sought to compress God) as analogous to the ruins of a demolished house, he holds that this image too had to be ‘destroyed’ in order that ‘they could see the sky again and him who remains the infinitely greater.’²⁶⁶

Drawing comparisons with our exploration of the Paschal Cycle, Ratzinger’s image of the demolished house echoes Rolheiser’s understanding of the task of the 40 Days, which is, definitively, to manage an ascension.²⁶⁷ That is, understanding the Paschal mystery as an organically inspired process of transformation, the 40 Days represent, within that, a time of adjustment and conversion. Colloquially, and sequentially, the manner of adjustment is outlined as follows:²⁶⁸

- a) to grieve for what has died,
- b) to adjust to the new reality.

Drawing on that template, grounded in our exploration of the 40 Days as a period of encounter, and moving towards its articulation within the contemporary reality of Irish Catholicism, certain indications are evident. The task is to receive the Spirit of the expression of Church we are in fact already living. According to Rolheiser, this demands the naming of deaths, and the claiming of births.²⁶⁹ In that context, it is necessary to measure the extent to which the deaths within the Church in Ireland have been acknowledged and accepted. Similarly, there is need to reflect on the degree of import and acknowledgement that has been applied to examples of new life within the church.

The exegetical interpretation of this mandate within the contemporary event of Irish Catholicism forms the basis of the following two chapters. As such these chapters address, sequentially, the ability of the Church in Ireland to grieve appropriately for what it has lost (to ‘name its deaths’), and the capacity of the Irish Church to adjust to the new reality within which it is present (to ‘claim its births’).

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 143.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid, 138.

²⁶⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 139.

Chapter IV

Grieving What You Have Lost

The task to 'name our deaths'

4.1 THE NATURE OF LOSS

Grief, and the nature of loss, is not a systematic discipline in that it does not lend itself easily to being 'compared, measured or quantified'.¹ Nonetheless, a consensus among grief theorists is of the need to establish a new and changed relationship with the one who has died, such that the bereaved 'may enter a new and enriching relationship'.² Writers have, variously, suggested stages through which the bereavement process must go.³ In that vein, and allowing that the journey through grief resolution is seldom so compactly structured, and seeking to establish a template appropriate to the current event of Irish Catholicism, a contemporary reading of that theory is helpful. Thus, we are informed by William Worden of the task at hand:⁴

1. To accept the reality of loss.
2. To work through the pain of grief.
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.
4. To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life.

This process of grief resolution correlates symbiotically with Rolheiser's reading of the process in terms of the journey towards the embracing of renewed life in the Church:

I can look at the church that gave me the faith, recognize that it has died, grieve its passing, let it bless me, let it go, and then receive the spirit for the church within which I am actually living.⁵

Furthermore, elements attaching to the processing of grief are identified. These include, though not exclusively: sadness, loneliness, heartbreak, awkwardness, isolation, anger,

¹ Bruce Pierce, *Miscarriage & Stillbirth: the changing response* (Dublin: Veritas Publications 2003), 24.

² D. Class, 'Spiritual aspects of the Resolution of Grief', in H. Wass and R. Neimeyer (eds), *Dying: Facing the Facts* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

³ For example: G. Engel, 'Grief and Grieving', in *American Journal of Nursing*, 62, 1964, pp. 93 -98; Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969); G. Davidson, *Mourning* (Augsburg Publishing, Minneapolis House, 1984).

⁴ William Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy* (New York: Springer Publishing, 1991), 10-16 (*passim*).

⁵ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 151.

conflict, silence.⁶ To the extent that the deaths within contemporary Irish Catholicism are named and acknowledged, some reference to this ‘template’ of grief should be expected. In that light, referring generically to the grieving process as ‘loss’, this chapter will first reflect on the experience of such loss in the Irish Church in terms of the mandate to ‘name your deaths’.⁷

In the second place, drawing analysis from the pioneering research of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross *On Death and Dying*,⁸ this chapter will focus on what she speaks of as ‘denial’, ‘isolation’, ‘numbness’ and ‘shock’,⁹ and what manifests itself in the Irish Church, in what Rolheiser speaks of as an ‘obsession’ with an expression of Church that has passed,¹⁰ as an inability to let go of that model of Church.

In her research, Kübler-Ross nominates two obstacles which conflict with the presence of hope, and the journey to final acceptance, for the one who is dying. Firstly, the conveyance of hopelessness on the part of family or medical staff erodes the patients tentative grasp on a hope-filled outcome. Secondly, an inability of family to accept the dying person’s final stage, even when she herself has moved to this stage, causes difficulties.¹¹ For Kübler-Ross this inability manifested itself as a desperate clinging to an unreasonable hope, thus impacting on the person’s sense of readiness.¹² In terms of the paschal dimension of the 40 Days, Rolheiser writes that this inability to grieve appropriately (letting go of what has died), is anathema to Easter encounter.¹³ Moreover, he locates this experience *par excellence* in the experience of Mary Magdalene, and her attempt to ‘cling’ to a redundant relationship with the manifestation of the Spirit, (Jn 20:11-18).¹⁴ Marking the contemporary equivalence in the Irish Church of these attempts to cling to a redundant manifestation of reality, this chapter will outline (also) ‘two obstacles which conflict with the presence of hope’:

⁶ John O’Donoghue, *Eternal Echoes: Exploring our Hunger to Belong* (London: Bantam Books, 1998), 341-344 (passim).

⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 139.

⁸ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1970).

⁹ *Ibid*, 37.

¹⁰ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 151.

¹¹ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 123-124.

¹² *Ibid*, 124.

¹³ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 151.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

- i. An adverse attachment in the expression of Irish Catholicism to a clericalist mindset and practice.
- ii. Unfruitful approaches to sacramental ritual within the Irish Church.

4.2 GRIEVE WHAT YOU HAVE LOST

Perspective

A starting point in naming deaths present to the contemporary event of Irish Catholicism, is to appeal to the experience named by the initial Easter encounter. The impact of loss in response to the death of the Lord, is both consistent and tangible. There is the sense of *dejection* on the road to Emmaus,¹⁵ the heartbreaking *grief* of Mary of Magdala,¹⁶ the *fear* of association.¹⁷ There is *lethargy* in believing prophetic voices that new life is present.¹⁸ There is the apparent *denial* of the message by the disciples,¹⁹ and, even in the very presence of the risen Jesus, there is *hesitation* and *doubt*.²⁰ Moreover, recalling that ‘two thousand years after these events, the Church relives them as if they had happened today’,²¹ it is envisaged that the experience of the first disciples in ‘naming’ their deaths, will offer perspective to disciples of the Church in Ireland as they, too, address this task.

4.2.1 Name Your Deaths

The evolution of change in the Irish Church today is experienced by many as merely the incomprehensible and unnecessary loss of a certainty in practice and the mystical in worship. Using as a benchmark the fidelity of practice, and the drama of worship, generated by a Tridentine based expression of faith, commentators reflect on the manner of their loss within Irish Catholicism. In the first place various interpretations, appropriate to the demise of the

¹⁵ ‘Our own hope had been’ (Lk 24: 21).

¹⁶ ‘They have taken my Lord away’ (Jn 20:13).

¹⁷ ‘The doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews’ (Jn 20:19).

¹⁸ Cf. Mary of Magdala (Mk 16:11), the women (Lk 24:11), Thomas (Jn 20:25).

¹⁹ ‘Simon Peter said, “I’m going fishing.” They replied, “We’ll come with you” ’ (Jn 21:3).

²⁰ ‘They fell down before him, though some hesitated’ (Mt 28:17).

²¹ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 28.

Church in Ireland, are offered. For instance, Bishop Willie Walsh, speaking in terms of ‘Signs of darkness’, illustrates such as:²²

- The fall-off in Sunday Mass attendance.
- The virtual disappearance of confession.
- The closure of seminaries and convents.
- The fact that family prayer has become a rarity.
- The limited acceptance of Church teaching on matters such as family planning, divorce, interchurch Eucharistic sharing.

Others draw out the impact of social change in Irish society on the Church:

- The erosion of a certainty of beliefs, resulting in a loss of conviction in faith.²³
- The associated ‘Protestantisation’ of many within Irish Catholicism.²⁴
- The deforestation of Christian memory and the loss of the Christian mother tongue.²⁵
- The movement of the Church from a place of primacy within Irish society and cultural practice, to a place of relative insignificance.²⁶
- The loss of the ‘Irish mother’ as the ‘major recruiting agent’ of prospective presbyters for the Church.²⁷
- The abandonment of Catholicism as both an identity and religious persuasion.²⁸

²² Willie Walsh, ‘The Church in the New Millenium’, in Denis Carroll (ed.), *Religion in Ireland, Past, Present, and Future*, 165-174 at 168.

²³ Patsy McGarry, ‘The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards an understanding of identity* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006), 31-46 at 42.

²⁴ Ibid, 42: archetypically demonstrated and led by the response to *Humanae Vitae*, the 1968 encyclical of Pope Paul VI, regarding the use of artificial forms of contraception. See also Patsy McGarry, ‘Dr Empey finds Vatican document confusing’, in *The Irish Times*, 31st October, 2001. Former Anglican Archbishop of Dublin Walton Empey comments that ‘many Catholics simply don’t toe the papal line on divorce, homosexuality, premarital sex, contraception, etc. They are more Protestant in their thinking’.

²⁵ Godfried Cardinal Danneels, ‘Address to the Jubilee Convention of Priests of the Archdiocese of Dublin’, 3rd May 2000, Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, in *Link-Up*, Summer 2000. See also William J Bausch, *The Parish of the Next Millennium* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1997), 31-32: Addressing the impact of loss on the Church he holds that a generic image of Church, ‘derived from the media, is that the Church is regressive: it is against same-sex marriage, a spoilsport at the Population Conference, an oppressor of women in the abortion debate, and generally intolerant and anachronistic. The hierarchy, as everyone knows, is Neanderthal, venal, and wicked. Priests are sexual predators of little children’.

²⁶ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 37.

²⁷ Patsy McGarry, ‘The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland’, 43: reflecting on the evolution of ‘the new Irish mother’ McGarry outlines important points of development. These include the removal in 1973 of the marriage bar on women in the public service (which by 1996 contributed to a 600% increase of women working outside of the family home); the extent and pace of social change within Irish society, much of which was ‘pushed’ by women (particularly regarding reproductive and marital and relationship legislation).

²⁸ Ibid, 44. Primarily evidenced initially in the generation of ‘free education’ in the 1960s and 1970s, such abandonment is substantially rooted in (what McGarry perceives as) a grossly deficient quality of religious education. Holding that such ‘religious education’ offered little in terms of either depth or formation, and

Reflection on these losses show that feelings of despondency, confusion, and even betrayal are present.²⁹ A sense of disillusionment is manifest in the experience of anxiety and uneasiness regarding the direction and perceived disorientation of the church.³⁰ Moreover, this sense of disillusionment is very much rooted in the experience of post Vatican II liturgy as being conceptually abstract and emotionally destitute. Collins holds that what is perceived as an overemphasis on this practice has left people's 'imagination and hearts unnourished and unmoved'.³¹ It has in many ways denied them of a sense of 'the nearness of a mysterious God'.³²

Conversely, however, if there is a sense of grievance, and grieving, over the perceived displacement of Catholic ritual and status within Ireland,³³ it is a sense, and sentiments, mirrored in the experience of those advocating the opposite viewpoint. Those who have been working for change in the Church feel helpless and frustrated at what they perceive as institutionalised driven inertia.³⁴ In that regard, they are angry at the failure of the Church to adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by the changed context of Irish Catholicism, including the event of Vatican Council II. Particularly they experience a sense of being disenfranchised from their baptismal vocation in the manner in which they are prevented from channelling their commitment.³⁵

The root cause of this disillusionment, in their understanding, is that those responsible for leadership have failed to develop a pastoral strategy, language and ritual sensitive enough to celebrate and empathise with modern Irish experience and strong enough to offer a critique of

drawing on the work of Vincent Twomey, McGarry reflects that the Church and Catholicism were experienced predominately as 'narrow-minded, anti-intellectual, and rigorist on moral questions' (ibid, 45).

²⁹ See Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 30-31.

³⁰ Pat Collins, *The Broken Image*, 111. Cf. also, Tony Flannery, *The Death of Religious Life?* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1997), 40. Flannery outlines how changes attached to regulations about the Lenten fast, or abstinence on Friday, or the fast from midnight before the reception of Holy Communion, exercised, variously, degrees of confusion, anger, vulnerability. People wondered how in the pre-Conciliar Church the price of failure regarding obligation to fast before communion merited the penalty of mortal sin and now that was done away with. He concludes that such a response pointed to the crux of the problem that was permeating Irish Catholicism – that peripheral things had been allowed to assume major importance, and that people, consequently, had lost the ability to distinguish between what was central and what was not.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Cf. Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, 79. The power demonstrated by the bishop of Cork, Dr Lucey, when in 1953 he noted that the bishops 'were the final arbiters of right and wrong even in political matters'

³⁴ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 31.

³⁵ Ibid.

the aggressive consumerism and pronounced individualism of the day.³⁶ They reflect their sense of loss in broad sociological and ecclesiological terms:

- The loss of confidence in the moral, pastoral and teaching authority of the Church.³⁷
- The loss of trust and credibility in the Church.³⁸
- The loss of morale among many in the Church, often expressed in the abandonment of any attachment to mission.³⁹

Both these interpretations (generically 'Tridentine' and 'Vatican II') are reflective of a deeper malaise in the Irish Church. This points to a difficulty as not merely to do with faith but also with imagination. Thus, reflecting on the 'joylessness' in the transmission of Christian faith today, Dermot Lane argues that such joylessness acts both as a critique of the images and concepts used in communicating the good news, and as 'a signal for those who have eyes to see'.⁴⁰ Moreover, it is demonstrated in the phenomenon of 'the yawn factor', which points to the need for 'a new imagination out of which the Christian story might be retold'.⁴¹ This, in turn, points to an experience underpinning the entire spectrum of loss, particularly as it applies to Irish Catholicism – namely that 'God is missing but not missed'.⁴²

Reflecting this, Dominican theologian Aidan Nichols evaluates the context, common in contemporary Christian experience, of an absence of God in the world today.⁴³ His analysis concludes that this sense of absence 'cannot mean that God has actually withdrawn himself from creation'.⁴⁴ Neither can it be that 'God has withdrawn from involvement in human

³⁶ Kevin Hegarty, 'Faith of our Children', 344. This is, he contends, because they were schooled in the ways of an authoritarian and patriarchal society and draw inspiration therefore from outdated maps of the Irish mind.

³⁷ Cf. Eoin G. Cassidy, *Measuring Ireland*, 40. Theological pronouncements by Irish Church authorities on issues of a moral nature may colloquially be seen as kettles and pots remonstrating over the relative degree of colouration. There is further quantifiable evidence offered: See, for example sociological surveys such as the 1998 International Social Survey programme, the 1999 European Values Study. See also domestic studies such as those by David Tuohy and Penny Cairns in *Youth 2K: Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture?*, and the December 2000 issue of *Doctrine & Life*.

³⁸ Owen O'Sullivan, 'Where are the priest-prophets?', *The Furrow* 54/1 (2003), 37-42 at 42.

³⁹ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 31.

⁴⁰ Dermot A. Lane, 'Faith', 170. See also: Maria Moran, 'Mission to One Another', *The Furrow* 55/11 (2004), 605; Enda McDonagh, *Faith in Fragments* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1996), 62.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Josep Vives, 'Dios en el crepusculo del siglo XX', *Razón y Fe* (Vol. 223, 1991), 467-79. Quotation from p.468. [Cited in Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 131.

⁴³ Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake: On Re-energising the Church in Culture*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999), 204.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

affairs'.⁴⁵ Rather, what is true is that 'our culture gives us few, if any, overt signals of God's presence'.⁴⁶

This unmissed absence also, critically, brings into focus what Church analyst Micheal Mac Gréil has defined as a fundamental obstacle to the new evangelisation in the contemporary event of the Catholic Church in Ireland – namely, 'The Challenge of Indifference'.⁴⁷

4.2.1.1 **Secular Marginalisation of Religious Belief**

Addressing such absence as a product of cultural sensibility, Michael Paul Gallagher talks of the 'secular marginalisation' of religious belief as a credible option among the culturally initiated, a development which effectively renders religion 'impotent in the public sphere'.⁴⁸ Accordingly, in so much as there is reference to religion, generically perceived as synonymous with reference to the God principle, it is understood as simply an individualist decision regarding product selection and lifestyle choice. The consequence is that reference to God has gradually disappeared from consciousness, not only as it applies to Church affiliation but also within the arrangement of the daily life we call culture.⁴⁹ This issues in a form of 'religious anaemia' whereby church-speak – the encounter only with the conventional externals of an institution – is experienced as a foreign language.⁵⁰ There can be no engagement because the communicators of faith have failed to enter imaginatively into the culture of the receiver.⁵¹

Further, grounded in the experience of 'cultural desolation', many 'receivers' have been rendered unfree in their capacity to embrace the revelation of Christian faith. That is, because the dominant culture 'kidnaps their imagination in trivial ways', many people today are blocked in terms of a readiness for faith.⁵² In that regard, and informed by the dominance of cultural conditioning over doctrine, the primary response of the Church must be to adopt a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference: A Need for Religious Revival in Ireland* (National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2009).

⁴⁸ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 7. This is especially the case in the academic and media worlds (ibid. 132).

⁴⁹ Ibid, 132.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 131-132.

⁵¹ Ibid, 132.

⁵² Ibid, 133.

‘ministry of disposition’, an ‘awakening of the hungers to which the truth may eventually be seen as answer’.⁵³ Moreover, while the urgency of the task is reflected in the sheer weight of the desolation, the response finds precedence and consolation in the promise of the 40 Days. Thus, just as the conversion experience of the apostles, established in the transformation of their lifeless faith into one of pure paschal joy, marked a pattern of renewal possible only in the encounter with the Risen One, so the Church today must journey from ‘understandable disgust to a disposition of hope, rooted in the Spirit’.⁵⁴

This, again, invites comparison with the circumstances pertaining in the 40 Days. Particularly we recall the counsel of Joseph Ratzinger regarding the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and how their assumed image of God served only to compress openness to the Divine initiative.⁵⁵ It was this redundant image that needed to be superseded in order that they could come to Easter faith. So too with the Church in Ireland. Seamus Ryan presents an image of contemporary Irish Catholicism as analogous to a potted plant whose roots are suffocating because they have nowhere to go.⁵⁶ Not unrelated, Paul Andrews believes that, given the extent of change at both a cultural and ecclesiological level within Ireland, ‘it is time for another image of the church’.⁵⁷ Similarly, Donal Harrington, reflecting on the inherent futility of persisting with a model of church that has become essentially counter-productive, holds that ‘there is need to think differently. There is need of a new mindset’.⁵⁸

In that context, we recall that the encounter appearances were effective because they adapted to the imagination, understanding, and sense experience of the disciples in a manner that facilitated the revelation of the risen Christ.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 142. Drawing on the Ignation tradition of spiritual discernment, particularly in the tension between desolation and consolation, Gallagher proposes a direction of interpretation and engagement with contemporary culture (ibid, 141-144). This demands literally the ability to be counter-cultural, not though in a spirit of denunciation but in the Spirit of authenticity and life.

⁵⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225.

⁵⁶ Cf. Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 170.

⁵⁷ Paul Andrews SJ, ‘A Headier Drink: Reflections on a life in Priesthood’, in Niall Coll and Paschal Scallan, *A Church with a Future*, 14-29 at 24.

⁵⁸ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 76.

4.2.2 Death and New Life

Reflecting on these developments commentators are in agreement. The Church in Ireland is in terminal decline. Or, more specifically, a particular manifestation of the Church is in terminal decline.⁵⁹ Further, if what is being witnessed is the death of a particular form of Church, it is in order that it may issue in the birth of a new form of church.⁶⁰ This is what Rolheiser talks of as ‘paschal death’, indicating by that a death that, while ending one form of life, opens the pathway to ‘receive a deeper and richer form of life’.⁶¹ More concretely, effectively the Church is undergoing a crucifixion in order that it may rise again, entirely by the grace of God, to a new place.⁶² Thus, drawing inspiration from the self-understanding of Jesus (Lk 4:17-21), Anthony Philpot holds that, rooted in the perennial promise of the Lord’s Jubilee year of favour (Lk 4:19), the moment of the Church will come again, and through circumstances we cannot foresee.⁶³ Moreover, referencing the return of the Jewish people from exile as one such incidence of Jubilee, he cautions against a repeat of their response, namely attempts at restoration.⁶⁴ Their attempts to go back to ‘the only way they knew’ denied the necessity of a new beginning that marks the essence of the Jubilee year experience: that is, in the providence of God, the experience of ‘blessed moments...when the impossible becomes possible...when the unthinkable becomes thinkable.’⁶⁵

In these circumstances we recognise the inbreaking of the ‘axis of Christian faith’ as the enduring and indissoluble life aspect of the New Testament people of God. That is, the Church in all ages is constituted as the ‘little flock’ of Christ (Lk 12:32), and commissioned under his authority to teach what they have been given (Mt 28:18-20). Certain imperatives follow:

⁵⁹ See Vincent Twomey, ‘Catholic Church today lacks a passion for truth’; Patsy McGarry, ‘The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland’, 46. Also, John O’Brien, *Seeds of a New Church*, 27: ‘This true Church does not fear death to self because it is forever dying and rising with Christ’.

⁶⁰ See John Littleton, ‘Catholic Identity in the Irish Context’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards an understanding of identity*, 12-30 at 29; See also Patsy McGarry, ‘The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland’, 46.

⁶¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138.

⁶² Anthony Philpot, ‘The Church will rise again’, *The Tablet*, 3rd October 1998, 1272-1274 at 1272.

⁶³ *Ibid.* This presents as a conflation of the prophecies in Isaiah 58 and Isaiah 61, nominating the two dominant themes as Jubilee and Messiah.

⁶⁴ See Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 38. Referencing Enda Lyons, Harrington outlines one of four possible responses to the experience of change and loss as an attempt at restoring the status quo, to going back to the way things were. In the colloquial form as they are named, the four responses are: ignore; deplore; restore; explore.

⁶⁵ Anthony Philpot, ‘The Church will rise again’, 1274

- The commissioning negates any justification for the Church clothing herself in the trappings of state or society.⁶⁶
- It involves always a sending out of the Church ‘as sheep among wolves’, and therefore to a struggle with ‘hostile and aggressive forces greater than itself’.⁶⁷
- The Church journeys accompanied by the promise of the Shepherd (Jn 10:16), not to be afraid (Lk 12:32), for he is with them always (Mt 28:20).

Moreover, the Church in this draws inspiration from the commissioning texts of the 40 Days, for example:

- ❖ You will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to earth’s remotest end (Ac 1:8).
- ❖ Go at once and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead (Mt 28:6-7).
- ❖ All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you (Mt 28:19).
- ❖ Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation (Mk 16:15).
- ❖ Go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God (Jn 20:17).
- ❖ As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you (Jn 20:21).

Thus, grounded in the identity, formation, and authority of the encounter with the risen Christ, the Church goes forth in irrevocable progression from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (cf. Ac 1:8). In this, recognising that the redemptive movement of the New Covenant is not one of ingathering but of Eucharistic expansion, the sending of the ‘little flock’ is understood as demonstratively centrifugal in nature and in task.⁶⁸ Accordingly, the mark of being ‘sent’ is the separation from, and leave-taking of, the established community of shared life in Jesus. This is so because ‘we are not moved by a longing for conquest but by a restless heart that cannot contain its joy until all are able to share it’.⁶⁹ In terms of informing the

⁶⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spirit and Institution*, 275.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 276.

⁶⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spirit and Institution*, 276-277.

⁶⁹ Archbishop Desmond Connell, *The Joy of Salvation*, Pastoral Letter 1997, (Dublin: Veritas Publications 1997), 6.

present circumstances of Irish Catholicism, von Balthasar is unequivocal in his summation of the authorisation given by this reading:

This is why they are not required to keep hammering away at a situation they cannot master but are instead given permission to pick up and go.⁷⁰

Again, this echoes the experience of the 40 Days. For instance, it recalls the commissioning of the apostles by Jesus, a task that demands a continually renewed decision for Jesus who is with them always. Further, sourced and informed in the peace of the risen Lord, it recognises that that the mission of the Church can only be understood in the light of the mission of Christ. Moreover, grounded in the characteristically transforming nature of the resurrection, this continuing ‘radiation’⁷¹ of the Church is described metaphorically in terms of ‘change, difference, newness’.⁷² In a particular way, the mandate ‘to pick up and go’ is quintessentially grounded in the experience of Mary of Magdala. We are reminded that on the first Easter morning she faced the temptation to cling to a reality that is no more but was prevented from doing so (Jn 20:11-18).⁷³ Rather, she too is commissioned by Jesus and sent as a witness to the resurrection. Indeed,

To her he "first entrusted ... the joyful news of his resurrection". ... Mary Magdalen thus teaches us that our vocation as apostles is rooted in the personal experience of Christ. Encountering him leads to a new way of living no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us (cf. 2 Cor 5: 15), by leaving behind the old man to be conformed ever more completely to Christ, the new Man.⁷⁴

On that first Easter morning Mary of Magdala faced the temptation to cling to an old body even as she is looking at a new reality. The Irish Church too faces the temptation to cling to a reality that is no more, to an expression of Church that has died. The alternative is to embrace the promise and life cycle of the paschal mystery. In this, it again draws inspiration from the example of the *apostola apostolorum*. That is,

⁷⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spirit and Institution*, 277. Cf. Mt 10:14; Lk 10:11; Mk 6:11.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 47.

⁷³ Cf. *esp*, v 17: ‘Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father’.

⁷⁴ John Paul II, Mass with the bishop and priests of the diocese of Aosta, Saturday, 22 July 2000 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2000].

The story of Mary of Magdala reminds us all of a fundamental truth: a disciple of Christ is one who, in the experience of human weakness, has had the humility to ask for his help, has been healed by him and has set out following closely after him, becoming a witness of the power of his merciful love that is stronger than sin and death.⁷⁵

This points to a particular and notable perspective regarding the preparedness of the Irish Church to embrace the life promise of the Paschal Cycle. That is, while Dermot Lane speaks of the Paschal Mystery in terms of the isolated individual ego becoming a relational being,⁷⁶ Jack Finnegan implicates the institutional ego of the Irish Church as ‘a factor that must be faced honestly and worked through’.⁷⁷ In a call for the institutional Church in Ireland to symbolically engage in a purification ritual, Finnegan rhetorically asks: ‘Why should institutions presume they have no shadow, no dark side, no need to apologize and repent?’ He continues, that in the face of scandal and disesteem, they must face their shadow ‘if humiliation is to become the doorway to saving humility’.⁷⁸

Reflecting on this call to repentance, commentators are at variance regarding both the capacity and the inclination of the Irish Church to engage with it. Thus, for example, it is believed that ‘those in authority within the Catholic Church appear to see no need for radical changes. They have set out their stall, and one can like it or lump it’.⁷⁹ Others, however, addressing the need for structural and attitudinal adjustment offer degrees of conditional optimism:

Today’s crisis will in time yield a new flowering of Church life in a new environment, that of modern Ireland, though not without considerable effort and, even more, help from above. That help is assured. Less assured is our indispensable contribution.⁸⁰

Or, again,

I do not believe that we have to be pessimistic about crossing the divide with modernity or, where need be, resisting the times. [However] the time has indeed come to undertake serious changes in the Church: deepening and freeing scholarship and carrying on continuing education; enabling various forms of experimentation in the liturgy; and lobbying for structural change in the Church.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, Angelus, Les Combes (Aosta Valley), 23 July 2006. Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/angelus/2006.

⁷⁶ Dermot A. Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 111.

⁷⁷ Jack Finnegan, ‘Postmodern Spiritualities and the Return of Magic’ in *Milltown Studies*, 39 (1997) 5-26 at 12.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

⁷⁹ Colum Kenny, ‘Where to Now? Contemplating a way forward for the Irish Church’, 8.

⁸⁰ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 12.

⁸¹ James O’Connell, ‘What Future Does the Church Have?’, *The Furrow* 55/1 (2004), 13–21 at 20:

Or, again,

If the hierarchical Church can in this present crisis, let go of its overriding concern with the external institution, expressed in its control of doctrine by canon law, and instead preach the Gospel of God's Kingdom, then, out of the present crisis, a wonderful new growth could emerge in Irish Catholicism.⁸²

Similarly, echoing this call to mandatory repentance within the Irish Church, Enda McDonagh talks of this time in Irish Catholicism as 'darkness' – the darkness of the Church, and significantly, the darkness of God.⁸³ Further, he talks of this darkness as 'faith in a wintry time', and, he says, 'the winter name of Church can only be metanoia'.⁸⁴ In other words, as McDonagh sees it, the call in the Irish Church at this time is for a radical change of human minds and hearts, of human structures and practices.⁸⁵ The place of encounter, where this call to metanoia and the Spirit meet, is darkness.

Moreover, McDonagh is clear in his reading of this encounter:

Today the Spirit is calling the whole Irish community church to move through the necessary lamentation to a new phase of life and love.⁸⁶

Further, he argues, this new 'life and love' is unlikely to originate in what he calls the official face of the church. This parallels the experience of the early disciples. When Peter and John run to the empty tomb on the Easter morning (Jn 20:3-10), while John must defer to the precedence of Peter in entering the tomb, his proclamation of Easter faith – 'he saw and he believed' (v 8b) – is established before that of Peter. Echoing this, McDonagh believes that if the author of change in the Irish Church today is the Spirit, the co-authors are all baptised and believing Christians. Therefore, what is needed is to be alert to the many new forms of Easter faith which will emerge from different sources and various routes.⁸⁷

In that regard, and in the context of the 40 Days as a time of renewal in identity and mission, we move to address what Rolheiser presents as anathema to that encounter with new life, 'the

⁸² Irene Ní Mháille, 'Dear Bishops...', *The Furrow* 54/5 (2003), 278-281 at 281.

⁸³ Enda McDonagh, *Faith in Fragments*, 10-11, and 7-17 *passim*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 62. See further, Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2003), Introduction: Mullins speculates that the referencing of John as the 'other disciple' (Jn 20:3), acts to preserve the 'ideal' and 'representative' character of the Christian disciple – that 'personal contact with Jesus stands behind the witness of the gospel' (*ibid.*, endnote 24).

refusal to let go and to enter death in trust, the refusal to enter the paschal mystery'.⁸⁸ We address this 'refusal' in the Irish context in terms of a damaging attachment (a 'clinging') to a clericalist mindset and practice.

4.3 A CLERICALIST MINDSET

Central to the initial encounter marked by the 40 Day template is the hesitation of the Eleven and other disciples in coming to Easter faith. All four gospels state that they did not easily accept the resurrection, for something prevented them from recognising him (cf. Lk 24:16).⁸⁹ Moreover, it is established that this tendency towards unrecognition is rooted, not in a deficiency of knowledge,⁹⁰ but in a disconnection from Easter faith.⁹¹ Consistent with the 'axis of Christian faith', which renders the belief of a later generation of Christians as 'not different in *kind* from the faith of the apostles on Easter day',⁹² it is necessary to explore this resistance to Easter faith within the parameters of the contemporary Irish Church. It is in that context that we address a principal reason why 'the promise of Vatican II was never realised in the Irish Church':⁹³ a persistence of clericalism as a valued and prevailing mindset within Irish Catholicism.⁹⁴ Indeed, 'if ever there was one part of Catholicism in the whole world that was over-clericalised, it was Ireland'.⁹⁵

4.3.1 Clerical Caste

We are reminded of a well-versed pronouncement from Vatican Council II:

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lilies*, 170.

⁸⁹ See Mk 16:10f., 14; Mt 28:10, 17; Lk 24:16; Jn 20:18, 25, 29.

⁹⁰ Cf. Lk 24: 22-24: 'Some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us that they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

⁹¹ The call to Easter faith, *oculata fide*, is essential. We recall the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their experience demonstrates that the ability to recite a series of credal facts regarding Jesus (Lk 24:19-20), even when complemented by validating experiential and evidential witness (22-24), is not in itself sufficient in creating the sight of faith.

⁹² Rowan Williams, *Resurrection*, 94.

⁹³ Peadar Kirby, 'The Catholic Church in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland', in John Littleton and Eamon Maher (eds), *Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2008), 32.

⁹⁴ Cf. Brendan Leahy, 'People, Synod and Upper Room', 65.

⁹⁵ Editorial 'After the Rebuke, the Rebuilding', in *The Tablet*, 27 March 2010, 2.

⁹⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

Thus, in addition to the ordained priesthood there is the universal priesthood of all God's people. This marks the primacy of baptism as 'the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the Church',⁹⁷ the 'foundation and title for equality among all the baptized in Christ',⁹⁸ and the 'ecclesial communion' that is characterised by 'a *diversity* and a *complementarity* of vocations'.⁹⁹ In that regard, addressing the identity conferred in baptism, Karl Rahner holds that 'by sacramental consecration every Christian in the Church has been authorised and empowered for the task of actively co-operating in the work of the church both interiorly and exteriorly'.¹⁰⁰ Thomas O'Meara, drawing on the theology of Rahner, speaks in opposition to a linear division of 'lay' and 'ordained' ministry within the Church, naming it as 'unrealistic and inadequate'.¹⁰¹

The Church is seen as an amalgamation and incorporation of charisms in which presbyters and the lay faithful rely on each other for 'the realization of their respective vocation'.¹⁰² Essentially, this should be understood as a 'decisive step away from a clericalist view of the Church and her ministry'.¹⁰³ In that regard, however, addressing specifically the response of the Church in Ireland to the vision promulgated by Conciliar and post-Conciliar expression, Brendan Hoban is unequivocal: 'The road-map that God gave us to find our way in a changing world has been torn up into little pieces by clerical gods who refused to accept its import'.¹⁰⁴ In a similar vein, describing clericalism as the 'central reason for the lack of a reforming current in the Irish Church', Peadar Kirby speaks in terms of a 'clerical caste' as the dominant elite in a Church which has kept 'lay people in a submissive and largely ignorant situation'.¹⁰⁵ However, reading the current lack of vocations to this clerical caste as a

⁹⁷ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, (Rome, Vatican Press, 1988), 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Rahner, 'The Role of the Layman in the Church', *Theological Investigations* 8 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), 57.

¹⁰¹ Thomas F. O'Meara, 'The Ministry of Presbyters and the Many Ministries in the Church', in Donald J. Goergen and Ann Garrido (eds), *The Theology of Priesthood* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 80. Cf. also O'Meara, 82: He references the Rahnerian teaching that 'each member of the church is an active co-bearer of the self-construction of the church' cf. Karl Rahner: 'Der theologische Ansatzpunkt für die Bestimmung des Wesens des Amtspriestertums' *Concilium* 5, (1969) 196.

¹⁰² *Ibid*.

¹⁰³ Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church* (Stoke on Trent: Alive Publishing Ltd, 2007) 59.

¹⁰⁴ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind* (Dublin: Banley House, 2007), 85.

¹⁰⁵ Peadar Kirby, 'The Catholic Church in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland', in John Littleton and Eamon Maher (eds), *Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2008), 26. Drawing from Leonardo Boff Kirby defines this as 'the greatest pathology of Irish Catholicism' (*ibid*, 30).

sign of ‘hope’, he believes that Church leaders are now being ‘forced’ to turn to lay people as ‘pastoral partners’.¹⁰⁶

His theory finds some resonance in the assessment of Irish Church leadership. Bishop Willie Walsh, proposing a move towards a new model of Church in Ireland, and speaking in the context of the paschal experience in the embryonic Church,¹⁰⁷ addresses this Easter hope in terms of a way forward for the church:

I am deeply aware of criticism of bishops and priests when we speak of the need of lay involvement. People have a sense that we were not that eager to give way in the past. I know in my heart that when we had a plentiful supply of priests we neither allowed nor encouraged people to take on their rightful role in the life of the Church. Today's shortage of priests has created a “needs must” situation and people are not slow in pointing this out to us. As a bishop and priest I acknowledge our past mistakes and I humbly invite you to answer our shared calling to do God's work together.¹⁰⁸

Again, Bishop Leo O'Reilly addresses the project of ‘New Evangelisation’ in Ireland as ‘a challenge for our people as well as our priests’.¹⁰⁹ He grounds his argument by reference to the Congregation of Clergy document ‘The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium’:

New evangelization has to underline the importance of bringing to maturity the meaning of the baptismal vocation of the faithful thereby bringing the faithful to an awareness that they have been called by God closely to follow Christ and personally to collaborate in the Church's mission.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ Bishop Willie Walsh, ‘Hope in a Changing Church’, A Lenten Letter from, Killaloe Diocese, March 2007. Cf. <http://www.killaloe-diocese.ie/images/stories/pdf/img084.pdf> [accessed March 2011]. Bishop Walsh specifically addresses a section in this pastoral letter as ‘Towards a new model of Church’. He reflects that, ‘Thankfully, the people of this diocese have been taking on greater responsibility for the work of the Church. The “new model” is effective in: Parish Pastoral Councils, Liturgy Groups, Parish Finance Committees, replacement of priests by lay people as chairpersons of School Boards of Management, increased involvement of parents in preparation of children for Baptism, Communion and Confirmation. Likewise, sisters from various religious congregations are working at parish level and in education and charitable organisations to further this work towards a new model of church.’

¹⁰⁸ Bishop Willie Walsh, ‘Hope in a Changing Church’. See also Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 102: ‘The parishioners who are available to give themselves to the care of their parishes are the hope of the Church. This cannot be overstated. To fail to see this is to be hopeless.’

¹⁰⁹ Bishop Leo O'Reilly, ‘Becoming Priests for the First Time (Response to Monsignor Rossetti's Address)’, in *The Furrow*, 59/9 (2008), 470-476, at 475.

¹¹⁰ See Congregation for the Clergy: ‘The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium’: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_19031999_pretres_en.html [accessed March 2011].

Moreover, aligning this to the celebration of the ‘year of vocation’ in Ireland,¹¹¹ he asserts as a ‘very important task’ the two-fold (and equal) dimension of that event, namely:

- i. promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life more effectively,
- ii. bringing to maturity the meaning of the baptismal vocation of the faithful.¹¹²

Indeed, significantly in terms of an uncritical attachment to a mindset of clericalism, he concludes that ‘it is only in the context of a more vibrant living out of the baptismal vocation of all Church members that we can hope to nourish vocations to priesthood and religious life’.¹¹³

Again, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, reflecting on the call to change in the Irish Church as an ‘opportunity to do more and do things differently’,¹¹⁴ talks of the ‘many signs of renewal in the Church ... [particularly] an extraordinary renewal in the commitment of our lay persons to service in our parishes’.¹¹⁵ He continues:

Some will say that we are opening up to lay involvement as a stop-gap solution to the shortage of priests. I would respond. If we look on lay involvement as a stop-gap solution it will simply fizzle out. Our plans for working together in mission will only work when they are rooted in an understanding of the calling of all Christians to the ministry of witness to their faith within the ecclesial community and in the world.¹¹⁶

Moreover, aligning this to the celebration of the year of vocations in Ireland, he asserts that the ministry of priests, ‘though specific and irreplaceable, requires the other charisms and ministries which the spirit grants to the Church’.¹¹⁷ Indeed, significantly, he concludes that the renewal anticipated is not just a renewal of structures but ‘a renewal in holiness’, a

¹¹¹ The ‘Year of Vocation’ ran in Ireland from Vocations Sunday 2008 (13th April) until Vocations Sunday 2009 (3rd May). Its aim was to raise awareness of the common vocation that all Christians share through baptism as expressed through witness, love and service. Within each of these themes the specific vocations of marriage, the religious life, the single life and priesthood were highlighted and promoted.

¹¹² Bishop Leo O’Reilly, *Becoming Priests for the First Time*, 475.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* See also John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, On the Formation of Priests in the circumstances of the Present Day, (Rome, Vatican Press, 1992), 3: ‘the more the laity’s own sense of vocation is deepened, the more what is proper to the priest stands out’. This bears witness to the reciprocal dimension relative to the common priesthood and the ordained priesthood:

¹¹⁴ Diarmuid Martin, Homily at Chrism Mass 2008, Holy Thursday, 20th March 2008. Cf. http://www.dublindiocese.ie/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1167&Itemid=372 [accessed March 2011].

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

renewal that is universal – a renewal that ‘goes out to all, young and old, laity, clergy and religious’.¹¹⁸

‘Though Some Hesitated’ (Mt 28:17)

Conversely, however, evidence of a ‘slowness to believe’ (cf. Lk 24:25) in this emphasis on baptismal vocation within Irish ecclesial life is indicated from within the Church. For instance, it is reported (in 2008, from *The Irish Catholic*) that ‘as many as 160 priests have died in the past year while only nine men have been ordained ... These figures suggest that the Church's vocation crisis is reaching "catastrophic levels".’¹¹⁹ Further, director of the Iona Institute, David Quinn comments that ‘When people speak of a vocations crisis, that’s an understatement. It’s not a crisis, it’s a complete catastrophe. And there is nowhere worse than Ireland’.¹²⁰ The national Co-ordinator of Diocesan Vocations, Fr Paddy Rushe, aligning the dramatic decline in seminary student numbers specifically to the litany of scandals attaching to the contemporary Irish Church, holds that the ‘hurt and the pain’ caused by the criminality of abusers, and the subsequent response of the Church, negated the option of a vocations ‘recruitment campaign’.¹²¹

Again, Gerald O’Hanlon, holds that the clericalist culture, despite the ‘diminished status of clergy’, still remains as the operative default culture within the Catholic Church in Ireland.¹²² As such, he speaks of an expression of Church that is dominated by ‘a kind of infantilizing passivity, a premium on loyalty and obedience which does scant justice to Vatican II’s teaching on the Church as People of God’.¹²³ Given the timeframe of his remarks (December 2010),¹²⁴ and in the context of evaluating the status accorded the call of baptismal vocation, there is value in outlining his reading:

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ ‘John Cooney, ‘Church crisis as number of priests to drop 66pc in 20 years’, *Irish Independent*, February 21, 2008

¹²⁰ Cf. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyj7rFyDQvk> [accessed March 2011].

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Gerald O’Hanlon, ‘Culture and the Crisis in the Church’, in *The Furrow*, 61/12 (2010), 655-666 at 660.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ In terms of the primary timeframe context of this study, ‘1990-2010’.

Do we really imagine that had more laity, parents, women been better represented at decision-making levels in a Church with a culture of more adult accountability that this situation [circumstances pertaining to the Ryan and Murphy Reports] would have been allowed to develop to the stage that it has?¹²⁵

In that context, a more insidious, and eminently more vital aspect of a clericalist mindset operative within Irish ecclesial life is addressed. In a submission to the State inquiry into clerical child sexual abuse in the archdiocese of Dublin, the lay organization ‘Voice of the Faithful’ hold that the culture of clericalism, prevalent in the Irish Church, ‘was and is an essential feature of the power-imbalance that led and leads to clerical child sexual abuse’.¹²⁶ Moreover, the finding of the Commission of Investigation, that there is ‘no doubt’ that clerical child sexual abuse was covered up by the archdiocese, underscores the belief that Church authorities were, in part, motivated by a desire to preserve the ‘naive image of the priest’ within the popular mindset.¹²⁷ Ecclesiologist Donald Cozzens concurs. Outlining the elements indigenous to a clericalist culture driving ecclesial life in Ireland, he associates them particularly with the absence of authenticity and integrity, and, of critical import, the central factor in denying ‘the Church’s ongoing need for renewal and reform’.¹²⁸

Offering a further perspective on reticence within Irish Catholicism to spontaneously identify with the paradigm of baptismal vocation, Donal Harrington addresses what he colloquially terms the ‘leave it to Father’ syndrome.¹²⁹ Drawing perspective from the derivation of the term ‘lay’, he argues that it perpetuates a dualistic mindset whereby ecclesial status and role are expressed in terms of amateur (lay) and professional (ordained).¹³⁰ Supporting this interpretation, Dominican theologian Paul Philibert intimates a restorationist approach to a type of clericalism that is ‘subduing the apostolic vision of the church sketched by Vatican

¹²⁵ Gerald O’Hanlon, ‘Culture and the Crisis in the Church’, 660.

¹²⁶ ‘Catholic Clericalism and Clerical Child Sexual Abuse’ (cf. (i), The VOTF Ireland submission to the Irish state commission of inquiry into clerical child sex abuse in the archdiocese of Dublin, March 2007. http://www.votfi.com/statements.htm#Irish_state_commitment_to_child_safety_now_seriously_in_question [accessed March 2011]

¹²⁷ ‘Catholic Clericalism and Clerical Child Sexual Abuse’, VOTF (ii). See especially *Report by Commission of Investigation into Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin*, 1.113: ‘The Commission has no doubt that clerical child sexual abuse was covered up by the Archdiocese of Dublin and other Church authorities over much of the period covered by the Commission’s remit. The structures and rules of the Catholic Church facilitated that cover-up’. <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB09000504> (cf. ‘Part 1’). [accessed March 2011]

¹²⁸ Donald Cozzens, ‘Culture that Corrodes’, in *The Tablet*, 5th December 2009, 6-7 at 7. He unambiguously outlines the ‘fibres’ holding together this clericalist mindset within Irish ecclesial life in terms of ‘secrecy, ambition, the remnant of feudal nobility, the temptation to idolatry’ (ibid).

¹²⁹ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 112

¹³⁰ Ibid, 115.

II'.¹³¹ Grounding his argument in an overemphasising of the part played by the ordained in the life of the church, he holds:

There are many symptoms, from cardinals unpacking their 15-foot trains of scarlet silk — cappa magnas (ceremonial capes) — to seminarians and young priests living full time in cassocks; from the disappearance of inclusive language in church texts and preaching, to the nearly exclusive focus upon clerical vocations in diocesan letters.¹³²

Again, reflecting this, Harrington posits that this 'two-tier spirituality' is effectively corroborated by an almost osmosis-like exposure to the legacy of the clericalist mindset within the Church – a sense among lay people that collaboration is somehow about trespassing on what is not their proper field of activity.¹³³ It is a perception that is not immediately discounted by reference, in 2010, to the public forum of the Irish dioceses.

4.3.2 Vocation

The Irish Approach

Opening the 'Vocations' link on the Diocese of Cloyne webpage, the reader is met with the banner headline 'PRIESTS FOR TOMORROW', followed by a welcome for 'those considering priestly vocation'.¹³⁴ Similarly, the 'Vocations' link for the Diocese of Elphin addresses singularly the topic of 'Priesthood in the Elphin Diocese',¹³⁵ as does, in its case, the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore.¹³⁶ This is the situation also in the Diocese of Limerick which, further, provides a link to the Irish national vocations website, the informatively named 'vocations.ie'.¹³⁷ Here, the rotator banner images (solely) various aspects of presbyteral ministry, and the viewer is encouraged to 'altar your life'.¹³⁸ Moreover, this page (vocations.ie) is, tellingly, the sole link offered by the 'Vocations' option on the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference webpage (catholicbishops.ie).¹³⁹ Again, the Diocese of Clogher

¹³¹ Paul Philibert, 'Clericalism and the Liturgy', in the *National Catholic Reporter*, April 5th, 2010. Online edition, <http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/clericalism-and-liturgy> [accessed March 2011]

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 115.

¹³⁴ <http://www.cloynediocese.ie/vocations.htm> [accessed August 2010].

¹³⁵ <http://www.elphindiocese.ie/vocations/index.html> [accessed August 2010]. It also offers 'Usefull [sic.] Links for People interested in Vocations', namely: Religious Vocations Association, Conference of Vocations Directors of Ireland, Sister Disciples of the Divine Master, Online guide to Religious Vocations in Ireland, Sisters of Mercy, Ursuline Sisters, Sisters of Nazareth, Poor Clare Sisters.

¹³⁶ <http://www.waterfordlismore.com/vocations> [accessed August 2010].

¹³⁷ <http://www.limerickdiocese.org/vocations.htm> [accessed August 2010].

¹³⁸ <http://www.vocations.ie/> [accessed August 2010].

¹³⁹ <http://catholicbishops.ie/> [accessed August 2010].

focuses solely on the call to sacramental priesthood, outlining the number of seminarians engaged in formation for the priesthood at the National Seminary.¹⁴⁰ The ‘Vocations’ webpage of the Diocese of Kilmore explicitly offers reference to ‘Priesthood’, the ‘Permanent Diaconate’, and ‘Religious life’.¹⁴¹

Similarly, the Derry Diocesan Vocations Council names its mandate as increasing ‘awareness in the Church of each one’s calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, acknowledging that there are different ways in which this call can be lived out’. It then references this call explicitly in terms of ordained priesthood.¹⁴² It is the Diocese of Kerry that offers a broader perspective on the question of vocation. Its vocations webpage addresses the various states in that regard – Single life, Marriage, Religious life, Permanent Diaconate, Priesthood – and it includes information and links on each.¹⁴³

This pattern of identifying vocations specifically with the calling to ordained ministry (or religious life) is recurrent throughout the Irish dioceses. As such, these reflections exhibit a particular mindset regarding the nature and form of ‘vocation’ within the Irish Church, and, consequently, of the nature of Church itself. That is, it points to an understanding of Church as grounded in the authority of ordination and office as distinct from the call of baptism and charism. As such, the near complete absence of any reference whatsoever to a concept of vocation, other than that of the ordained, acts as an insightful commentary on the status afforded the lay state by the institutional Irish Church. It offers little indication or appreciation that lay people too, by right of Baptism and Confirmation, share in the prophetic, priestly and kingly role of Christ.

Ordained Priesthood and Baptismal Priesthood

It is significant that both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, in impressing upon the Irish Bishops the need to exercise ‘discernment’ regarding the changed circumstances facing the Irish Church, ground their counsel in the same scriptural reference – namely, the need to be like

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.clogherdiocese.ie/vocations> [accessed August 2010].

¹⁴¹ <http://www.kilmorediocese.ie/vocations> [accessed August 2010].

¹⁴² <http://www.derrydiocese.org/vocations.asp> [accessed August 2010].

¹⁴³ <http://www.dioceseofkerry.ie/page/our-diocese/vocations/> [accessed August 2010].

the 'householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old' (Mt 13:52).¹⁴⁴ On that basis, there is the need to understand that 'the new evangelisation requires a renewal of pastoral governance and activity',¹⁴⁵ and the need to 'correct the idea that Catholicism is merely a collection of prohibitions'.¹⁴⁶ Thus, highlighting this absence of reference to the universal priesthood of all the baptised is neither an exercise in distracted pedantry nor, significantly, a case of 'novelty for novelty's sake'.¹⁴⁷ Neither is it about identifying the laity with the clerical state, for the issue here is not the collapsing of differences between the priesthood of the ordained and the priesthood of all the faithful.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, grounded in the difference 'in essence and not only degree', the essential relationship pertaining to the expression of the two modes of priesthood (and the different charisms named within each) must not be obscured. However, neither should they ever be viewed in terms of 'competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy'.¹⁴⁹ They are, rather, a cause for rejoicing, as Paul rejoiced with and for his 'fellow-workers in Christ Jesus' (Rom 16:3).¹⁵⁰

Reflecting on this relationship between the ordained priesthood and the baptismal priesthood, Michael Lawler holds that either the sense of rejoicing named by Paul is present and lived out, or it remains unacknowledged and suppressed, and is then given expression in a form of ecclesial neurosis.¹⁵¹ In his reading, not only is it the case that for many Catholics this sense of rejoicing is not being lived out, but, 'as a theology of baptism and the Christian life of the Spirit', it has been repressed and suppressed by the Church for many centuries.¹⁵² He sequentially outlines the development of a theology of exclusion in the chronology of

¹⁴⁴ See John Paul II, 'Address to the Bishops of Ireland on their *Ad Limina* visit, 26th June 1999 and Benedict XVI, 'Address to the Bishops of Ireland' on their *Ad Limina* visit, 28 October 2006.

¹⁴⁵ John Paul II, 'Address to the Bishops of Ireland' on their *Ad Limina* visit, 26th June 1999 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1999/].

¹⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, 'Address to the Bishops of Ireland' on their *Ad Limina* visit, 28 October 2006 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/].

¹⁴⁷ John Paul II, 'Address to the Bishops of Ireland' on their *Ad Limina* visit, 26th June 1999.

¹⁴⁸ Not least in regard to the dangers inherent in reducing *in persona Christi* to *in persona Ecclesiae*. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood', (15 October 1976), 5: 'It is true that the priest represents the Church, which is the Body of Christ. But if he does so, it is precisely because he first represents Christ himself, who is the Head and Shepherd of the Church. The Second Vatican Council used this phrase to make more precise and to complete the expression "in persona Christi." It is in this quality that the priest presides over the Christian assembly and celebrates the Eucharistic sacrifice "in which the whole Church offers and is she wholly offered".'

¹⁴⁹ Michael G. Lawler, 'Do Not Quench the Spirit', in *The Furrow*, 58/4 (2007), 201-205 at 203.

¹⁵⁰ Paul names his 'fellow-workers' as Prisca and Aquila (3). See John J. Pilch, 'Romans', in Dianne Bergant and Robert J. Karris (eds), *The Colledgeville Bible Commentary* (The Liturgical Press: Colledgeville, Minnesota, 1988) 1080-1099 at 1098: Among the leading early missionaries outside Palestine, Prisca and Aquila were well known in the New Testament. Both had accepted Christianity prior to Paul's conversion. They began their missionary activity independently of Paul, but later consented to work in association with him.

¹⁵¹ Michael G. Lawler, 'Do Not Quench the Spirit', 203.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

ecclesial life, specifically viewing the contribution of three aspects of theology – that of baptism, of Church, of priesthood.¹⁵³ Collectively, these mark a theological emphasis giving rise to a model of Church that is hierarchical and pyramidal in construct, and, in consequence, suppressive of the baptismal character of all believers.¹⁵⁴ This reflects, Lawler holds, an operative mindset driving a deficient vision of ecclesial vocation which, in the context of the ‘new life’ of the call to collaborative discipleship, underscores a false premise.¹⁵⁵

In a similar vein, Benedictine theologian Ghislain Lafont, identifying ‘charism’ with ‘the more current term “vocation”’,¹⁵⁶ establishes a principle which applies, by association, to a prejudicially informed clericalist mindset in the Irish context. He outlines that:

Something is askew when matters of the Church’s doctrine in areas like sexuality, the family, economics, social justice, and political options are formulated by a magisterium that is clerical, episcopal and papal, i.e., is exercised by persons who normally do not participate in these activities, who have no immediate experience of them, and who have demonstrated a practical judgement that was neither constant nor relevant.¹⁵⁷

Again, establishing that he harbours no intention of depriving the ecclesial magisterium of its mandate to ‘indicate the general lines’ emerging from scripture and tradition,¹⁵⁸ Lafont indicates his thinking as it pertains to baptismal vocation:

In those domains that are indivisibly human and spiritual, the process of reflection should stem from reason enlightened by the faith of those who are directly involved rather than from an “illumination” from above. This procedure would better respect the economy of a Church that is structured communion.¹⁵⁹

Carmelite theologian, Antonio Maria Sicari, echoes and contributes to this reading by locating the debate on ‘Vocation’ against the rediscovery of the charismatic dimension at

¹⁵³ Regarding baptism, the theology was deficient, not in terms of its emphasis on the pursuance of a sinless life, but rather on ‘its insistence on a restricted meaning of baptism’ (Michael G. Lawler, ‘Do Not Quench the Spirit’, 204); Regarding ecclesiology, the theology was deficient, not in terms of the need of the people of God for leadership, but rather in its insistence that ‘all authority in the Church is from the top down and that nothing of value for the upbuilding of the Church comes from the bottom up’ (Ibid); Regarding priesthood, the theology was deficient, not in terms of the ecclesial office of Overseer and Presbyter, but in ‘its repression/suppression of the common priesthood that the sacral priesthood shared with all believers’ (ibid).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ In that regard see *Christifideles Laici*, 23: ‘The Church’s mission of salvation in the world is realized not only by the ministers in virtue of the Sacrament of Orders but also by all the lay faithful; indeed, because of their Baptismal state and their specific vocation, in the measure proper to each person, the lay faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ.’

¹⁵⁶ Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 113.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 117.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 117-118.

Vatican Council II, a development he reads as giving rise to a ‘new ecclesiological paradigm’.¹⁶⁰ As such, the task is, definitively, to ‘apply ourselves to this rethinking’.¹⁶¹ Defining the ‘protagonist’ of Vatican II’s ecclesiology as the *christifidelis*, he outlines two points that ‘need to be highlighted and applied once and for all’.¹⁶²

1. The “*ecclesiology of communion*,” in which the primary thing is not that there is a hierarchy among the vocations and states of life in the Church, but that they are “*ordered to one another*,” for mutual, complementary service, and that they are interdependent.¹⁶³
2. The “*ecclesiology of mission*,” in which all vocations and states of life in the Church must flow together into the one mission of the Church, each with its specific contribution and distinctive gift.¹⁶⁴

Cumulatively, the position of Lawler, Lafont and Sicari name the lay vocation, while different from that of the sacred ministry, as integral to ‘the pastoral structure of the Church’.¹⁶⁵ The challenge, therefore, is the encouragement and advancement of ‘Gospel-inspired lay people’ in order to ‘exercise to the full their Christian powers *which are often repressed and buried*’.¹⁶⁶ Not unrelated, Pope John Paul II, addressing the Irish Episcopal Conference at the turn of the millennium, spoke of ‘the new evangelisation’ leading to ‘a springtime of the Gospel’.¹⁶⁷ Further, he advised that the extent to which this will be fruitful, ‘will depend very much on the lay faithful being fully aware of their baptismal vocation and of their responsibility for the Gospel of Jesus Christ’.¹⁶⁸ It is a viewpoint unequivocally echoed in the thinking of Benedict XVI:

It is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective roles of the consecrated and of lay people. This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as “collaborators” of the clergy but truly recognized as “co-responsible”, for the Church’s being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁰ Antonio Maria Sicari, ‘Ecclesial Movements: A New Framework for Ancient Charisms’, in *Communio* 29 (Summer 2002), 286-308 at 295.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Christifideles Laici*, 23,

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* [my italics]

¹⁶⁷ John Paul II, ‘Address to the Bishops of Ireland’ on their *Ad Limina* visit, 26th June 1999.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, ‘Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility’. Address at the *Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, 26 May 2009 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/]

4.3.3 One Priesthood

The issue, therefore, in terms of the destructive proclivity of the culture of clericalism in Ireland, is not the eradication of difference between baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood – indeed it is the exact opposite. The issue is the eradication of clericalism as an operative mindset and practice within Irish ecclesiology because it functions as a significant barrier to the fulfilment of the baptismal vocation of the universal priesthood. Within that, the task is a coming to awareness (and acknowledgement) that the symbiotic relationship relative to the living out of the Christian vocation lies in the assertion of two fundamental principles:

- i. All the baptised are called to act in the person of Christ;
- ii. Only the ordained person acts in the person of Christ.¹⁷⁰

As such, it is the acknowledgement that the principle of unity is fundamental: ‘Together, they manifest the one priesthood of our one high-priest; the candles of both are lit from the one Paschal Candle and, in turn, they help to light each other’.¹⁷¹ Moreover, any appeal to hesitancy in this regard is seen, in 40 Day expression, to have precedence. It is mirrored in the refusal by some disciples to act on the testimony and mission of the woman, Mary of Magdala (Mk 16:11). This represents an incomplete interpretation of the dimension of ministry and one ‘severely’ denounced by the Lord for its ‘incredulity and obstinacy’ (Mk 16:14). It is, furthermore, a call to ‘ministry’ reflected, notably, in the ecclesiology of Vatican II.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, recalling the famous dictum of Romano Guardini, that ‘The Church is awakening within souls’, names as the fruit of this awakening the event of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁷² Further, placing the Christocentric focus of the Council at the ‘head of its considerations’,¹⁷³ he names it as a process of conscientisation that found verbal expression with the concept of the ‘Mystical Body of Christ’.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, acting as the point of departure, this concept names the Church as the presence of Christ,¹⁷⁵ and, within that, the

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Thomas Lane, *A Priesthood in Tune* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1993), 92.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988), 3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

identification of each of its members as an organ of his Body in this world.¹⁷⁶ In that regard, addressing the communitarian character of ecclesial life, Ratzinger speaks of the ‘we-ness’ of Church, a quality given expression in the call to ‘co-responsibility’ and genuine involvement.¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, as both the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptised are essential to the nature of Church, if either is diminished it impacts on the whole Church. This circumstance is reflected in attempts to clarify the essential diversity between the two. Thus, for instance, we recall the *Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priest*.¹⁷⁸ In that respect, however, there exists the danger of overemphasising the difference to the extent that the identity of one is lost in favour of the other. If, for example, the ordained priesthood is so distanced from the lay priesthood, the resultant order of difference can be one of ‘subordination rather than coordination’.¹⁷⁹ The implication is that ‘one (the ordained) is *separate* from or *superior* to the other’.¹⁸⁰ Commentators refute this option as deficient both in terms of pastoral sensitivity and of theological acumen. Thus, Yves Congar draws awareness to the understanding that,

Any Roman Catholic theology of the laity must take account of the fact that ordination is not an option for half the members of the Church: any relegation of the lay people to the status of second class citizens necessarily relegates women to that status as well.¹⁸¹

The eradication of the clericalist mindset within Irish Catholicism requires a proactive response to this viewpoint. The operative theology of the Church in every circumstance must acknowledge the inherent dignity and priesthood of all Christians, and, as such, affirm the dignity of lay people. Therefore, it must be sensitive to the hurt caused by overt and unnecessary displays of patriarchy. Where possible, it should promote the use of inclusive language and inclusive imaging of the Church. Indeed, a report specifically reflecting on the

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁷⁷ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 6: ‘We ourselves are the Church. These ideas too have matured to contribute directly to the Council: everything that is said about the joint responsibility of the laity and everything that was done to implement this meaningfully in the way of legal provisions grew out of these insights.’

¹⁷⁸ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html [accessed March 2011].

¹⁷⁹ Jack Risley, ‘The Minister: Lay and Ordained’, in Donald J. Goergen and Ann Garrido (eds), *The Theology of Priesthood* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 119-137 at 121.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁸¹ A.N. Williams, ‘Congar’s Theology of the Laity’, in Gabriel Flynn (ed), *Yves Congar, Theologian of the Church* (Louvain-Paris-Dudley, MA: Peeters Press, 2005), 135-159 at 157.

future of the Church in Ireland in terms of ‘Faith, Culture, and Evangelisation’, listed as a priority the belief that,

Priests should press for more lay involvement in liturgy and in ministry, and that involvement should be positively valued by the Church. In particular, the Church should listen to women’s voices.¹⁸²

In that regard, there is need to be aware that, within the dominance of the male principle in religious language and ritual, is found ‘the seeds of women’s subordination’.¹⁸³ A dialogue vignette in the pages of *The Furrow* encapsulates some of these issues.

4.3.3.1 Disenchantment with the Church

In an article entitled ‘Why I Have Left’, Phil Dunne, previously active over a number of years in her parish community and Church, reflects on the reasons she could no longer remain in the Church. She speaks of it as a ‘patriarchal organisation’,¹⁸⁴ as corrupt, unjust and sexist.¹⁸⁵ It excludes the vast majority of members from decision making, seeks to maintain itself even at the cost of ignoring the Spirit, and ‘pays only lip service to women’.¹⁸⁶ Yet, she moved away, not for such reasons but because she could see ‘no possibility of change’.¹⁸⁷ In a response, predictably entitled ‘Why I Have Stayed’, Helen Costello, again active at both parish and diocesan level in her Church, outlines her considered reason for not leaving: ‘My confidence in the institution rests not in the hierarchy but in the indissoluble and historical link between the Church and its founder whose main concern was the bringing in of the Kingdom’.¹⁸⁸

Similarly, Angela Hanley impartially reflects on ‘Why I almost left ... and why I stayed’. Disillusioned on many fronts with her experience of Church she had remained only out of commitment to her children. Having fulfilled that covenant, and thus preparing for exodus, she surprisingly (to her) experienced a faith encounter (outside of patriarchal ritual) that

¹⁸² Dublin Council of Priests Working Group on Faith, Culture and Evangelisation, *New Evangelisation Dublin 2000 and Beyond* (Dublin: Elo Press Limited, 2000), 22.

¹⁸³ Betty Maher, ‘It will not be taken away from her’, in *The Furrow* 56/1 (2005), 62-63 at 63. She continues ‘there is an often held belief that to be male is to be in God’s image, to be female, less so’.

¹⁸⁴ Phil Dunne, ‘Why I Have Left’, in *The Furrow* 54/9, (2003), 465-468 at 466.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 465.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 467.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁸ Helen Costello, ‘Why I Have Stayed’, in *The Furrow* 54/11, (2003), 593-596 at 593.

addressed her in ‘an adult way’, and respected her ‘intelligence’.¹⁸⁹ Thus, experiencing a life-giving aspect of Christian faith unknown to her she remained to explore its potential. However, she is still unhappy ‘to belong to a group that supports what is often an unjust, unfair, and at times, vindictive administration’.¹⁹⁰ Again, by way of response, Moya St Leger explains that she remains a Catholic for one reason only – the ‘astounding vision and a breathtaking Christology ... [of] the significance of the Resurrection’,¹⁹¹ taught to her by a prophet of the Church.¹⁹² Tellingly, however, the compromise is, ‘I had to disengage my intellect and my emotions from any hope I harboured for a different future for the Church’.¹⁹³

If, as is contended, the Papal Mass in the Phoenix Park was effectively ‘part of a great funeral liturgy’ for an expression of Irish Catholicism that was dying,¹⁹⁴ among the first to name its presenting symptoms was Michael Paul Gallagher. He spoke of an imminent general withdrawal from the Church as grounded in ‘the thesis of the three A’s’ – that is, the experience of ‘Alienation’, ‘Anger’, ‘Apathy’.¹⁹⁵ It is a thesis evidentially applicable to the experience named by the women’s dialogue. Their discourse is notable in its consistency of timbre and encounter. Each contributor is compelled to reconcile her personal sense of vocation against what she understands as a narrowing or a denial of the validity of that vocation. It is, moreover, a restriction perpetrated on them collectively by what they experience as a clericalist driven mindset and practice. Against that, while the experience of the ‘three A’s’ is unambiguously present, perhaps the most striking emotion evoked is a sense of hopelessness, that nothing substantive will change – this when we are advised that, in terms of the contemporary Irish Church, ‘hope is arguably the Christian virtue most needed in these times of adversity’.¹⁹⁶

The dialogue reads quintessentially as an engagement with First Reality. Thus, their attachment to Church is reciprocal to their ‘faith encounter’ with the Easter Story. It is from this encounter that they speak of ‘Kingdom’, ‘Resurrection’, ‘Vision’, ‘Christology’ and ‘Prophecy’ as the mark of that encounter. Significantly, in no instance is either their

¹⁸⁹ Angela Hanley, ‘Why I almost left... and why I stayed’, in *The Furrow* 55/2, (2004), 114-115 at 114.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Moya St Leger, ‘In Search of the Catholic Church’, in *The Furrow* 55/6, (2004), 370-371 at 371.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 370.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 24.

¹⁹⁵ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief*, 37.

¹⁹⁶ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 31.

experience, or their interpretation of it, linked proactively to their membership of Church as institution, or, indeed, as baptismal community. Rather, cherishing fidelity to the paschal dimension of the Easter story within their own journey, they remain conditionally attached to Church as the *quid pro quo* to the fulfilment of this journey. The compromise is to ‘disengage’ intellectually and emotionally from a structure of Church that, by implication, seemed to possess neither the capacity or willingness to address them in ‘an adult way’ or to respect their ‘intelligence’. That is, essentially, they are staying in spite of their experience of Church, not because of it.

Moreover, the circumstances attaching to the dialogue have important overtones regarding the ontology of Irish ecclesial life. Not least in this regard is that attempts to dismiss it as a form of isolated disenchantment, or atypical of contemporary Irish Catholicism, are refuted by reference to a broader spectrum of Church commentary.¹⁹⁷

4.3.3.2 Customer and Shopkeeper

Russell Shaw, onetime official spokesman of the United States Bishops’ Conference, has written extensively on ‘the evils of clericalism’.¹⁹⁸ By ‘clericalism’, Shaw writes,

I mean an elitist mindset, together with structures and patterns of behavior corresponding to it, which takes it for granted that clerics – in the Catholic context, mainly bishops and priests – are intrinsically superior to the other members of the Church and deserve automatic deference. Passivity and dependence are the laity’s lot.¹⁹⁹

He continues, crucially in the context of the Irish Church:

¹⁹⁷ Collectively, these commentators bear testimony to ‘the thesis of the three A’s’. See, for instance, regarding ‘Alienation’, Michael Router, ‘Welcoming Back the Alienated Catholics in Ireland’, in Niall Coll and Paschal Scallan, *A Church with a Future*, 74-86 at 81: ‘The limited availability of catechesis for adults in Ireland plays no small part in this lack of basic knowledge, and it could be seen as a major factor in the drift away from active involvement in the Church.’ Regarding ‘Apathy’ see Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 30: ‘The fact is that many people have already walked away from the Church and its influence. More are still there in body but their minds are somewhere else and soon they’ll be gone too.’ Regarding ‘Anger’ see Colum Kenny, ‘Where to Now? Contemplating a way forward for the Irish Church’, in *The Word*, 52/1 (2003), 9: Reflecting on those forsaking the religious sphere altogether, Kenny sees their decisions fuelled by a number of factors which include ‘the ostensible irrationality of certain doctrines, the scandalous lifestyles of some priests and the depressing nature of the Irish hierarchy.’ Moreover, ‘their departure appears to be a matter of complete indifference to the authorities of the Catholic Church, from which they have come to expect little more than overweening condescension or indifference, or even an arrogant snort of contempt’ (ibid).

¹⁹⁸ Richard John Neuhaus, ‘Clerical Scandal and the Scandal of Clericalism’, in *First Things*, March 2008/181, 57-60 at 57.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

By no means is clericalism confined to clerics themselves. The clericalist mindset is widely shared by Catholic lay people.²⁰⁰

Addressing this prevalence of clericalism within Irish Catholicism, Church commentator Sean O'Conaill joins a growing consensus identifying it as the root cause of the problems facing the Church in Ireland. Thus, canvassing for the diminution of the clericalist viewpoint as an ongoing influence in the Church, he names as the *sine qua non* of such adjustment the need for lay members of the Church to embrace fully their vocation to collaborative ministry. Moreover, establishing parameters within which this transformation must occur, he defines as the first and mandatory step the need for the Church in Ireland (especially laity) to put an end to the perception, and deferential treatment, of the ordained priest as Church 'grandee'.²⁰¹

Allied to this he characterises the *modus operandi* of Irish Catholicism as grounded in 'a church system that privileges clergy above laity, and leaves the latter with no clearly defined or dignified role (as laity)'.²⁰² The predictable (or perhaps preordained) consequence is a system that relates to lay people in the same manner, primarily, as 'needy clients' will relate to the professional expert (of the elite clerical caste), and not as recipients of the same gifts of the Holy Spirit.²⁰³ In that light, it is argued that the relationship between the clerical Church and people reflects significantly the relationship between 'customer and shopkeeper'.²⁰⁴ Moreover, the significance of this analogy is evidenced in the viewpoint of the Irish 'Catholic Monthly Newspaper' *Alive!* Addressing the concept of 'clericalism' in terms of the call to 'Church renewal', the publication offers the following assessment of the position of the lay vocation in the Church:

Lay people have many opportunities in daily life to witness to their faith and values – making the sign of the cross when passing a church, offering to pray for a person in distress, and so on. They need to avail of these opportunities.²⁰⁵

Notwithstanding the fact that such an unequal (expert-client) relationship inordinately misrepresents the relational dynamic pertaining between the priesthood of the baptised and that of the ordained, O'Conaill specifically denounces this display of clericalism on the basis

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Cf. Sean O'Conaill, 'Beyond Clericalism', in *Reality* 69/03 (2004). 9-11 at 11

²⁰² Ibid, 9.

²⁰³ Ibid, 10.

²⁰⁴ Jim O'Brien, 'The Church: Circles of Grace', *The Furrow*, March 2007, 138-144 at 138.

²⁰⁵ 'Church renewal must focus on right areas, in *Alive!*, 7, No. 162, December 2010.

that ‘it demands too much of clergy’, and, more significantly, ‘far too little of laity’.²⁰⁶ This reading gives voice to an evolving and influential consciousness within Irish theological scholarship – namely, the presence of a deeply felt sense of alienation among women and men in the Irish Church, one that is generated by ‘participation in destructive structures of thought and practice’.²⁰⁷

Further, defining as an ‘exasperating myth’ attempts to apply superhero status on the ‘Fr Tom’s’ of the Irish Church,²⁰⁸ O’Conaill reads it as a commentary on ‘a form of Church that is no more’ and ‘a form of parish ministry that is no more’,²⁰⁹ yet which the tradition and authority of expectation conspire to make present. It is, further, reminiscent of the ‘leave it to Father’ syndrome, which itself symbolises a collective resistance to an evolving collaborative model of Church. Addressing this conundrum in terms of ‘clerical condescension’, Paul Philibert holds that it appeals to and reinforces a passive clericalism on the part of the laity ‘who are used to being put down and quite unused to being reminded of or commissioned for an apostolic role’.²¹⁰

In that regard, to continue routinely a practice of linking ordained priesthood with an essentially unqualified control and power of veto over all aspects of parish life, or to defer *ex officio* to him in all essential matters of faith, acts as a fundamental barrier to the development of the Church.²¹¹ This is because the correlative of a Church that gratuitously prioritises ordination and office over baptism and charism is effectively training its laity to be ‘dependent, incompetent, intellectually lazy and childish’.²¹² This, O’Conaill holds, is the legacy of a clericalist dominated Church – ‘children who must never dare to grow up,

²⁰⁶ Sean O’Conaill, ‘Beyond Clericalism’, 10.

²⁰⁷ Linda Hogan, ‘Occupying a Precarious Position: Women in Culture and Church in Ireland’, in Dermot A. Lane (ed), *New Century New Society: Christian Perspectives* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2001). 140-148 at 143. The list of ‘influential thinkers and practitioners’ named within the Irish Theologate are Mary Condren, Katherine Zappone, Ann-Louise Gilligan, Ben Kimmerling, Anne Thurston, Enda McDonagh, Dermot Lane (Ibid).

²⁰⁸ See Gerard Moloney, ‘Church fails to react to shortage of priests’ (Rite and Reason), in *The Irish Times*, November 20th 2006. Fr Moloney depicts the quasi-fictional character of ‘Fr Tom’, and his increasingly despairing attempts to maintain his parish in the manner to which it is accustomed. He is the ever-dedicated parish priest working tirelessly in the area traditionally associated as his department – sacraments, devotions, schools, finances. However, his age and circumstance are conspiring to render his efforts ever more desperate and futile. The ‘circumstance’ is easily defined: that ‘over the past six years 10 Catholic priests have died for every one ordained. The result is ‘catastrophic.’ For the full article, see Appendix ‘C’, ‘Church fails to react to shortage of priests’, 347-348.

²⁰⁹ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 80.

²¹⁰ Paul Philibert, ‘Clericalism and the Liturgy’, in the *National Catholic Reporter*, April 5th, 2010

²¹¹ Sean O’Conaill, ‘Beyond Clericalism’, 10.

²¹² Ibid, 11.

especially in understanding and expressing their faith'.²¹³ It is, further, anathema regarding the vision of 'participation in the one priesthood of Christ',²¹⁴ for it is driven, not by any sense of baptismal identity, but by 'the priest's expectation that he both can, and must, be dominant'.²¹⁵ In that regard, the prevailing expression of Church remains clerical centred while the role of the non-ordained is an ingrained adherence to the legacy of the ecclesial and cultural history of Irish Catholicism, that of the passive recipient.²¹⁶ In this model of Church, faith is expressed in terms of privatised religious practice, is emphasised in terms of rubrical exactness, and functions in terms of the pathway to personal salvation.²¹⁷

Furthermore, and critical relative to the call to the new life named by the 40 Day encounter, it indicates a propensity to cling to a model of Church that is being called to a new form of expression. Thus, 'we continue to continue', allowing the good be the enemy of the best,²¹⁸ preferring a business as usual Church even in the face of becoming ignored as irrelevant.²¹⁹ It is, evidentially, an approach that is not without consequence:

Unless it is to be doomed to irrelevance, it will be impossible to do theology from now on in Ireland without taking into consideration the horrors revealed by the *Murphy* and *Ryan* reports. The very structures of our belief have been challenged forever. We need, in faith, to ask once again the question of who God in Christ is for us.²²⁰

It is in that context, and in advance of naming specific areas of new life present to the Irish Church, that it becomes prudent to reflect on the extent, if any, in which this sense of irrelevancy is being perpetuated. In that light, drawing precedence from the experience of Mary of Magdala (in attempting to cling to a redundant manifestation of the Spirit),²²¹ and analogy from the research of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (on an inability to accept a dying person's final stage, even when the person has moved to this stage),²²² we address the second of the 'obstacles which conflicts with the presence of hope' in the Irish Church.²²³ In pursuing this, the method is to reflect on the established mode and manner of the presence of

²¹³ Sean O'Conaill, 'Beyond Clericalism', 11.

²¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

²¹⁵ Sean O'Conaill, 'Beyond Clericalism', 11.

²¹⁶ Richard Lyng OSA, 'Theology in Ireland: Background and Prospects', in Niall Coll and Paschal Scallon, *A Church with a Future*, 153-165 at 164.

²¹⁷ Cf. Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 63, 80, 136.

²¹⁸ Neal Carlin, 'Ministry: No Clerical Preserve', *The Furrow* 57/2 (2006), 99-102 at 100.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Thomas R. Whelan, 'Church Leadership after *Murphy* and *Ryan*', in *Doctrine and Life* 60/4 (2010), 2-12 at 8.

²²¹ John 20:17. 'Do not cling to me'.

²²² Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 123-124.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 124.

the Spirit of the risen Jesus in the contemporary world, the experience intrinsic to the life of sacramental encounter.²²⁴

4.4. SACRAMENTAL ENCOUNTER

Tensions relative to differing priorities regarding the imaging of reality within Irish Catholicism underpin, to a significant degree, the debate surrounding approaches to sacramental ritual in the Irish Church.²²⁵ For many, the established practice regarding sacramental encounter is paradigmatic of the level of crisis within contemporary Irish Catholicism. In effect, this crisis reflects a dis-ease surrounding the teaching of Catholic beliefs as against the appropriation of these beliefs in a personal act of faith. Particularly, it draws attention to the manner and method of the sacramental initiation by the Church of its members. Addressing these tensions, this section will firstly outline the primary issues involved, and will then present a reading of these issues against the paradigm of the encounter of the 40 Days.

Commentators observe that sacramental ritual in Ireland is a practice often grounded in the worship of the gods of civil religion – an affirmation of the political, social, and economic *status quo*.²²⁶ As such this practice rejects any critique of who we are, and neither invites or challenges us to become more authentic.²²⁷ Moreover, such is the assumption in Ireland of admission to the Church and the sacraments, that questions regarding ‘disposition and commitment’ are essentially set aside to accommodate the ‘indifference and unresponsiveness’ of such cultural expectation.²²⁸ The consequence is the diminishment and neglect of the spiritual richness of the sacramental encounter in favour of ‘a haze of utilitarian thinking and shallowness’.²²⁹ From a sociological and theological perspective this points to

²²⁴ In that regard, see, for instance: Dermot A. Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 93-94; Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 49-50; Gerald O’Collins, *Christology*, 315-317.

²²⁵ This diversity ranges from the belief that ‘God embalmed faith in amber sometime around 1950 and there is no need for anything new ever to evolve’, Breda O’Brien, ‘Being a Catholic in Ireland Today’, *The Furrow* 57/4 (2006), 221-231 at 231; to an understanding that Irish Catholicism is ‘the religion of a practice rather than of belief, the skip of sheep over a non-existent hedge, which continues because long, long ago, generations before, there had indeed once been a hedge there’, Kevin Myers, *The Irish Times*, March 30th, 2004.

²²⁶ Cf. Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 61.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Niall Coll ‘Catechesis’, 128.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

a growing gap between what the Church understands by the sacraments and what more and more people in our increasingly secularised Irish society assume about them.²³⁰

Other views support and develop this perspective. For instance, Michael Drumm challenges the *modus operandi* of Church initiation. Reflecting on the tension between the principles of *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*, he argues that although traditionally Catholics have placed more significance on the former over the latter, ‘today many believers think that we need to review the balance between these two principles’.²³¹ His views are reciprocated by Niall Coll who, in the belief that the Church in Ireland is being challenged to renew its pastoral practice, holds that

An essential feature of this general process of renewal is the need to breathe fresh life into our appreciation of the sacraments. We must promote among Irish Catholics a more holistic understanding of sacraments as both perceptible signs for the common worship of God, and also as special moments of grace provided by Christ through which we encounter him.²³²

In this regard, Drumm continues, significantly, that ‘the sacraments presuppose and nourish faith; without it they are meaningless’.²³³ Developing this, he holds that an unhelpful factor in Ireland is the practice of sacramentalising without evangelising. Thus, ‘we baptise infants because they are infants and not because of any likelihood that they will be raised in the practice of the faith’.²³⁴ Moreover, it appears that the mindset behind the other sacraments of initiation is not dissimilar – children make their first Holy Communion because they are in second class, they make their Confirmation because they are in sixth class. To many it seems that in neither case is the question regarding the practice of the faith realistically addressed. In both cases, as with the sacrament of baptism, the suggestion of cultural conformism is strongly indicated.²³⁵

This practice raises questions regarding approaches to the sacraments of initiation. To some it appears that the sacred dimension has so diminished in priority and understanding that, notwithstanding the theological principle of *ex opere operato*, the sacraments are perceived, essentially, as an irrelevance to many. Further, to an ever more significant extent, sacramental

²³⁰ Ibid, 127.

²³¹ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 87.

²³² Niall Coll ‘Catechesis’, 128.

²³³ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 112.

²³⁴ Ibid, 113.

²³⁵ Cf. Ibid, 106.

preparation is undertaken by teachers who are often not believers themselves.²³⁶ Against that, countenance must be taken of the fact that the Catholic Church in Ireland is facing a grave crisis, ‘a crisis concerning the capacity of the sacramental life of the church as we know it to nourish the spiritual hunger of Christians today’.²³⁷ Thus, to continue unquestionably as always may serve only to undermine the true meaning of sacramental encounter.²³⁸ Further, bolstering an expression of Church drifting ‘rudderless’ through an ongoing storm, such continuance acts as ‘an obstacle to grace’.²³⁹ In this way the legacy of current church practice may be ‘to secularise the sacraments, rather than sacramentalising or evangelising the secular’.²⁴⁰

Commentators reflect on the apparent inconsistency of such an approach. For instance, drawing a distinction between the doctrinally grounded ‘official’ theology and the experientially sourced ‘operative’ theology, Joe Egan questions the extent to which the practice of sacramental life in Ireland is rooted (no matter how tenuously at times) in faith, and the extent to which such practice is ‘something entirely other’.²⁴¹

Central to this debate is the place and authority of contemporary culture on approaches to religious commitment. The movement of ‘culture’ to the centre ground of Irish life is seen as a recent development.²⁴² Yet, within the space of a generation it has succeeded in transforming the Irish landscape such that it is now bereft of the fundamental belief and value system by which it traditionally maintained itself.²⁴³ In response, the Church must open a dialogue between faith and life that can revitalise and re-present the understanding of faith as intrinsic to the human condition and not outside of it.²⁴⁴ In that regard, it requires the capacity to disengage from the ‘games of unreality’ that the Church is currently hosting,²⁴⁵ and to courageously and imaginatively move forward on the basis that ‘this humbler moment after

²³⁶ Joe Egan, ‘The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture’, in *Doctrine & Life*, January 2007 11-23 at 13, 17. Cf. also Niall Coll ‘Catechesis’, 133: Reflecting on a hardening in the position adopted by the Irish National Teachers Organisation regarding sacramental preparation Coll cautions that ‘It would be foolish to ignore such signals’.

²³⁷ Cf. Dermot A. Lane in ‘Foreword’ to Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 7

²³⁸ Cf. Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 81.

²³⁹ Owen O’Sullivan, ‘Is Ireland Heading for Islam?’, *The Furrow* 57/11 (2006), 602-608 at 605.

²⁴⁰ Niall Coll ‘Catechesis’, 128.

²⁴¹ Joe Egan, ‘The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture’, 18.

²⁴² Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 1, 2. Gallagher agrees that it can be traced to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of Marxism in 1989.

²⁴³ Brendan P. Delvin, ‘Faith and Culture in the Irish Context’, *The Furrow* 58/1 (2007), 3-13 at 6.

²⁴⁴ Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 165.

²⁴⁵ Owen O’Sullivan, ‘Is Ireland Heading for Islam?’, 606.

modernity is itself already a friendly moment for creative embodiment of the Christian vision'.²⁴⁶

Failure in this respect will ensure that the communication of the content of faith will be received and accepted at a superficial level only.²⁴⁷ This is abundantly reflected in the curious anomaly that marks the practice of sacramental initiation within Ireland – that, despite the collapse of the Catholic Church's cultural ascendancy, the preparation for admission to the sacraments is still largely confined within the primary school curriculum. That this is carried on with the general approval of the children's parents, notwithstanding the fact that their reference and commitment to church life beyond the classroom may be minimal at best, indicates that the collapse of the Catholic cultural heritage in Ireland may be somewhat overstated.²⁴⁸

In reference to the sacramental economy, Egan remarks that the seismic shift in culture has distorted what were authentic and good pastoral practices to the extent that 'the gap between the theological vision and the lived reality has begun to get progressively wider'.²⁴⁹ Thus, for instance, he questions the theological circumstances regarding the pastoral practice of baptising children at the request of parents who are obviously deficient of even a basic understanding of Catholic faith, let alone any commitment to it.²⁵⁰ Developing his thesis we are informed of the 'official' theology pertaining to the ritual:

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons [sic.] of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission.²⁵¹

Perhaps a comment from the secular dimension speaks eloquently of what is commonly the 'operative' theology:

²⁴⁶ Michael Paul Gallagher, 'Post-modernity, Friend or Foe' in Eoin G. Cassidy (ed) *Faith and Culture in the Irish Context*, 81.

²⁴⁷ Dermot Lane, 'Faith', 161.

²⁴⁸ Niall Coll 'Catechesis', 130.

²⁴⁹ Joe Egan, 'The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture', 19.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

²⁵¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 1213

The same people who exchanged rings while pretending to sign up to the rule of Rome will proceed to baptise their children into a belief system they don't adhere to...Baptism means a better choice of schools and, for them, that is the beginning and end of the argument. Being a believer doesn't come into it.²⁵²

Similarly, regarding the sacrament of Confirmation we are informed doctrinally that

By the sacrament of Confirmation they [the faithful] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are endowed with the special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed.²⁵³

Practice and experience indicates that the operative theology in many, and increasing, instances indicates that the only thing being confirmed is the perceived irrelevance of the Church. Even from a theological perspective, the prevailing approach to confirmation in Ireland renders it 'in many ways devoid of a convincing meaning'.²⁵⁴ Collectively, these point to the celebration of confirmation as *de facto* a rite of passage, 'a church leaving sacrament',²⁵⁵ or the 'sacrament of retirement'.²⁵⁶ And on it goes. A child celebrates first Eucharist even if they have no attachment to the Eucharistic community because 'first holy communion is a time for white dresses and miniature suits, nostalgia, family unity and hard cash'.²⁵⁷ Two people get married in church simply to avoid family tensions,²⁵⁸ and because culturally it is the more acceptable thing to do.²⁵⁹

Unsurprisingly, in terms of the theology of sacramental encounter it is an approach subject to critical analysis. In this respect, Bishop Bill Murphy reflects:

It is our faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, meets us in each sacrament to grace us with his love, to give us his life, to renew his Spirit in us. People who do not share this faith will consider the sacraments meaningless rituals and empty rites and should not receive them. To do so would be a lie, a charade, an abuse. It doesn't make any sense, for example, if a couple who are not believers ask for a Church Wedding ... We have to ask ourselves too if it makes any sense if parents who do not share the faith of the Church or parents who do not go to Mass present their children for the sacraments.²⁶⁰

²⁵² Róisín Ingle, 'Any Dogma Will Do', *The Irish Times*, November 11th 2002.

²⁵³ *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

²⁵⁴ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 47.

²⁵⁵ Joe Egan, 'The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture', 18.

²⁵⁶ John Littleton, 'Catholic Identity in the Irish Context', 31.

²⁵⁷ 'A grand earner: Communion day nets youngsters up to €1,000 each', in the *Irish Independent*, 22nd May 2004.

²⁵⁸ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 14.

²⁵⁹ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 85.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Homily of Bishop Bill Murphy, Chrism Mass, St. Mary's Cathedral, Killarney, Tuesday, 6th April 2004.

For many, the practice Bishop Murphy addresses is one marked by dishonesty, farce, ignorance, shame, embarrassment.²⁶¹ Moreover, it is a form of ritualism that belittles the nature of sacrament, that demoralises the minister of the sacrament (as well as many in the broader faith community), and corroborates the participants perception of sacrament – that in matters of faith, tokenism will do.²⁶² By way of response, commentators reflect that ‘nature at times seemed to have triumphed over grace’,²⁶³ that Church structure and practice breeds infantilism in regard to faith,²⁶⁴ and that it reinforces the ‘religious anaemia’ relative to the tensions between official theology and operative theology.²⁶⁵ Concisely, it demonstrates that the current *modus operandi* of Irish Catholicism is untenable.²⁶⁶

4.4.1 Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story

Grounded in the experience of the 40 Days encounter we are reminded that the choice facing the Irish Church is either to cling to a reality that is no more, or to embrace a different expression of Church that has been called to life. In that light, and cognizant of questions arising from this outline of sacramental practice, certain imperatives follow:

- a) there is a need to establish a sense of credibility regarding that practice;
- b) it is imperative within that to reclaim publicly the inherent sacredness of the ritual of sacramental encounter.

A point of departure is to acknowledge that, to a significant degree, ‘we are already telling again the story of Christian faith to a generation as if for the first time’.²⁶⁷ It is to acknowledge a decisive factor pervading the lived experience of Catholicism – that people ‘don’t and won’t know the story’, because they have become disconnected from ‘the tribal memory of their religion’.²⁶⁸ Thus, we recall that ‘the language used and the reality

²⁶¹ Owen O’Sullivan, ‘Is Ireland Heading for Islam?’, 605.

²⁶² *Ibid*, 606.

²⁶³ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 92.

²⁶⁴ Owen O’Sullivan, ‘Is Ireland Heading for Islam?’, 607. See also Colum Kenny, ‘Where to Now? Contemplating a way forward for the Irish Church’, 10: Kenny corroborates this assertion by reflecting that ‘hiding from reality as infantilised members of a closed institution was for too long an acceptable form of Catholicism on this island’.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 132.

²⁶⁶ Niall Coll ‘Catechesis’, 131.

²⁶⁷ Herbert O’Driscoll, *The View from The Hill of Mars*, Hastings Memorial Lecture, College of Preachers, Washington National Cathedral, Washington D.C., 1998, 8.

²⁶⁸ William J. Bausch, *Brave New Church* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2001), 46.

experienced do not correspond'.²⁶⁹ Moreover, we are reminded that Teilhard de Chardin, once asked why so many sincere and good persons did not believe in God, responded that 'they must not have heard of God in the correct way'.²⁷⁰ Therefore, given the task of reclaiming the sacred dimension within sacramental encounter, it is correlatively, and equally, the task of retelling the story at the heart of our tradition. That story, 'the greatest of all Christian stories', recounts the journey of the paschal mystery.²⁷¹ On that basis, and drawing perspective from the initial experience with the Risen Lord named by the 40 Days, elements inherent to the story are indicated.

4.4.1.1 Redundant Expectation

Central to the encounter with the Easter story is the experience that the presence of the Risen Lord is not to validate the expectation of the other. This is borne out by a number of incidents. For instance, there is the anticipation of the women who come to the tomb looking for the body, and, contrary to expectation, find instead a void: 'You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified...he is not here' (Mk 16:6). There is the conjecturally rooted post-crucifixion abandonment of discipleship by some, and, contrary to expectation, an encounter with the One they had presumed lost: 'it is the Lord' (Jn 21:7). There is the grief-stricken desolation of Mary Magdalene at the tomb and, contrary to expectation, the experience of being caught up in 'the language of love'²⁷² with the Risen One: 'Rabbuni!' (Jn 20:16).

Applying that to the Irish context it is evident that the experience of sacramental ritual cannot be seen to validate redundant expectation. For example, where, irrespective of catechetical disposition, the expectation regarding sacramental initiation effectively amounts to knowing the date and the time of the ceremony, and where the motivation is driven culturally by tradition, and aspirationally by educational opportunities, the call for it to be challenged is indicated. The universal experience of the 40 Days encounter, that 'he is not what they have thought him to be', issues in the need to 'learn' about Jesus 'afresh, as if from the beginning'.²⁷³ Moreover, 'the purpose of the liturgy of the Church is not to placate people's

²⁶⁹ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 18.

²⁷⁰ Quoted in Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, preface.

²⁷¹ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 21, 20.

²⁷² Bruce Vawter, 'The Gospel According to John', in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 463.

²⁷³ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2002), 75.

desires or fears, but to hear and receive the living Jesus'.²⁷⁴ Thus, as the Samaritan woman was led by Jesus to a broader vision – 'If you only knew' (Jn 4:10) – so too, if we approach the sacraments in search of the 'God of our condition', we shall not find him.²⁷⁵

4.4.1.2 Call to Awareness

This experience underscores a fundamental element in the encounter with the Easter story, namely that Jesus as risen is a Jesus who cannot be restricted within the parameters of a past human life. Neither can he be 'painlessly assimilated into our own memories'.²⁷⁶ This is exemplified in the encounter between the risen Lord and Cleopas (Lk 24:13-35). We recall that the nature of the journey to Emmaus indicates that Cleopas, and his companion, had abandoned the way of Jesus because he had *not met* their expectations. In this, Cleopas possesses a memory of Jesus as the one who had given fresh impetus to the liberation struggle in Israel, an impetus that had been violently crushed.²⁷⁷ The temptation, however, to look retrospectively on Jesus in terms of the gallant but ultimately failed hero is not to be the way in which Jesus' followers speak of him. To that end, Cleopas has been made aware of the unsettling and confusing absence of a body (Lk 24:22-24). The challenge facing him is to journey from redundant expectation to the recognition of Presence – it is to recognise that the Lordship of Jesus is not constructed from a recollection but experienced in the encounter. It thus marks the journey from the hope-less despair of unbelief (Lk 24:17) to the hope-filled elation of belief (Lk 24:32), from expectation to encounter.

Applying that to the Irish context it is evident that the experience of sacramental ritual must clearly and catechetically reflect that 'the Lordship of Jesus is not constructed from a recollection but experienced in the encounter'. As such, the manner in which we celebrate the sacramental encounter must be seen to have value to the Church, for we are reminded that

The Church is not 'founded' by Jesus of Nazareth as an institution to preserve the recollection of his deeds and words; it is the community of those who meet him as risen and the place where all the world may meet him as risen.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 71.

²⁷⁵ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection*, 71.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid* 72.

²⁷⁷ 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel' (Lk 24:21).

²⁷⁸ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection*, 74.

In that regard, celebrating the rite of sacramental encounter as a moment of evangelisation, it should allow dialogue between the Easter story and the symbol to bear fruit. Thus:

One might hear the word 'baptism', and think immediately of water. One might hear the word 'confirmation', and think immediately of oil. One might hear the word 'eucharist', and think immediately of bread and wine ... [But] when one hears the word 'baptism', one should think of Jesus; when one hears the word 'confirmation', one should think of Jesus; when one hears the word 'eucharist', one should think of Jesus, and so on.²⁷⁹

4.4.1.3 Encounter with a 'Stranger'

This draws attention to another of the prevailing elements of the Easter story: that the post-Resurrection encounter with Jesus began as an encounter with 'a stranger'.²⁸⁰ We recall that through all the resurrection stories there runs the idea that those who saw Jesus did not recognise him.²⁸¹ Accordingly, we are cautioned against interpreting the risen Christ as a projection of the faith structure of a believing community. Rather, we should see that it is in Jesus the faith community discovers its sense of identity and continuity.²⁸² Definitively, 'Jesus is alive, he is there to be encountered again'.²⁸³

Applying that to the Irish context it is evident that the experience of sacramental ritual should not be entered upon on the basis that the presence of the risen Christ automatically bestows an *imprimatur* on the Church's approach to the encounter. Again drawing reference from the pattern of revelation attached to the 40 Days, and recognising in that how the initiative of encounter rests with the Lord,²⁸⁴ we see how it is an experience that issues in a changed pattern of approach for those who are present to the Lord.²⁸⁵ In that light, we recall that

there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁹ Kenan Osborne, *Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 76.

²⁸⁰ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection*, 75.

²⁸¹ For example, Lk 24:16, 37; Jn 20:25; Mk 16:11, 13, 14.

²⁸² Rowan Williams, *Resurrection*, 75.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51: See the pattern of encounter (2).

²⁸⁵ Thus, 'at these words [it is the Lord] Simon Peter ... jumped into the water' (Jn 21:7); the two disciples on their way to Emmaus 'immediately set out and returned to Jerusalem' (Lk 24:33); Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord' (Jn 20:18).

²⁸⁶ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritas*, on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission, (Vatican Press, 2004), 84.

Therefore, while the efficacious presence of sacramental encounter is certain *ex opere operato*, a ritualistic manifestation of the encounter (grounded in a presumed familiarity) that encourages silence and passivity (and boredom) cannot be seen as the norm in liturgy.²⁸⁷ Contextually what is required is to create a sense of belonging, shared responsibility, and active participation.²⁸⁸ Concisely, ‘we need to re-awaken our theological imagination so as to mediate the divine in ways that are ever ancient and ever new’.²⁸⁹

4.4.1.4 Oculata Fide

This call to dialogue prompts another element of the Easter story, one that is central and essential. This points to the capacity to see through the eyes of faith as fundamental to the reception of the story, a principle reflected throughout the experience of encounter.²⁹⁰ In that context we recall that sense experience alone is not sufficient to recognise the presence of the risen Christ – rather, through the insights of revelation, the call to Easter faith is essential.²⁹¹ Further, cognisant that the ‘axis of Christian faith’ opens us to the sacramental presence of Christ, we are reminded that ‘the faith of a later generation of Christians is not different in *kind* from the faith of the apostles on Easter day’.²⁹² Thus, again, we understand that access to God’s ‘historically irreversible and historically tangible offer of Himself’ is now intrinsically bound up with abiding faith in Jesus.²⁹³

In that light, Pope John Paul II, reflecting on ‘the face which the Apostles contemplated after the Resurrection’ holds that,

²⁸⁷ Cf. Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 17. Indeed, in terms of the 40 Day template of encounter, such a disposition acts as anathema in Christian experience. See, for instance, Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2010), Introduction. Mullins, outlining a portrait of encounter with the Lord, holds that it is marked by the experience of his ‘benevolence, care, compassion and forgiveness’, that there is a focus on ‘prayer, praise and joy’, an abiding concern for ‘the poor, the outcast and the marginalised.’

²⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 65.

²⁹⁰ For instance, on the road to Emmaus the disciples recognise Jesus only after their hearts had been opened through the breaking of word and bread (Lk 24:30-32). At the sea of Tiberius, it is only ‘the disciple Jesus loved’ (Jn 21:7) who is able to recognise the presence of the risen Jesus. Again, only in the calling of her by name is Mary of Magdala set free to respond in faith recognition (Jn 20:16).

²⁹¹ We again draw perspective from the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their experience demonstrates that the ability to recite a series of credal facts regarding Jesus (Lk 24:19-20), even when complemented by validating experiential and evidential witness (22-24), is not in itself sufficient in creating the sight of faith.

²⁹² Rowan Williams, *Resurrection*, 94.

²⁹³ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 330.

regardless of how much his body was seen or touched, *only faith could fully enter the mystery of that face.*²⁹⁴

Concluding his argument he reveals that,

Only the faith proclaimed by Peter, and with him by the Church in every age, truly goes to the heart, and touches the depth of the mystery: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Mt 16:16*).²⁹⁵

Applying that to the Irish context it is evident that the experience of sacramental ritual should have at its core the importance of seeing in faith. Indeed, 'Christian initiation is meaningless without faith. In fact it is scandalous to celebrate the three sacraments in anything but a faith context'.²⁹⁶ Finding perspective in the initial experience of the 40 Days we recall how the disciples laboured fruitlessly until acknowledgement of the Lord's presence was established (*Jn 21:3*), and, similarly, how the disciples conversed fruitlessly because they exclude the one subject that makes sense of their 'condition', the experience of the resurrection event (*Lk 24:31-32*). Against that, we understand that the manner in which we receive the sacraments *ex opere operantis*, 'determines the fruitfulness of the sacraments'.²⁹⁷ In that light, sacramental practice presents a serious pastoral conundrum in that opinions differ regarding the conditions, if any, by which restrictions limiting access to sacramental encounter might be sanctioned.²⁹⁸ Again, while any sense of exclusion is exposed to the claim of pastoral transgression, we recall from the 40 Days that to join the Church will mean 'to share in the faith and joy of those who have seen and heard and touched the Word present among them'.²⁹⁹

Further, to the extent that there is religion in the postmodern world, it is grounded in the principle of *ex opere operantis*, that is, in the theology of individual charism. The implication is that an unqualified adherence to the principle of *ex opere operato* over that of *ex opere operantis* is deficient against prevailing Irish cultural practice, detrimental to the pastoral practice of the Church in Ireland, and serves to impede the development of Christian identity in its members.

²⁹⁴ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 19.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 62. Cf. also Dermot A. Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 113: 'The underlying supposition of each sacrament is faith and the basic characteristic of this faith is trust in the liberating Spirit released through the death and resurrection of Christ'.

²⁹⁷ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 86 [my italics].

²⁹⁸ Cf. Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A sacramental People*, 15.

²⁹⁹ Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 32.

4.5 GRIEVE FOR WHAT HAS DIED

When the child was alive, I fasted and wept because I kept thinking, "Who knows? Perhaps Yahweh will take pity on me and the child will live." But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? (2 Sam 12:22-23)

So it is that King David, sensing a mood of scandal among his entourage that he had not properly mourned the death of his son, speaks paschal words – colloquially, ‘when the child was alive I fasted and prayed, but now that he has died, I must move on to create new life’. It echoes the mandate named by the experience of Mary of Magdala on the first Easter morning – the paschal imperative to let go of what is gone and to embrace the new life and the new spirit that is present. The premise underpinning this chapter has been that this call to new life is addressed in a particular way to the contemporary event of Irish Catholicism. In that context, it is rooted in Rolheiser’s directive regarding the task of the 40 Days,³⁰⁰ specifically, the need ‘to grieve for what has died’, and its corollary, the mandate to name our deaths.³⁰¹

As such, the task has been, firstly, to acknowledge the changed circumstances applying to the Church in Ireland, cognisant that, to speak of such change within the context of naming our deaths, is to acknowledge the absence which marks the ‘longing for something that is gone’.³⁰² Further, however, it is to acknowledge that there can be ‘no true belonging without the embrace of loss’.³⁰³ In that light, the associated task of this chapter has been to name resistances in identifying such loss in the life of the Irish Church. Again, categorising these resistances in terms of an unhealthy attachment to a clericalist mindset, and questionable approaches to Sacramental encounter, we draw further perspective from our analogy *On Death and Dying*.³⁰⁴ Thus, what needs to be communicated is affirmation of the dying person appropriate to their stage in the dying process, essentially ‘that the important things have been taken care of and he is where he should be – and reassurance that he is not alone, that he has not been abandoned’.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 143, To grieve for what has died and to adjust to the new reality.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, 139.

³⁰² John O’Donoghue, *Eternal Echoes: Exploring our Hunger to Belong*, 339. In turn, this requires a capacity to recognise the reality and magnitude of the loss, (Frances Macnab, *Life after Loss: Getting over Grief, Getting on with Life*, (Newtown: Millennium Books, 1989), 68), and to not avoid the sadness of the loss (Bruce Pierce, *Miscarriage & Stillbirth*, 67).

³⁰³ John O’Donoghue, *Eternal Echoes*, 340.

³⁰⁴ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 100.

Concisely, in that regard, the task for the Catholic Church in Ireland is to engage faithfully in the pattern of Easter encounter.³⁰⁶ This is because, against the symbolic import of the 40 Days, we reflect that ‘we can now believe that out of death comes life, darkness yields to light, and self-surrender leads to transformation’.³⁰⁷ Ultimately, however, as the Irish Church seeks its own approaches to the retelling of the Easter story, we recall the assurance of the Lord to those charged with a mission that demands a continually renewed decision for him – ‘I am with you always, to the end of time’ (Mt 28:20).³⁰⁸ Thus,

The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity ... This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication.³⁰⁹

From this assurance, ‘we must gain *new impetus in Christian living*, making it the force which inspires our journey of faith’.³¹⁰ In that light, we move to discuss the *new impetus* that Rolheiser places at the heart of the 40 Days paradigm – the adjustment required to ‘receive the new spirit for the ecclesial life we are in fact already living’, what he names as the mandate to ‘adjust to the new reality’ – and, colloquially, the task to ‘claim our births’.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

³⁰⁷ Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive*, 113-114.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Chapter V

Adjusting to the New Reality

The task to 'claim our births'

5.1 CLAIM YOUR BIRTHS (New Life)

Consistent with the directive outlined in Rolheiser's thesis of the 40 Days, 'grieve what you have lost and adjust to the new reality',¹ this chapter addresses specifically the second element of this directive, the need to 'adjust to the new reality'. Encompassing the paschal journey from death to new life it will reflect on what Rolheiser outlines as the basis of readjustment, the need to 'claim your births'.²

In that light, the predominating focus of this chapter will be on the capacity of the Irish Church to both acknowledge and embrace opportunities of new life, essentially its capacity to claim the new forms of life through which the Holy Spirit is manifest today. As such, this section will reflect on opportunities of new life present to the current generation of Irish Catholicism. It will, further, assess the ability of the Church to embrace this life, and obstacles that act as resistances in that regard. Our point of departure is the event of the Second Vatican Council, '*the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings*'.³

5.1.1 New Life – A 'New Pentecost' in the Church

Pope John XXIII spoke of Vatican Council II as a 'new Pentecost' in the Church.⁴ Marking the tenth anniversary of the closing of the Council, Pope Paul VI spoke of 'creating within a Church still more firmly rooted in the undying power and strength of

¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 143.

² Ibid, 139.

³ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57.

⁴ Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 239.

Pentecost a new period of evangelization'.⁵ Similarly, Pope John Paul II reflected that 'the Church after Vatican II in a renewed outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost has come to a more lively awareness of her missionary nature'.⁶ Thus, counting on 'the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost' we are impelled still today 'to start out anew'.⁷ Moreover, finding equivalence and inspiration in the missionary mandate and zeal of the early Church, our pathway is signposted. Thus,

the Risen Christ asks us to meet him as it were once more in the Upper Room where, on the evening of "the first day of the week" (*Jn* 20:19) he appeared to his disciples in order to "breathe" on them his life-giving Spirit and launch them on the great adventure of proclaiming the Gospel.⁸

Reflecting on this call to go forth once more from the upper room, commentators point to the imperative nature of that mandate when applied to the Irish context. For instance, Donal Harrington reflects that 'growing numbers of baptised people are in need, not of catechesis, but of re-evangelisation'.⁹ Indeed, the need is to recognise that 'for growing numbers of people there is little or no contact between their spiritual hunger and the gospel of Jesus Christ'.¹⁰ Further, the 'unintelligibility' of the Christian vocabulary, aligned with an incomprehension in regard to religious belief, obliges the contemporary Irish Church 'to visualize a radical re-evangelisation'.¹¹ Concisely, Ireland is 'a mission country in need of evangelisation' and to the extent that this remains unacknowledged and unaddressed by the Church authorities, so attempts at pastoral initiatives are rendered ineffective.¹²

Furthermore, the designation of this period in the Church as 'the new Pentecost' draws us into the task of the 40 Days, which, as we recall, is to manage an ascension.¹³ In that regard, and drawing reference from the experience of the initial encounter of the forty

⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 2

⁶ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 2.

⁷ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Brendan P. Delvin, 'Faith and Culture in the Irish Context', 5.

¹² Joe Egan, 'The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture', 17.

¹³ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 143.

days, it is possible to name elements integral to the journey to ascension. This in turn benchmarks the capacity of the Church in Ireland to embrace the ‘new Pentecost’ – to embrace the reality that it is in fact already living and so to receive its Spirit – as inexorably linked to its capacity to embrace what is essential in the journey to ascension. This journey, grounded in the 40 Days encounter, is outlined as follows:

- It is a time marked by transformation.¹⁴
- It is rooted in the need for adjustment.¹⁵
- It is manifestly a call to conversion.¹⁶
- It represents a formation in identity and in mission.¹⁷
- It involves an issue of choice.¹⁸

Integrating these as the essential elements of the journey to Ascension, Rolheiser defines the task of the forty days as the ability to honour the process of accepting death and embracing life. Conversely, failure in that regard blocks our ability to experience Ascension and Pentecost – effectively, it is to choose to live out of a reality that is no more.¹⁹ It is not a choice without consequence or precedence. The experience of Mary Magdalene shows that attempts to cling to a redundant relationship with the manifestation of the Spirit succeeds only in frustrating the journey from the darkness of grief to the joy of Easter. Effectively, ‘by clinging to what once was we cannot recognise God’s presence within a new reality’.²⁰

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 214. Cf. also Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138: a transformation within which we ‘are given both new life and new spirit’.

¹⁵ Cf. Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138. Also Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225. Ratzinger compares the level of adjustment required of the disciples as equivalent to the demolishing of a house in order that ‘they could see the sky again and him who remains the infinitely greater’.

¹⁶ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52, 53. The conversion that is required, while rooted in the elements of ‘sameness’ and ‘continuity’ (ibid), is expressed in terms of ‘change, difference, newness, and transformation’ (ibid, 48).

¹⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg,, *The Church in the New Testament*, 12: ‘The band of Jesus’ disciples assembled (again) after Easter and, on the basis of divinely effected events of Jesus’ resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit, formed itself into Christ’s community’.

¹⁸ Cf. Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 151. It is quintessentially, Rolheiser argues, the issue of choice faced by Mary of Magdala on Easter morning – whether to cling to a reality that is no more, or to accept from Jesus her commission as the *apostola apostolorum*.

¹⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 152.

²⁰ Ibid.

Evidentially, therefore, the challenge for the Irish Church is to acknowledge and claim the new life within which it ‘lives, and moves, and exists’ (cf. Ac 17:28), and so embrace the ‘new Pentecost’. Echoing this position, and offering, essentially, a synoptic reading of the task of the forty days, Christopher O’Donnell holds that for Irish Catholicism, ‘the only way forward lies in conversion, in a change of understanding, of vision and of behaviour’.²¹

In that regard, however, we have recognised some hesitation within Irish Catholicism to move towards this position. For instance, while the Church has demonstrated an impressive degree of logistical precision regarding the implementation of Vatican Conciliar and post-Conciliar decrees, it has equally reflected a deficiency in an appreciation of, and aspiration towards, the *raison d’être* of these teachings – an embrace of the spirit within which they are suffused. Michael Drumm establishes a benchmark against which perspective may be drawn. Reflecting on the new language inherent in the post-Conciliar mindset, he contrasts it with the dominant mindset of pre-Conciliar expression.²²

Pre-Vatican II

Clerical centered
Sacraments received
Passivity of recipient
Rubric and law
Priest is another Christ
Other-worldly
Church centred
Seven sacraments

Post Vatican II

Community
sacraments celebrated
faith of participant
word and symbol
a community in the Spirit
this-worldly
Christ centred
sacramentality of all life.

Drawing on that template, while acknowledging that we have unquestionably changed the terminology, Drumm questions whether ‘very much else has happened’.²³ Indeed, regarding the task facing the Irish Church on its journey towards Ascension (to claim the new life within which it lives, and moves, and exists – illustrated by the ‘Post Vatican II’

²¹ Christopher O’Donnell, ‘Love of the Church’, in Niall Coll and Paschal Scallon, *A Church with a Future: Challenges to Irish Catholicism Today* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2005), 61-73 at 69.

²² Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 18.

²³ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 101.

column), he speculates that ‘matters have ended up worse than they were in that the new language is used but the old reality persists’.²⁴ If his thesis is correct, and, similarly, if Rolheiser’s reading of the task is correct (the need to adjust to the new reality), it suggests that the incentive to cling to the old life (cf. Jn 20:17) is proving very attractive and, apparently, indispensable. Meantime,

Jesus is constantly replacing the old with the new in our Easter Readings, yet “no change” is the public face of Irish Catholicism. Sanctity equals static because God is permanent!²⁵

Against that, and mindful that ‘the Church must be very much aware of acting as a living, pliant instrument of the Holy Spirit’,²⁶ the repercussions relative to its receptiveness of a ‘new Pentecost’ are significant and fundamental. That is, we remember that, as ‘the head of the church’,²⁷ the Holy Spirit is moving with the Irish Church in a period of profound transition ‘through the necessary lamentation to a new phase of life and love’.²⁸ It is a journey suffused with elements intrinsic of the call to ascension – transformation, adjustment, conversion, formation, choice. Moreover, the capacity of the Church to engage with this process of dying and rising cannot be understood as ‘some kind of optional extra to Christian faith’.²⁹ Rather, it involves the movement of ‘decentring the self in order to recentre the self in Christ’.³⁰ Fundamental to this movement is the knowledge that ‘superficial touch-up jobs are not enough’.³¹ That is, it calls for a reconfiguration of the religious imagination such that, empowered in a new way of interpreting life and experience, and mirroring the encounter of the first disciples, we too may be ‘filled with unspeakable joy [and] experience his living and glorious presence’.³²

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jerry Joyce, ‘Irish Church – Stale or New’, in *NCPI News Bulletin*, Summer 2001, 10.

²⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, on Catechesis in our time (Rome, Vatican Press, 1979), 72.

²⁷ William J Bausch, *The Parish of the Next Millennium*, 152.

²⁸ Enda McDonagh, *Faith in Fragments*, 32.

²⁹ Dermot Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive*, 114. Cf. also Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 5: ‘for the presentation of the Gospel message is not an optional contribution for the Church’.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Brendan Leahy, ‘People, Synod and Upper Room’ 56.

³² John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 18.

Contextually, and referencing the significance of the Second Vatican Council for the Irish Church, Vincent Twomey holds that until this movement in the Church is one with ‘the letter *and* the spirit of the council, the Catholic Church faces a rather bleak future’.³³ In that light, it is apparent that the energy driving ecclesiological expression in Ireland – driving its words and actions and structures – must be malleable to the call of the Holy Spirit, and not act in resistance to it. Against that, Ghislain Lafont offers a critical reading. Reflecting on the ‘ambiguities and uncertainties’ attaching to the presentation of Vatican II on the Church, he speculates whether

they do not arise out of a certain lack of appreciation and failure to stress the gift par excellence which Jesus gave to his Church after the resurrection – the Holy Spirit.³⁴

Again, perspective can be drawn from the experience of the 40 Days. There we recognise that resistance to the call of the Spirit serves to impede the mission of Christian proclamation.

For instance, the Easter message is first announced to the faithful women of the Christian entourage (Mk 16:7). However, despite the angelic directive – to go to Galilee and ‘see him there just as he told you’ – the effect of the message is dominated by fear and, thus, evangelical paralysis (Mk 16:8).³⁵ Similarly, in the revelation of the Easter message and mission to Mary of Magdala she is cautioned against resisting change for such results only in ‘holding back the Risen One’ (Jn 20:17).³⁶ Further, the disciples on the road to Emmaus walk in ignorance until, convinced of the victory of Christ, they are empowered to recommit to the journey of Christian faith (Lk 24:13-35). Not unrelated, we are advised that the Easter message, revealed in the hope of Vatican II, ‘died’ in Ireland through ‘a lack of courage and imagination, and a dogged, determined, fear-driven (and successful) resistance to change’.³⁷ Again, therefore, we note that superficial touch-up

³³ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 60.

³⁴ Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church*, 103.

³⁵ See Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005), 446: an experience of ‘fear’ which, throughout Mark’s Gospel, had been presented as the opposite of ‘faith’.

³⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 250.

³⁷ Owen O’Sullivan, ‘Is Ireland heading for Islam?’, 605.

jobs – ‘to fiddle with a few liturgical changes and playing at having Pastoral Councils’,³⁸ falls well short of the scale of change required in the Irish context. The situation demands, rather, a paradigm shift in theological consciousness in order that, grounded in a ‘new imagination for faith’, a reconstruction of Christian faith relevant to the place of the Church in contemporary Ireland may occur.³⁹ In that light, the call to embrace the life of the ‘new Pentecost’ acts as ‘the summons to the *new evangelization*’.⁴⁰ Accordingly,

we can count on the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost and who impels us still today to start out anew, sustained by the hope "which does not disappoint" (*Rom 5:5*).⁴¹

Thus empowered, the mission of the Church is to communicate the life of God.⁴² More specifically, the task of the Catholic Church in modern Ireland is to replace ‘a yawning chasm in the national soul’ with a renewed articulation of ‘God’s faith in us’.⁴³ Further, this is not the task of the few but the responsibility of all the members of the People of God.⁴⁴ As such, it marks a renewed appreciation of the baptismal vocation of all as ‘Sharers in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly Mission of Jesus Christ’.⁴⁵ In that way, it compels the Church in Ireland, conscious of the need to adjust to the new reality, to claim this renewed understanding as a new form of life – a new life grounded in the collegiality of discipleship, and manifest in the call to collaborative ministry.

³⁸ Neal Carlin, ‘Ministry: No Clerical Preserve’, 100.

³⁹ Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 169.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 58.

⁴² Brendan Leahy, ‘People, Synod and Upper Room’, 54.

⁴³ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 60.

⁴⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 14.

5.1.2 New Life – The Call to Collaborative Discipleship

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Cf. Is 43:18-19)

Grounded in the belief that the Irish Church is moving through ‘the dying process’ to ‘a new resurrection’,⁴⁶ a ‘new thing’ being called to prominence in its parochial and diocesan life is the summons to collaborative discipleship.⁴⁷ This is a concept grounded in the vision of parishioners sharing in (equal) responsibility with the presbyter for the care and future of their parish.⁴⁸ Drawing on his experience within the Irish Church Loughlan Sofield presents the essence of collaboration in terms of ‘gift, ministry, mission’.⁴⁹ That is,

- i. it begins with an identification of the gifts of each member of the community;
- ii. it explores the reasons why the gifts are not being used;
- iii. it attempts to weave the gifts of all into the one tapestry of collaboration.

5.1.2.1 Gift

In the first place, for Sofield the identification of gifts stems from a sharing in the life of the risen Christ who possesses the Spirit and now assigns it to his disciples. Further,

The Holy Spirit, while bestowing diverse ministries in Church communion, enriches it still further with particular gifts or promptings of grace, called *charisms*... [Thus] the *discernment of charisms* is always necessary... [for] “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7).⁵⁰

In the Irish context the manifestation of these charisms have been identified as including,

⁴⁶ Loughlan Sofield, ‘Collaborative Ministry – an urgent development’, *The Furrow* 57/9 (2006), 455-462 at 456.

⁴⁷ Donal Harrington, ‘Collaborative Ministry: from Vision to Reality’, 11.

⁴⁸ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 102.

⁴⁹ Loughlan Sofield, ‘Collaborative Ministry – an urgent development’, 457.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 24.

- Parishes blessed with adults who are literate and articulate in areas such as theology, catechesis, liturgy, and prayer guidance.⁵¹
- The presence of pastoral development and renewal in dioceses and parishes throughout Ireland.
- The large numbers of women and men, especially young people, studying theology in Ireland today.⁵²
- The prophetic activities of the justice desk of the Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI).⁵³
- A vibrant post-primary religion teachers association.⁵⁴
- New movements in the Church⁵⁵

Moreover, Michael Drumm, reflecting on the gifts of the Christian Community as ‘almost innumerable’, outlines some of them:⁵⁶

Consoling the bereaved,	Healing the sick,
Comforting the lonely,	Encouraging the downcast,
Embracing poverty,	Reaching out to the addicted,
Being celibate,	Counselling,
Praying,	Leading,
Teaching,	Believing,
Hoping,	Loving

Further, Joe Egan talks of ‘the incomparable resources’ at our disposal that can be utilised for the empowerment of Christian ministry.⁵⁷ Thus, for instance, he references the ‘new communications technologies’, holding that these can act for young people especially as an antidote to the ‘boring and unimaginative’ experiences of traditional

⁵¹ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 40.

⁵² Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 160.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ E.g., *Charismatic Renewal, Focolare, Cursillo, Communion & Liberation*, L’Arche, St Egidio: Cf. Brendan Leahy, ‘Charism & Institution – a new ecclesial maturity’, *The Furrow* 50/5 (1999), 278-285.

⁵⁶ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 101.

⁵⁷ Joe Egan, ‘The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture’, 19.

approaches to faith encounter. His views echo those of Pope John Paul II who holds that ‘the world of the mass media represents a new frontier for the mission of the Church’.⁵⁸ Moreover, the Holy Father recognises ‘in particular, the lay faithful’s responsibility as professionals in this field’.⁵⁹ This again finds resonance with Egan who, pointing to readily available professional expertise within the Church in ‘every sphere of life’, holds such standards as the *sine quo non* of fruitful dialogue with the cultural demands of today.⁶⁰

In a further delineation Pope John Paul references a charism particularly applicable to the evolving Irish context. He nominates the ‘gift of older people’ as ‘specifically that of being the witness to tradition in the faith both in the Church and in society (cf. *Ps* 44: 2; *Ex* 12:26-27)’.⁶¹ Indeed,

this period [of life] provides real possibilities for better evaluating the past, for knowing and living more deeply the Paschal Mystery, for becoming an example in the Church for the whole People of God.⁶²

5.1.2.2 Ministry

In the second place, echoing Sofield’s template, Donal Harrington theorises why the call to collaboration is resisted within the Irish Church.⁶³ Drawing on that, we first outline the nature of this resistance and then read it against the initial experience of the 40 Days.

Harrington posits that the capacity to embrace ‘the promise of new life’ symbolised by collaborative discipleship demands the ability to hope. Indeed, grounded in the axis of

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 44.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Joe Egan, ‘The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture’, 19.

⁶¹ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 48.

⁶² *Ibid.* 48. Pope John Paul sees the charism of vocation as embracing the entire age spectrum. Thus for example: Children are ‘a continual reminder that the missionary fruitfulness of the Church has its life-giving basis not in human means and merits, but in the absolute gratuitous gift of God’. Further, ‘Children as living members of the family, contribute in their own way to the sanctification of their parents’ (*ibid.*, 47); Youth make up ‘an exceptional potential and a *great challenge for the future of the Church*. In fact the Church sees her path towards the future in the youth, beholding in them a reflection of herself and her call to that blessed youthfulness which she constantly enjoys as a result of Christ’s Spirit (*ibid.*, 46).

⁶³ Donal Harrington, ‘Collaborative Ministry: from Vision to Reality’, 11.

Christian faith, our ability to experience ‘our transcendental hope in resurrection’ acts as a point of contact with the life of the early Church.⁶⁴ To ‘hope’, however, is a concept largely alien to the tradition of Irish Catholicism. That is, the Church in Ireland has not known hope, but, rather, success (in its ability to ‘keep things ticking over’).⁶⁵ Thus, in these changed times, the Irish Church finds itself in the position of having to learn how to hope, of learning to assert the ‘sense of possibility in every situation’.⁶⁶

Further, the widespread experience of traditional Irish Catholicism, rooted in a ‘provided-for’ church where the clergy did everything, has conditioned a mindset inhospitable to collaboration.⁶⁷ This view is corroborated by Neal Carlin who, addressing the problem in terms of ‘co-dependent laity’, holds that they know of ‘no other concept of being *ecclesia*’.⁶⁸ Accordingly, a combination of role expectation and conditioning significantly negates the capacity of the non-ordained to ‘exercise their new-found freedom as privileged members of the priesthood of Jesus Christ’.⁶⁹

Thirdly, a culture of complacency in parish and diocesan life, expressed in a contentment with the way things are, militates against innovation and serves to reinforce the status quo. This is often bolstered by an understanding of religion as a personal affair, grounded in a privatised ‘me and Jesus’ mindset.⁷⁰ In that light, the ‘smothering effect’ of such complacency tends to dominate when urgency and change are needed.⁷¹

Addressing further the context of collaborative discipleship, Harrington, commenting on a prevailing mindset within the Irish Church, identifies this mindset as a significant

⁶⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 275.

⁶⁵ Donal Harrington, ‘Collaborative Ministry: from Vision to Reality’, 11. See further, Speaking notes of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, ‘Keeping The Show On The Road: Is this the future of the Irish Catholic Church?’ at Cambridge Group for Irish Studies, Magdalene College, Cambridge, 22nd February 2011 [http://www.dublindiocese.ie/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2293&Itemid=372 accessed March 2011]. Archbishop Martin, addressing ‘the future of the Irish Catholic Church’, outlines the comments one priest during a consultation process, namely, “The most we can do today is to keep the show on the road”.

⁶⁶ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 31.

⁶⁷ Donal Harrington, ‘Collaborative Ministry: from Vision to Reality’, 13.

⁶⁸ Neal Carlin, ‘Ministry: No Clerical Preserve’, 101.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 135.

⁷¹ Donal Harrington, ‘Collaborative Ministry: from Vision to Reality’, 13.

barrier to the fulfilment of the baptismal vocation of the universal priesthood. Grounding his thesis on the directive of Jesus to call on ‘the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do his harvesting’ (Lk 10:2), he posits that the way this divine mandate is interpreted and acted upon ‘has the effect of obscuring the theme of collaboration’.⁷² It is a mandate, he contends, that is commonly interpreted in a minimalist way, as an entreaty of vocations to the ordained priesthood only.⁷³ Yet, not only does a consideration of the text refute this interpretation, it points to an opposite reading as a valid interpretation – ‘the twelve have already been called; this is about a further dimension of ministry!’⁷⁴ It is a thesis supported in the belief that ‘the call of the Lord Jesus "You go into my vineyard too" ... is addressed to every person who comes into this world’.⁷⁵

It is, moreover, a reading of the mandate that has broader repercussions. Given the propensity to utilise the text as an encouragement for vocations to the presbyterate only, and reading the ‘signs of the times’ as a benchmark for the status of such invocation,⁷⁶ it suggests that ‘we are asking in the wrong place’.⁷⁷ In that regard, to the extent that there is ‘a crisis in vocations’, it lies in our approach to, and promotion of, the charism of vocation. Furthermore, this reading is consistent with the evolution of an ecclesiology rooted in the mandate of the Second Vatican Council:

The fact that the movements almost have to *contain* the vocations to which they give birth, while the traditional institutes are hard pressed to find new members, explodes the idea that there is a “crisis of vocations.” The truth is that there is no crisis of vocations, if by vocation we mean a response to the charismatic call of the Spirit.⁷⁸

It is in this context that our deliberations on the influence of a clericalist mindset are re-echoed, here acting as a resistance to collaborative discipleship within the Church.⁷⁹ Not

⁷² Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 106.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 2.

⁷⁶ Cf. Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 106. What Harrington describes as ‘a poor response’.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Antonio Maria Sicari, ‘Ecclesial Movements: A New Framework for Ancient Charisms’, in *Communio* 29 (Summer 2002), 286-308 at 296.

⁷⁹ See Seán McNulty, ‘The Culture of Clericalism’, *The Furrow* 57/6 (2006), 363-366. Optimistic that ‘the time is coming when the Holy Spirit may get a better reception than in the recent past and present’ (366),

unrelated, Paul Fleming confines the needs regarding the call to collaboration to two. It is firstly the continuing challenge to make all the baptised more aware of their responsibilities ‘as equal sharers in the life and mission of the church’.⁸⁰ Secondly, there is the ongoing challenge for Church authorities to recognise the gifts given in the sacrament of baptism and to set in place structures which will facilitate the baptised in exercising their ministry.⁸¹

Again, it is observed that, despite the ambiguous nature of the term ‘lay people’,⁸² it is found that when they and presbyters gather together in collaboration, ‘the level of energy rises dramatically and there is an excitement that exudes hope’.⁸³ This bears witness to the reciprocal dimension relative to the common priesthood and the ordained priesthood – namely that, ‘the more the laity’s own sense of vocation is deepened, the more what is proper to the priest stands out’.⁸⁴ Somewhat prophetically, therefore, locating the inspiration for collaborative discipleship in the conciliar vision of Vatican II, it is observed that ‘much of the energy and excitement of that time has died down and with it a lot of the impetus for change’.⁸⁵ Further, drawing reference in that context particularly to the Irish Church, the loss in ‘life and dynamism’ is caused by the reform movement having become ‘the total possession of the institution which is itself in need of reform’.⁸⁶

Naming this call to collaborative discipleship as an example of new life present to the Irish Church, the resistances to that call find equivalence in the experience of the initial encounter of the 40 Days. Drawing on von Balthasar’s reading of that experience we recall that the mark of the encounter is a new relational dynamic operative between Jesus

McNulty reproaches the ‘organisational culture of clericalism’ in Ireland as ‘proving ruinous’ for the structures within which collaboration might take root (365).

⁸⁰ Paul Fleming, ‘Baptism: An Equal Share in the life and Ministry of the Church’, in Niall Coll and Paschal Scallan (eds), *A Church with a Future*, 30-43 at 43.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cf. Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 114-124: ‘Laity’ is an unfortunate term in that it defines the baptismal vocation of those who share in the universal priesthood, but not the presbyterate, in terms of what they are not. The connotation of being in the ‘lay state’ is of being unqualified and unprofessional regarding ecclesial life, and essentially, therefore, occupying the role of passive recipients of church services.

⁸³ Loughlan Sofield, ‘Collaborative Ministry – an urgent development’, 456.

⁸⁴ Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 3.

⁸⁵ Benedict Hegarty, ‘Inspiration and Institution’, *Doctrine and Life* 49/1 (1999), 34-42 at 36.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

and his followers,⁸⁷ and the 40 Days symbolise within that a coming to awareness, through training and transformation, of this changed dynamic.⁸⁸ We recall further that von Balthasar presents this renewal in terms of the conversion experience of the apostles, demonstrated in the Copernican-like transformation of their lifeless faith into one of pure paschal joy.⁸⁹ This, in turn, demanded a redrawing of the disciples' perception of the Easter event in terms of their encounter with the Risen One.⁹⁰ Applying that reading to the contemporary Irish context, we find parallels in the experience of the 40 Days.

Thus, the resistance marked by 'an inability to hope', recalls the circumstances of the apostles locked in the upper room dispirited by events, paralysed by fear, and devoid of hope (cf. Jn 20:19). The resistance inherent in 'a mindset inhospitable to collaboration' is reflected in the lack of a positive response to the revelation of encounter with the Lord (Mk 16:13, Jn 20:25). Similarly, the resistance demonstrated by 'a culture of complacency' finds resonance in Ratzinger's reflection on the task facing the disciples on the road to Emmaus, namely, the death of the image they had formed of the promise of God, 'so that he could live on a bigger scale'.⁹¹ Likewise, the resistance named by a narrow interpretation of the 'dimension of ministry',⁹² is suggested by the refusal to act on the testimony and mission of the woman, Mary of Magdala (Mk 16:11), a resistance 'severely' denounced by the Lord for its 'incredulity and obstinacy' (Mk 16:14). In all of this we are reminded of the elements intrinsic to the journey and task of the 40 Days – that it is a time marked by transformation, adjustment, conversion, formation, choice.

5.1.2.3 Mission

The third element named by Sofield is 'mission'. It has been well rehearsed how Vatican Council II reworked the preliminary draft of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church so that the fundamental importance of the entire people of God, the *Christifideles*, became

⁸⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 214.

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225.

⁹² See above on commission of 'the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do his harvesting'.

paramount for all Christian ministry.⁹³ In that regard it had moved from an initial emphasis on clericalism and juridicalism to the importance of understanding the role which all the baptised share by the very fact of being part of the people of God.⁹⁴ This renewed emphasis decreed that it is baptism, not just holy orders, which is fundamental in the Church.⁹⁵ In so doing the Council finds inspiration in the account of discipleship and ministry in the early Church. In that regard, Paul identifies ministry as something in which all share through being gifted by the Spirit:

There are many different gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all. ... But at work in all of these is the one and the same Spirit, distributing them at will to each individual (1 Cor 12:4-6, 11).

Drawing on this template, the Council's teaching on the use of charisms and the effect of baptism presents it as a service to the gospel, public in nature and focused on building up the kingdom of God – a mandate identified with the embryonic church and the 'last will and testament' of Jesus to his chosen followers.⁹⁶

Moreover, recalling how the pattern of encounter in the 40 Days concluded always by a form of missioning from Jesus,⁹⁷ the requirement to 'weave the gifts of all into the one tapestry of collaboration' is acknowledged as imperative and essential. Particularly, regarding the circumstances of Irish Catholicism, the Church cannot spend more time discussing the value and necessity of collaboration – 'there is an urgency right now'.⁹⁸ In that regard, we are informed that 'this call for the active participation of all the faithful in

⁹³ Cf. William J. Bausch, *The Total Parish Manual* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 20.

⁹⁴ Cf. Hans Küng, *The Church: The 'People of God'* is a phrase which in a sense echoes the whole spirit and direction of Vatican II. It is a biblical term and effectively underlines the continuity between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament Church. Küng reports how, from the earliest times, those gathering in the name of the risen Jesus took upon themselves the great title of the Old Testament, *Kahal Yahweh*, the 'Community of God', from which is derived 'ecclesia', and the corresponding 'Church' (Ibid, 81). Further, he argues that 'the undeniable fact that the New Testament itself always uses the same word "ekklesia" where we would say 'congregation', 'community', or 'church', should warn us against trying to invent contrasts here' (ibid, 84).

⁹⁵ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 116.

⁹⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 199.

⁹⁷ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52. See pattern of encounter (5).

⁹⁸ Loughlan Sofield, 'Collaborative Ministry – an urgent development', 461.

the mission of the Church has not been unheard'.⁹⁹ Indeed, it is witnessed, among other ways, 'in the new manner of active collaboration among priests, religious and the lay faithful'.¹⁰⁰

A sense of hesitancy, however, attaches to an unreserved endorsement of such instruction. This reticence finds rationale in the impression that a strong motivating factor driving the need for *Instruction* is not merely to provide a 'clear, authoritative response' to questions raised by 'cases of new forms of "pastoral activity" of the non-ordained',¹⁰¹ but also, implicitly at least, to act in the preservation of 'the clerical caste system'.¹⁰² Doubtless, a contributory factor driving this interpretation is the extensive reception of Church declarations as 'ill-timed, poorly expressed, harsh or irrelevant'.¹⁰³ Certainly, notwithstanding the validity of its teaching, the *Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priest* might be interpreted in that light. In that context, acting as an indicator of the mentality of the Vatican on lay issues, the *Instruction* is regarded as 'seriously disturbing'.¹⁰⁴

Spoken of in terms of 'ecclesiastical apartheid',¹⁰⁵ the *Instruction* presents as a forceful declaration of that which is 'unlawful',¹⁰⁶ 'forbidden',¹⁰⁷ 'prohibited',¹⁰⁸ and those who

⁹⁹ John Paul II, *Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priest*, (Signed by the heads of eight principal Vatican offices of Church governance (dicasteries), and approved by Pope John Paul II *in forma specifica*. Promulgation Vatican City, 15 August 1997), Premiss. [henceforth, 'Instruction']

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Specifically, 'by active participation in the Liturgy; in the proclamation of the Word of God and catechesis; in the multiplicity of services and tasks entrusted to the lay faithful and fulfilled by them; by the flourishing of groups, associations and spiritual movements as well as by lay commitment to the life of the Church and in the fuller and meaningful participation of women in the development of society" '.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Neal Carlin, 'Ministry: No Clerical Preserve', 102: Carlin uses the term as commonly applied to the sacral model of priesthood – one that is institutionalised, hierarchical, conditioned to being 'in control'. Cf. also, William J Bausch, *Brave New Church*, 178: the purpose of the *Instruction* is 'to check the blurring of roles'; Cf. also Paul Fleming, 'Baptism: An Equal Share in the life and Ministry of the Church', 39: Fleming questions the translation of the *Instruction* from the original Italian, holding that the English version contains alterations, without reason given or authority acknowledged.

¹⁰³ Christopher O'Donnell, 'Love of the Church', 62.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2003), 129.

¹⁰⁵ Editorial, 'A Rebuff to the Catholic laity', *The Tablet*, 22nd November, 1997, 1491.

¹⁰⁶ *Instruction*, Article 6, § 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, Article 7, § 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

‘may not’.¹⁰⁹ Moreover ‘exclusion’¹¹⁰ is practised on the basis of ‘that function which is reserved to [the sacred minister] in virtue of having received the Sacrament of Holy Orders’.¹¹¹ Some, however, have intimated an apparent inconsistency in its teaching. For instance, reflecting on the parameters within which the term ‘ministry’ may be validly applied to the vocation of the lay faithful, Paul Fleming points to seemingly different emphases in that regard. Thus, an intimation of uneasiness within sections of the Magisterium about the term ‘ministry’ being used in an unqualified sense when applied to lay participation in the life of the church,¹¹² is countered by the fact that it has been used specifically as such in Conciliar and papal documents.¹¹³ Further, the preference among some in the Magisterium to refer instead to the ‘lay apostolate’ is itself incongruous in that it conveys the role of the lay vocation as subsidiary to tasks assigned to them by bishops.¹¹⁴ Yet,

the laity share in the mission of the church in their own right by virtue of their baptism – not by dint of performing tasks delegated to them by bishops or anyone else.¹¹⁵

Moreover, Oonagh O’Brien, reflecting on developments in the theology of Lay Ministry, inspired by Vatican Council II, references the context of the debate at the Council:

The use of the term ministry, for the activity of lay people, did not cause any controversy or discussion among the members of the Council. It is accepted that servers, lectors, commentators and choir members exercise liturgical ministry (SC29). Ministry is also applied to musicians (SC112) and artists (SC122). Later in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) the laity are said to share in the ministry of the word and sacraments (AA6).¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, Article 3, § 2; Article 6, § 2; Article 6, § 2; Article 13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, Article 3, § 1.

¹¹¹ Ibid, Article 3, § 2.

¹¹² Paul Fleming, ‘Baptism: An Equal Share in the life and Ministry of the Church’, 41.

¹¹³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 32 (drawing on 1 Cor. 12, 11): ‘This very diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one, because “all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit”.’ Also John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 23: ‘Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their *foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation*.’ See also Oonagh O’Brien, ‘The Theology of Lay Ministry: “Developments” Since Vatican II’, in the *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 72 (2007) 88–95 at 89: referencing Elissa Rinere, O’Brien points out that in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the term ‘ministry’ is used 19 times, in four different senses, to refer to lay activity.

¹¹⁴ Paul Fleming, ‘Baptism: An Equal Share in the life and Ministry of the Church’, 41.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Oonagh O’Brien, ‘The Theology of Lay Ministry: “Developments” Since Vatican II’, in the *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 72 (2007) 88–95 at 89. Further, referencing *Christifideles Laici*, O’Brien outlines that the document does allow the term ‘ministry’ as a description of lay activity. However, it distinguishes

Within the liturgical setting also this sense of inconsistency is encountered. There is the anomaly of nominating those who proclaim the scriptures for the community as ‘Ministers of the Word’, yet those who distribute the Eucharist among the community have the appendage ‘extraordinary’ added to their designation as ‘Ministers of the Eucharist’ – despite the belief that ‘it is the same Christ who is present in the word and the Eucharistic species’.¹¹⁷ Where the depiction ‘extraordinary’ might reasonably be applied, however, is in relation to the *Instruction* referencing ‘The Apostolate to the Sick’.¹¹⁸ In that regard while acknowledging, ‘in this area, the non-ordained faithful can often provide valuable collaboration’,¹¹⁹ it references where the non-ordained faithful particularly assist the sick – ‘by helping them to have the disposition to make a good individual confession as well as to prepare them to receive the Anointing of the Sick’.¹²⁰

Moreover, while the *Instruction* talks of giving ‘priority to the promotion of vocations to the Sacrament of Holy Orders’,¹²¹

it must be noted with great satisfaction that in many Particular Churches the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the pastoral ministry of the clergy has developed in a very positive fashion. It has borne an abundance of good fruits ... [and indeed] has also brought about bounteous and tangible results in situations of a shortage or scarcity of sacred ministers.¹²²

Inspired by the belief that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ (Qo 1:9) these sentiments have precedence in the self-revealing prophecy of David – ‘You are the man!’ (2 S 12:7). Thus, among God’s people there exists extraordinary depths of faith, unexplored reserves of commitment and energy, and unacknowledged gifts for leadership in a whole range of parish activities.¹²³ In the Irish context, experience has shown that ‘there is enough’, indeed ‘there is more than enough’.¹²⁴ The charisms are present in abundance; it is the

the source of these ministries, basing lay ministry in baptism and confirmation and ordained ministry in holy orders (ibid, 92).

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 42. Fleming references *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, Chapter 2, Article 33.

¹¹⁸ Instruction, Article 9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, Article 9, § 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, Conclusion.

¹²² Ibid. Premiss.

¹²³ Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 107.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 108.

task of a priestly community to affirm them, to harness them and to challenge those that have been so gifted to put their gifts at the service of the Christian community.¹²⁵ It is to recognise the potential within the body of the Irish Church that has lain largely dormant and remains untapped.¹²⁶ Moreover, as an issue, it finds precedence in the initial experience of the encounter of the 40 Days – that is, it is ‘chiefly a matter of wanting to notice’.¹²⁷ In that regard, the empowerment of the non-ordained in collaborative discipleship is dependent not on a reconstitution of their status within the People of God, for the ‘ministry which all the baptised share is theirs by right’,¹²⁸ but rather points towards the need for ‘a paradigm shift in the concept of priesthood’.¹²⁹

In all of this, however, some cautionary guidance from Pope John Paul alerts us to a foundational principle of Christian praxis:

There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace.¹³⁰

Accordingly, ‘we must resist this temptation by trying "to be" before trying "to do"’.¹³¹ Again, this is fundamental to the experience of the encounter of the 40 Days. We recall how the disciples’ meeting with the risen Jesus was not arbitrary but focused – it represented for them a time of formation in identity and in mission, a time of being immersed in the Easter story.¹³² Thus, again drawing inference from the experience of the

¹²⁵ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 101.

¹²⁶ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism*, 12.

¹²⁷ Cf. Tad Dunne, ‘Experience’, 367. We recall that a constant in the initial experience of resurrection encounter is the inability to recognise the presence of the Risen Lord (see, for example, Mt 28:17; Mk 16:13; Lk 24:16; Jn 21:4). In that regard, Tad Dunne, addressing the experience of religious encounter, holds that we will never experience what we contrive to exclude from our experiential awareness. Thus, all experience, including that of the conscious love of God ‘is chiefly a matter of wanting to notice’. Not unrelated, Paul Lakeland (addressing the *Instruction*) holds that ‘The document completely fails to recognize that we live in a new ecclesial situation’ (Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity*, 129).

¹²⁸ Paul Fleming, ‘Baptism: An Equal Share in the life and Ministry of the Church’, 42.

¹²⁹ Neal Carlin, ‘Ministry: No Clerical Preserve’, 101.

¹³⁰ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 38

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 15.

¹³² Cf. John L. McKenzie, ‘The Gospel According to Matthew’, (43:25), 68: This call to identity formation, and grounding life principle, draws parallels with the 40 Days of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:1-11). The symbolic character of that narrative is evident; ‘the temptations and Jesus’ answers define the true character of his Messianic mission’. Further, the phrase ‘forty days’ suggests the 40 years of Israel in the desert. The desert sojourn was a time of temptation and failure for Israel; now Jesus, the new Israel, is likewise

disciples in the 40 Days, we recall how their attempts to act in the absence of the Lord proved unproductive (Lk 24:13-24; Jn 21:3). Similarly, 'our witness ... would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first *contemplated his face*'.¹³³ In that light, the task at hand is 'a rediscovery of the "Upper Room" aspect of the Church', as the pathway to spiritual conversion and renewal.¹³⁴ This draws us again to the task of embracing new life and adjusting to the new reality – it is to recognise that 'we are in the midst of an explosive spiritual upsurge',¹³⁵ and a renewed search for the sacred.

5.1.3 New Life – The Search for the Sacred

We are cognisant that contemporary society is 'losing its faith in no faith',¹³⁶ that a 'widespread desire for spiritual nourishment' points to a new awareness among many, 'even if in a confused way, of not being able to live by bread alone'.¹³⁷ Effectively, they are making again the request made to the Apostle Philip, 'We wish to see Jesus' (Jn 12:21). Accordingly, 'Like those pilgrims of two thousand years ago, the men and women of our own day — often perhaps unconsciously — ask believers not only to "speak" of Christ, but in a certain sense to "show" him to them'.¹³⁸ This draws us into the very heart of the 40 Days within the Paschal Mystery, showing the hour of darkness is followed by a new, radiant and definitive dawn, 'the Nazarene victorious over death'.¹³⁹ As such it points to 'the empty tomb', 'the cycle of apparitions', the journey from bewilderment to 'unspeakable joy', the experience of 'his living and glorious presence', the reception of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22) and 'the command to proclaim the Gospel to "all nations" (Mt 28:19)'.¹⁴⁰

tempted in the desert (ibid). Moreover, in Matthew's reading of the temptation narrative, the challenge comes not to Jesus but to the Church, which carries on his mission (ibid, 43:26).

¹³³ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 16.

¹³⁴ Brendan Leahy, 'People, Synod and Upper Room', 66.

¹³⁵ Pat Collins, *The Broken Image*, 107.

¹³⁶ Cormac Murphy O'Connor, 'A time to show the way', *The Tablet*, 26th August, 2006, 12.

¹³⁷ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 68.

¹³⁸ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 16.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 18.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Grounded in the experience of ‘cultural desolation and restless amnesia’,¹⁴¹ people are looking for new options. The postmodern tide has brought disillusionment not only with the institutional expression of religion but also with its secular alternatives. Thus,

We are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization¹⁴²

Prophetically, given the Church’s ‘responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel’,¹⁴³ this cultural upheaval has not gone unacknowledged. For instance, the times in which we live are described by the *Pontifical Council for Culture* as ‘reminiscent of the Areopagus in Athens’ (cf. Ac 17:19-32).¹⁴⁴ The Council further acknowledges that ‘people are searching once again for spirituality in a whole variety of ways’, and that what may be classified ‘under the polysemous heading of sects...succeed quite clearly because they respond to frustrated aspirations’.¹⁴⁵ In that regard, the very presence of the New Age spiritual phenomenon represents ‘the most powerful critique and indictment of our faith that exists’,¹⁴⁶ its very existence an indication of a spiritual vacuum present in mainline Christianity.¹⁴⁷ Marked by a quest for belonging, a search for wholeness, a need of vision, spiritual guidance, and the pursuit of transcendence,¹⁴⁸ the New Age occurrence means that we, as Church, ‘have treasures that we are not using’.¹⁴⁹ In that light, ‘one of the challenges the Church must take up is that of getting through to people affected by sects, or in danger of it, in order to proclaim to them the message of salvation in Jesus Christ’.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘Post-modernity, Friend or Foe’, 80.

¹⁴² *Redemptoris Missio*, 38.

¹⁴³ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Pontifical Council for Culture, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture* (Vatican City, 1999), 24.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ William J Bausch, *The Parish of the Next Millennium*, 171.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* As an adjunctive to this a significant development is occurring – a conscious separation between the concept of ‘religion’ and that of ‘spirituality’ (*ibid.*). This is done on the basis of the perceived failure of organised religion to satisfy people’s spiritual hunger. The upshot is this – religion has been traded in for spirituality (Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 33).

¹⁴⁸ Cormac Murphy O’Connor, ‘A time to show the way’, 13.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Pontifical Council for Culture, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, 24.

5.1.3.1 A Post-modernity of Christian making

Michael Paul Gallagher suggests an alternative approach. Agreeing that the advent of the postmodern project reopens avenues of conversation regarding relationship, community, and ‘the ultimate goals of life’,¹⁵¹ he sees it as conducive to a creative embodiment of the Christian vision.¹⁵² The task is to engage contemporary culture with a post-modernity of our own Christian making. This calls for an ‘energetic seizing of the moment’,¹⁵³ a proactive movement towards defining the Christian message as credible and relevant to the Ireland of today.

In that respect, and in the context of addressing the secular humanist ‘religion’ pervasive in Western culture,¹⁵⁴ Dominican scholar Aidan Nichols offers an important reading. He identifies the basic nature of contemporary Western society as, definitively, ‘progressive, secular and pluralistic’.¹⁵⁵ It is a position and an agenda which, in his view, is inspired variously by the need to celebrate the faculty of reason alone, to liberate the status of the individual, and to repudiate ‘traditional duties as repressive’.¹⁵⁶ It is, moreover, a position that acts in opposition to the aspiration of Christian apologia. In that light, reflecting on the ‘imaginative constraints’ created by secularisation,¹⁵⁷ Nichols outlines elements attaching to the advance of a secularist ideology, which, in effecting the desacralisation of civilisation,¹⁵⁸ ‘tends to drag down the Church to its own level’.¹⁵⁹ Thus, in his reading, the process of secularisation, has, variously:

¹⁵¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 110.

¹⁵² Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘Post-modernity, Friend or Foe’ 81.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake: On Re-energising the Church in Culture*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999), 81. Nichols holds that secularism is now, in what were once Christian nations, the civil religion.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake*, 82.

¹⁵⁹ Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake*, 82.

- Engendered a culture where human beings suffer from a reduced sense of self, and search endlessly for an elusive fulfilment.¹⁶⁰
- Established a ‘new class’ which has lost, to a significant degree, any sense of community. This development acts, further, in pursuit of, and in compliance with, the ‘one supreme value’ – an unlimited freedom of choice, and (therefore) an impatience ‘with the constraints involved in marital and familial ties’.¹⁶¹
- Rendered ‘a large chunk of a culturally transmitted human basis for prayer and contemplation’ as, effectively, inaccessible.¹⁶²

Furthermore, this reading is underscored by the belief that the force of secularism has been underestimated, and that ‘the latent power of a Christian imagination’ has been left untapped – this at a time when strategies for countering the influence of secularism’s subversion should have been formulated.¹⁶³ Indeed, Nichols intimates a certain complicity by the Church in this development holding that its performance falls ‘lamentably short’ of its aspirations.¹⁶⁴ In that regard, outlining a way forward, he proposes a focused approach:

We should not be looking primarily for ‘inculturation’, where the faith so easily disappears into cultural dialogue, nor for ‘acculturation’, where the Church remains basically external to the cultures in which she acts. Instead, we ought to be looking at ... Christ the saving transformer of culture.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 2. Nichols further identifies a ‘new materialism’ among a group of militantly atheistic scientific writers – Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, Peter Atkins – which conspires to offers ‘a reductionist account’ of what it is to be human (ibid, 13).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid, 205. He continues that, in terms of members of the Church, ‘we are not speaking – by definition – of a loss of faith, but of the deprivation of what is in a Christian culture the humus or compost which nourishes faith in its normal development’ (ibid). In that context, ‘A culture may be insufficiently open to transcendence, and thus inhibit the expression of theology’s ultimate Reference as well as Source’ (ibid, 12).

¹⁶³ Ibid, xi.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Nichols further outlines that, ‘The results of a non-dogmatic Catholicism, horizontalist in mentality and concerned chiefly to participate with others in the building of the human city, have been ... disastrous for the missionary, catechetical and liturgical enterprises which fall under the first commandment, love of God’ (ibid, 6).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 16.

This will require the recovery of clarity and coherence on the part of the Church as a necessary precondition for its exertion of moral and spiritual leadership.¹⁶⁶ Essentially, Nichols holds, the task of the Church is to ensure the doctrinal and spiritual formation of its adherents, to proclaim the reign of Christ throughout all areas of human living, and to renew those values, human and supernatural, which belong to Christian civilisation. It is in this context that Nichols, in the course of his analysis, singularly identifies the Republic of Ireland as an instructive example of where the Church must engage more authentically with the language and viewpoint of culture.¹⁶⁷ Specifically, he holds that the Church should disavow the term ‘pluralism’, in its colloquial assertion,¹⁶⁸ and instead represent it as a euphemism for the neutralisation of the Church’s ‘spiritual and magisterial gifts’.¹⁶⁹

Responding to the ‘ontological oblivion’ engendered by an ‘hostility to the *logos* among that loose family of *savants* called postmodernists’,¹⁷⁰ Nichols draws a linkage between the ‘malaise and anomie’ of modern society, and the rationale compelling Christian proclamation in that context.¹⁷¹ Addressing the dominant model of cultural expression as a form of ‘radical pluralism’, he opines that it will result only in the disintegration of society. This is because it fails to acknowledge two related truths:¹⁷²

- i. Humanity’s pursuit of ‘goalseeking’ consists in ‘finding where the divinely given goal lies, rather than in fixing what it is to be’.
- ii. Humanity cannot pursue any particular goal which is not also, implicitly, ‘the pursuit of a wider goal – in the last analysis, that of the whole society’.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 82.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Essentially, an egalitarian concept, generically understood as the mutual coexistence of distinct cultural, ethnic, or religious groups within a single society, and particularly applying to the protection of civil liberties.

¹⁶⁹ Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake*, 82. Nichols explains that such an approach ‘is not to seek the Church’s self-aggrandisement’, but, rather, ‘to provide a source of help for society and State in consolidating their ability to fulfil the tasks for which they were (through the creation of the human species) made’ (ibid).

¹⁷⁰ Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake*, 13.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁷² Cf. Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake*, 3.

Developing this analysis, and holding that ‘society cannot recognise such ends until it has been (re)converted to the saving truth of the Judaeo-Christian revelation’,¹⁷³ Nichols proposes a Trinitarian paradigm for a more authentic engagement of culture with that revelation:

1. A culture should be conscious of transcendence as its true origin and goal. This can be called ‘culture’s tacit “paterological” dimension, its implicit reference to the Father’.¹⁷⁴
2. The forms which a culture employs should manifest integrity, clarity and harmony. Moreover, ‘since these qualities are appropriated in classical theology to the divine Son, the “Art” of God and splendour of the Father, we can call such qualities of beautiful form the specifically Christological aspects of culture’.¹⁷⁵
3. The spirituality and ‘health-giving character’ of the moral ethos of Christian culture ‘yields up culture’s pneumatological dimension, its relation to the Holy Spirit’.¹⁷⁶

In this way, Nichols holds, it is in the Holy Trinity that we find a key to the wider need of humanity’s global culture – the need to fuse ‘the universal and the particular ... the One and the Many’.¹⁷⁷

5.1.3.2 A Renewed Imagination

In a similar vein, John Paul II, outlines that, the Christian message while ‘it is the same as ever’, must be adapted to ‘the circumstances of each community’.¹⁷⁸ As we have seen, this calls for a reconfiguration of the religious imagination,¹⁷⁹ and, in that, reference to the experience of the encounter of the forty days:

¹⁷³ Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 16.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 16-17.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 17. Nichols invokes here the Pentecost Sequence Hymn *Veni Sancte Spiritus: Sine tuo numine, nihil est in homine, nihil est innoxium*. (Without your spirit, nothing is in man, nothing that is harmless).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29.

¹⁷⁹ Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 169.

the appearances were effective because they adapted to the imagination, understanding, and sense experience of the disciples in a manner that facilitated the revelation of the risen Christ.¹⁸⁰

Similarly we remember the teaching of Joseph Ratzinger who, in the context of the forty days, demonstrated how the disciples' image of God – or more particularly the image they had formed of his promise – 'had to die so that he could live on a bigger scale'.¹⁸¹

Further, cognisant that 'invasive cultural influences can kidnap our imagination' the creation of a Christian ecology of the imagination is imperative.¹⁸² A challenge central to this task has been outlined:

This is the core issue: How does mainstream conciliar and postconciliar theology, based on the need to dialogue with modernity, talk to postmodern concerns? The short answer is with great difficulty.¹⁸³

Effectively, mirroring the shift to a postmodern perspective, the question regarding Christian faith today has also shifted. It is no longer predominated by 'How do I know more about God?', but rather, 'How do I have an experience of God?'¹⁸⁴ Indicating a pathway forward, William Bausch, while denouncing New Age philosophy as essentially the antithesis of Catholic belief and practice, nonetheless points to its constituent elements as a challenge and a lesson for Catholicism.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the New Age focus on authenticity and personal freedom, on interiority and a desire for faith in the God dimension (but not Church), its mantra that 'I definitely believe in Something',¹⁸⁶ points to the restlessness of the human condition as symptomatic of the desire for a fulfilment that can only be found in God. Moreover, its portrayal of Catholic practice in terms of

¹⁸⁰ Consistent with that initial experience of encounter, we established this axiom as one of two pillars within a contemporary framework of encounter. The other pillar acknowledged that the initiative for the encounter comes from Jesus, and that for those to whom he appeared a new revelatory experience of Jesus issued (Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51)

¹⁸¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225.

¹⁸² Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing symbols*, 12.

¹⁸³ Jack Finnegan, 'Postmodern Spiritualities and the Return of Magic', 19.

¹⁸⁴ Herbert O'Driscoll, *The View from The Hill of Mars* 12-13. The new question is equally 'How do I have a relationship with God?' (ibid, 13).

¹⁸⁵ William Bausch, *The Parish of the Next Millennium*, 169: Bausch holds that it is a philosophy 'heavily into self-determination, self-potential, self-accountability, and radical individualism'.

¹⁸⁶ Pat Collins, *The Broken Image*, 107. Moreover, while grounded in what is experienced as fundamentally positive and essential, as a spirituality it has little doctrinal content but is, rather, immersed in foundational postmodern principles of subjectivism and relativism.

detached legalism and of external application only, represents the Church as something essentially negative and irrelevant. To a degree, Bausch concurs, holding that as a Church

We have been preoccupied by our social concerns, social activism and institutional survival to the extent that we have not fed the basic human hungers about life, death, and the meaning of human life'.¹⁸⁷

This viewpoint is echoed from within the experience of Irish Catholicism:

The vast majority of people in Ireland are principally interested in discovering the truth about the big questions in life concerning life and death, brokenness and healing, history and eternity, suffering, evil and God. The church does have an important faith perspective on questions of this kind but unfortunately it appears reluctant to enter into the debate.¹⁸⁸

Importantly, however, regarding a renewed search for the sacred, there is a growing realisation in Ireland that not only has the removal of the Church from the centre ground of influence and authority been a catalyst in the onset of a spiritual and moral vacuum, efforts by some media commentators to fill this vacuum have proved unsatisfactory.¹⁸⁹ Accordingly, the task for the Church is to take its position at the market place of contemporary spirituality.¹⁹⁰ Gabriel Daly indicates how it might set out its stall. Pointing to the inherent absurdity whereby, in the search for the sacred, 'religion' is the byword for all that is negative, closed, and sectarian, and 'spirituality' the embodiment of what is 'open, free and affirmative', he outlines how 'there is good and bad, true and false religion, just as there is good and bad, true and false spirituality'.¹⁹¹ Further, it is seen that 'free spirituality can lead to lazy spirituality, religiosity masquerading as religion, and finally to the narcissism of the New Age movement'.¹⁹² In that context, and grounded in the spirit of its indigenously held truth, that 'knowledge of Christ is the very substance of

¹⁸⁷ William Bausch, *The Parish of the Next Millennium*, 172. He contrasts this position with what we are *not* doing: feeding the basic spiritual hunger of people, asking ourselves why they find *The Celestine Prophecy* so fascinating, reincarnation so intriguing, why they're listening to Dr. [Deepak] Chopra, why we're not growing, why so many Catholics are absent (ibid, 182). *The Celestine Prophecy* is the title of a novel by James Redfield. The novel is seen as a spiritual guide for the New Age.

¹⁸⁸ Dermot Lane, 'Faith', 168.

¹⁸⁹ Gerry O' Hanlon, 'Religion and Society', *Studies*, 95/378 (2006), 141-152 at 143.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Christopher O'Donnell, 'Love of the Church', 72: 'Contemporary spirituality is like a bazaar'.

¹⁹¹ Gabriel Daly, 'Liberal Democracy, Crisis and the Christian Vision', 149.

¹⁹² William Bausch, *Brave New Church*, 38.

our spiritual life',¹⁹³ the Church finds itself in the place that 'she has never left ... in the Upper Room that she bears in her heart'.¹⁹⁴ From there, we are reminded that,

Our quest for God must be consistent with our nature. Hence, it must have, as a non-negotiable part, a communitarian dimension. Ecclesiology, church, by definition, is precisely that, walking to God within a community. To attempt to make spirituality a private affair is to reject part of our very nature.¹⁹⁵

Further, recalling how the pattern of encounter marked by the 40 Days reveals Jesus as the One who initiates Communion,¹⁹⁶ we remember that Vatican Council II exhorts us once again to reflect on 'the communion of each Christian with Christ and the communion of all Christians with one another'.¹⁹⁷

5.1.4 New Life – Communion

In the early Church the basis of Christian life, and 'its only authentic expression', is *Koinōnia*.¹⁹⁸ Used to define those in 'community', or 'communion', it is a term widely in use throughout the New Testament,¹⁹⁹ and connotes 'the bond of responsibility for one another enjoined on believers by their assent to the Gospel'.²⁰⁰ Moreover, drawing on the life pattern of the Christian *Koinōnia*, it is shown that the ritual of baptism very quickly evolved as a tangible action designating those who 'belonged'.²⁰¹ Further, those who shared in the communion of baptism were wholly convinced of their bond of mutuality, of the life that they had in common.²⁰² This was reflected in 'the principle norms of

¹⁹³ Archbishop Desmond Connell, *Christ our Light*, Pastoral Letter 1993, (Dublin: Veritas, 1993), 7.

¹⁹⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, (Rome, Vatican Press, 1986), 66.

¹⁹⁵ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 128.

¹⁹⁶ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51: see pattern of encounter (2).

¹⁹⁷ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 19.

¹⁹⁸ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'The First Letter To The Corinthians', in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (eds), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (II), 798-815 at 800.

¹⁹⁹ Raymond E. Brown, 'Early Church', *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (II) 1338-1353 at 1340 (10).

²⁰⁰ Richard J. Dillon, 'Acts of the Apostles', *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (II), 722-767 at 734 (28).

²⁰¹ Raymond E. Brown, 'Early Church', *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1340 (10). 'The unanimity of Matt, Acts, Paul, and John suggests that this baptism very quickly became a standard feature of Christian life.'

²⁰² Ibid.

church life' outlined by Luke ²⁰³ – prayer, the breaking of bread, the teaching of the Apostles, a voluntary sharing of goods.²⁰⁴ In that light an individual Christianity is unthinkable for the embryonic Church: 'belief in Christ, communion with Christ, life deriving from Christ, are only found within the society of believers joined to the Lord'.²⁰⁵

John Paul II affirms that the concept of the Church as *Koinōnia* was fundamental to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.²⁰⁶ Drawing on the final report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, he recalls:

Much was done by the Second Vatican Council to bring about a clearer understanding of the Church as *communion* and its concrete application to life. What, then, does this complex word '*communion*' mean? Its fundamental meaning speaks of the union with God brought about by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. The opportunity for such *communion* is present in the Word of God and in the Sacraments. Baptism is the door and the foundation of *communion* in the Church. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11). The Body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist sacramentalizes this communion, that is, it is a sign and actually brings about the intimate bonds of *communion* among all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 *Cor* 10:16)".²⁰⁷

This echoes the thinking of Joseph Ratzinger who outlines that 'this ecclesiology of communion became the real core of Vatican II's teaching on the Church'.²⁰⁸ Aligning this concept of *communio* with the Conciliar emphasis on the idea of the 'People of God',²⁰⁹ he outlines that it demonstrates the variety of ways in which communion and ordering to the Church can and do exist, even beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church.²¹⁰

²⁰³ Cf. Richard J. Dillon, 'Acts of the Apostles', *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (II), 734 (28).

²⁰⁴ 'These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to prayers' (Ac 2:42). Cf. Raymond E. Brown, 'Early Church', *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1340-1341 (11-14). Cf. also Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (Rome, Vatican Press, 2005), 20.

²⁰⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (London and Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1974), 14.

²⁰⁶ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 19.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. See 'The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod', "C. The Church as communion" (I. The meaning of communion). Accessed March 2011 at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/SYNFINAL.HTM>

²⁰⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 7.

²⁰⁹ Enunciated especially in *Lumen Gentium*. See further, Christopher O'Donnell, 'Vatican II', in *Ecclesia*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 457-463 at 461: 'We have to see chapter 2 of LG as being a communion approach, and to note carefully that chapter 3 speaks of a hierarchical communion. The Holy Spirit is the principle of both communion and hierarchy (LG 4, 10-11).

²¹⁰ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 17: 'If one wants sum up in brief phrases the outstanding elements of the concept of the people of God that were important for the Council, one could

Brendan Leahy, reflecting on the *perichoretic* life of love intimately shared in by Christians, holds that Vatican II, wanting to present ‘this true face of God’, did so by emphasising the understanding of the Church as communion.²¹¹ It is a designation that registers at various levels in the Council’s texts.²¹² Peter Hocken holds that the renewal undertaken at the Council, from the outset (and the approval of its first publication, *Sacramentum Concilium*), focuses attention on the Church as communion:²¹³ ‘Through Christ the Mediator, they [the faithful] should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all’.²¹⁴

Again, John Paul II, reflecting on the central place of *Koinōnia-communion* at Vatican Council II, contends that, modelled and sourced on the Communion of God as Trinity, it is a concept that embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church.²¹⁵ As such, it acts as a ‘demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (cf. *Rom* 5:5), to make us all "one heart and one soul" (*Ac* 4:32)’.²¹⁶ Manifest as a ‘communion of love’,²¹⁷ the cultivation of *Koinōnia*, ‘to make the Church the home and the school of communion’, is the priority and challenge facing the Church at this time.²¹⁸ In that light,

that here was made clear the historical character of the Church, the unity of God’s history with mankind, the inner unity of the people of God even across sacramental class-distinctions, the eschatological dynamism, the provisional and fragmentary nature of this Church that is always in need of renewal, and finally also the ecumenical dimension, that is the different ways in which being linked and related to the Church are possible and effective outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church’.

²¹¹ Brendan Leahy, ‘People, Synod and Upper Room, 53.

²¹² Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ‘Some aspects of the Church understood as Communion’ (*Communio notio*). *Communio*, 1. As a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology (*Lumen gentium*, 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 21, 24-25; *Dei Verbum*, 10; *Gaudium et spes*, 32; Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22). *Communio*, 3. As an organically structured community (*Lumen gentium*, 11). *Communio*, 5. The Church is the Body of Christ, the Eucharist, ‘where the Church expresses herself permanently in most essential form’ (*Lumen gentium*, 3, 11); *Communio*, 6. Communion tends also towards union in prayer, inspired in all by one and the same Spirit (*Lumen gentium*, 4). *Communio*, 8. ‘It is possible to apply the concept of communion *in analogous fashion* to the union existing among particular Churches’, and to see the universal Church as a *Communion of Churches* (*Lumen gentium*, 23). Cf. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communio-notio_en.html [Accessed March 2011]

²¹³ Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church*, 87-88.

²¹⁴ *Sacramentum Concilium*, 48.

²¹⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 18.

²¹⁶ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 42.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*

²¹⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.

John Paul II exhorting the need to 'promote a spirituality of communion',²¹⁹ outlines the essence of the Christian Community. Reflective of 'the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us' it requires the capacity to relate to, and act for, our sisters and brothers, as 'those who are a part of me'.²²⁰ It involves, therefore, the disposition

- to share their joys and sufferings,
- to sense their desires
- to attend to their needs,
- to offer them deep and genuine friendship.²²¹

A spirituality of communion implies also the ability

- to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me".
- to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (*Gal* 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.²²²

Moreover, this call to implement a spirituality and structure of communion is not neutral in consequence.

Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.²²³

In so much as this acts as a template for the Christian Community it acts as the measure of the task facing the Irish Church today. It is the task of fashioning a church defined by the 40 Days, one that is faithful to its identity and mission – the 'last will and testament'

²¹⁹ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43. Recalling the example of Pope Paul VI who, on the conclusion of Vatican Council II proclaimed 'The Church is a communion' (Cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 19).

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ All from *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

of the Risen Lord to his followers²²⁴ – yet also in tandem with the needs of contemporary Ireland. It is the task of evolving into a more participative church, grounded in the spirit of Vatican Council II, where all the baptised collaborate in the furthering of that mission (Ac 1:8). It is the task of engaging proactively and imaginatively in courageous and bold new strategies in order to facilitate the mission – that is, conscious of the relational dynamic between Jesus and his followers, marked by the 40 Days, it cannot be just more of the same. It is the task, definitively, of the 40 Days: to enable the Church to receive the Spirit of the expression of Church we are in fact living. ‘By time, circumstance, culture, and countless other forces’²²⁵ the Church in Ireland has undergone crucifixion. Yet, speaking out of that loss, we are reminded that ‘just when you think it is dead, suddenly you see flames spring to life on a distant hill’.²²⁶ The task is to fan these flames, ‘the gift of God’, into the Spirit of power and love and self-control (cf. 2 Tim 1:6.), and so to embrace the form of life the Spirit is calling the Church to. This is the essence of Pentecost, as it is the task of the 40 Days. Commentators offer various perspectives regarding the realisation of the task.

In the prophetically entitled contribution ‘After the Wake’,²²⁷ Niall Coll outlines some of the steps required if the Irish Church is to retrieve the sense of relevancy and credibility attached to its embrace of new life. Grounded in its new found sense of humility, these include,

- The development of structures and programmes to promote faith formation beyond the boundaries of school and church;
- Parish based catechesis of our young people (and the properly formed personnel – voluntary and fulltime professional – to respond to those needs);²²⁸
- A reprioritising of the approach to the sacrament of Confirmation whereby candidates are conferred at a later age (possibly sixteen), and only on completion of a parish-based catechetical programme;²²⁹

²²⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 199.

²²⁵ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 151.

²²⁶ Breda O’Brien, ‘Being a Catholic in Ireland Today’, 230.

²²⁷ Niall Coll, ‘After the Wake’, *The Furrow* 50/2, (1999), 98-106.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 105.

- The continuing development of adult religious education.²³⁰

Similarly, nominating the ‘need to speak with a new humility’ as the pathway to a renewed respect for, and trust in, the church, Christopher O’Donnell outlines the necessity for the Irish church to convince not by the arrogance of presumption but by the attractiveness of its teaching.²³¹ Moreover, it is a humility that acts as the *sine qua non* of ‘New Testament boldness, such as the apostles had in proclaiming the resurrection’.²³² In that regard, and resonating with the call for Mary Magdalene to let go of the past in order to receive her commission from Jesus as the *apostola apostolorum* (Jn 20:16-17), so it is mandatory for the church to detach itself from its ‘clutter’ – to let go of those negative features which negate the genuine gifts and values that the Church has to offer society. These include the manner in which it presents its teachings, often experienced as negative, rigid, dictatorial, and irrelevant.²³³ There is, further, ‘the untold damage’ inflicted by poorly celebrated liturgy.²³⁴ Again, in the call to de-clutter, there is the need for sensitivity in communication and the necessity that the Church not cling to sexist language, or indeed anything that indicates paternalism or male hegemony.²³⁵

Echoing the Pauline analogy whereby the communication of revelation is compared to the making of music (cf. 1 Cor 14:6-9), Vincent Twomey, reflecting on the contemporary search for the authentic and the sacred, holds that as a church, ‘we must once again learn the tune’.²³⁶ Fundamental in this is the development of theological literacy among the faith community, supported by a proactive approach to theological scholarship within the Irish Church.²³⁷ Moreover, given that ‘the situation of the Catholic Church in Ireland is

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid. Cf. also, Women’s Forum: “Nurturing the Faith of the Pilgrim People” (April 1998): Number One in their list of ‘key recommendations’, ‘That, as a matter of urgency, the immediate policy of the Church in the Dublin Diocese should be to provide education in faith for adults’.

²³¹ Christopher O’Donnell, ‘Love of the Church’, 69.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid, 67.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 159.

²³⁷ Ibid, 159-167.

such that somewhat radical measures are indeed called for',²³⁸ among a number of nominated measures regarding the restructuring of the Church he includes,

- A national synod to redraw the diocesan boundaries, thus relating them to contemporary civil realities;²³⁹
- A restructuring of diocesan and parochial administration allowing the laity to have 'a genuine voice in their church', and 'the role of clergy to be directed primarily to spiritual direction and chaplaincy',²⁴⁰
- The development of the role of full-time pastoral workers within the parish and at the level of supra-parochial institutions.²⁴¹

In addition to these commentators, others reinforce and add to them.²⁴² Ultimately however, cognitive of the task,²⁴³ these calls to renewal are seen, not as issues of believing and belonging, but as a crisis of ultimate identity. In that regard it draws us to what 'constitutes our very identity as Christians', our encounter with the resurrected Christ.²⁴⁴ Moreover, recalling that without this encounter with the living presence of the Lord, there is no Church,²⁴⁵ we are reminded of the need 'to be' before trying 'to do'.²⁴⁶

In that light, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin considers the question, 'Why the Church?'²⁴⁷ He points out that, while traditionally the Church in Ireland was very much a 'doing Church', its primary essence is about being rather than doing. Moreover, drawing inspiration from the 'original community of the believers in Jesus Christ', he cautions against allowing the Church to portray itself as a *de facto* public organization rather than

²³⁸ Ibid, 105.

²³⁹ Ibid, 106.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 106, 107.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 107.

²⁴² Cf. for example, Anne Codd, 'Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development', in *Intercom*, July/August 2007, 9; Martin Kennedy, Post-colonial Evangelisation?, *ibid*, 20; John Littleton, 'Catholic Identity in the Irish Context', 32.

²⁴³ To embrace the form of life the Spirit is calling the Church to.

²⁴⁴ David Ranson, 'Meeting the Resurrected Christ', 610.

²⁴⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 191

²⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 15.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Intervention of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin on *Why The Church?*, at Trinity College Dublin, 12th May 2004. A meeting inspired by the book *Why the Church?* by Luigi Giussani. Available at <http://www.clonline.org/ie/archibishop.html> [accessed march 2011]

what it is called to be – ‘a communion of faith, a communion of worship, a communion of service and a communion of mission’. Further, this sense of discipleship as ‘always a community of mission ... must apply to Church today’. As such, he speaks candidly:

A tired, stagnant Church will only lose the essence of its own identity. A safe, careful Church will fossilize in its own safety. The Gospel is not the text of yesterday. It brings a radical newness to every generation. Failure to recognize that and to have the courage to put out into the deep is in the long term a failure of faith.²⁴⁸

In that context the Archbishop draws us again into the Upper Room. Addressing the experience of Pentecost among the community of disciples, he reflects that it brought them to a new level of self-awareness, to ‘a new personality which is born into them, into their hearts’. The members of the Christian community are changed, yet remain themselves. Thus, the knowledge that ‘Jesus is with them with strength and wisdom’ empowers them to become prophets of his message. This is at the core of the paschal mystery, that ‘Christian death and resurrection involve personal continuity within a process of transformation’.²⁴⁹ It is at the core of our identity as Church – ‘led by the Holy Spirit Who renews and purifies her ceaselessly, to make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible’.²⁵⁰ It is, therefore, at the core of the Irish Church as she symbolically journeys through the 40 Days. In that light, drawing from the model outlined by Rolheiser, we name the measure of the task. The forty days symbolise and are encompassed by,

a process of transformation within which we are given both new life and new spirit. It begins with suffering and death, moves on to the reception of new life, spends some time grieving the old and adjusting to the new, and finally, only after the old life has been truly let go of, is new spirit given for the life we are already living.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 120.

²⁵⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 21.

²⁵¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138.

5.2 40 DAYS: INVITATION TO INTIMACY

Reflecting on the famous Rublev icon of the Trinity, Michael Paul Gallagher outlines how the circle of three gather around and gesture towards the chalice at the centre of the table. The chalice represents ‘the symbol of suffering love’, and, in this it offers ‘a logic of intimacy’.²⁵² Gallagher further outlines how there is a fourth place at the front of the table. This acts as an invitation to sit down with this community of love.²⁵³ It is an invitation to experience the intimacy of the community from within, not from the impersonal position of an outside observer.

The first disciples, in responding to this invitation, were called to journey from the cross of Good Friday, to the empowerment of Pentecost. It was a journey marked symbolically by the events of the 40 Days. Moreover, it was a journey, as it was an experience of encounter, which was to change them profoundly. The pattern of encounter tells us that the disciples did not recognise the Risen Jesus at first. When they did recognise him, things could no longer be the same – for he ‘made as if to go on’ (Lk 24:28). In this call to Easter faith, ‘their eyes were opened’. Thus, they recognised him. They recognised him in their capacity for cowardice and fear, in their experience of despair and failure, in the promise of life and hope. They recognised him in his renewed invitation to intimacy with himself and responsibility in his Church. They recognised him, universally, by the very manifestation of Easter faith – ‘They were filled with Joy’! (Mt 28:8; Lk 24:32, 41, 52; Jn 20:20).

In so much as the Church in Ireland has encountered crucifixion, and has taken refuge in the Upper Room – or fled the scene by metaphorically heading for Emmaus, or engaged in the Irish equivalent of renunciation of mission by returning to the fishing boats at the Lake of Tiberias – it is now time for the church to emerge and recover morale.²⁵⁴ The Upper Room represents not merely a place of sanctuary, it is also ‘the inner chamber of

²⁵² Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘Show atheists the Trinity’, *The Tablet*, 24th January, 1998, 104. ‘The Spirit is the artist of desire, “the transformation of you so that you can listen to Jesus”, in the words of the Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan. The Son embodies (literally) a new love here within the tragedies of history. The unseen Father promises another fullness and vision for hereafter’ (ibid).

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Christopher O’Donnell, ‘Love of the Church’, 69.

the Church'.²⁵⁵ It is the place where we 'meditate again on the mystery of the Cross at Golgotha, where he gave his life for us'.²⁵⁶ It is the place of *revelation* and *invocation* – the revelation of 'the unity of Christ with the Father as the wellspring of the Church's unity'; the invocation of 'the gift which in him she will constantly receive until its mysterious fulfilment at the end of time'.²⁵⁷ It is the place where the disciples, shown as a group dispirited by events, paralysed by fear, devoid of hope, and rooted in doubt, encounter the Crucified and Risen One. It is the place of *shalom* where the recognition of the Risen Jesus among them brings 'joy' into the darkness of the disciples, and redeems them from the 'fear' that had controlled them. It is the place where the encounter with Jesus, in the showing of his wounds and the exhortation to believe, issues in the proclamation of the resurrection kerygma – 'My Lord and my God' (Jn 20:28). Moreover, it is the place which is concerned with more than the bringing of peace and the evocation of joy, it also issues in mission. It is the place where this mission is empowered by the sending of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the Church is founded on this basis: 'On gathering around the person of Christ and sharing his Spirit'.²⁵⁸ The term 'Christian' indicates an identity in regard to this, something we attach to ourselves to define who we are. Moreover, we can only be Christians through being Christians with others.²⁵⁹ This is the essence of *Koinōnia*, that the Church is fundamentally communion and belonging – 'it is communion with Jesus and belonging to his mystical body'.²⁶⁰ Everything else follows from this, including pastoral initiatives, the development of life-giving liturgies, programmes in structural renewal.²⁶¹ Experience, however, indicates a limited appreciation of the concept of *Koinōnia* within the Irish Catholic mindset. It is apparent that, despite Vatican II, and its articulation within the Irish Church in the advent of new forms and expressions of

²⁵⁵ Brendan Leahy, 'People, Synod and Upper Room', 72.

²⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 13.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 48.

²⁵⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 112.

²⁵⁹ Seamus Ryan, 'Priestly Renewal', in *NCPI News Bulletin*, Summer 2001, 5.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Speaking notes of Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin, *Why the Church?*

²⁶¹ Martin Tierney, 'Environment, Community, Evangelisation: The Ecology of Parish', in Niall Coll and Pascal Scallan, 87-98 at 92.

communion,²⁶² the prevailing form of Irish ecclesiological expression is grounded in a very privatised type of religion.²⁶³

Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, retired Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster relates how, as a newly ordained priest, 'full of zeal and enthusiasm', his enthusiastic approach to ministry had to be tempered to the reality of people's lives in the parishes where he served. It was, he recalls, an experience both of frustration, and of discovery. The frustrating element came in the realisation that 'there was no quick way to bring people to greater commitment to the love of Christ and the mission of the Church'.²⁶⁴ His moment of epiphany came in the realisation that renewal and flourishing of faith in the parish was not to be achieved by his personal charisma and efforts, but 'by the manner in which the Spirit of God became fruitful in people's lives'. In time, this became focused on his exposure to the spirit of *Koinōnia* present in the basic Christian community.²⁶⁵ In terms of our assessment of the 40 days, this represents a critical insight.

It reminds us that, if the prevailing mood of those Jesus appears to is one of despondency and disappointment, and the initiative for the appearances comes from Jesus, the 40 days encompass a time of formation in identity and mission. Moreover, it is pattern evident in the contemporary experience of Irish Catholics. Fr Michael Hurley, founder in Ireland of the Parish Cell Movement, reflects that while the level of aspiration and envisioning in parish life can extend merely to the provision of bingo, more recently that aspiration has found greater voice in those drawn to a deeper relationship of faith and community.²⁶⁶ In a similar vein, Gerard Gallagher, analysing the growing impact of *Youth 2000* in Ireland, holds that their 'very traditional style of content', which essentially defines the counter-

²⁶² Cf. Brendan Leahy, 'Charism & Institution – a new ecclesial maturity', 278-285. E.g., Charismatic Renewal, Focolare, Cursillo, Communion & Liberation, L'Arche, St Egidio.

²⁶³ Martin Tierney, 'Environment, Community, Evangelisation: The Ecology of Parish', 92.

²⁶⁴ Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, 'Fired by the Spirit', *The Tablet*, 31st May, 2003.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, 'Fired by the Spirit', in *The Tablet*, 31st May, 2003. Developing this concept he recalls, 'It was in these faith clusters, or communities, that a whole mix of people – married, unmarried, young and old – discovered a new and deeper experience of faith through prayer, Scripture, community and service to others. Those communities brought something new to the parish, which became, in a very real and tangible way, "a living parish".'

²⁶⁶ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish: Building a Faith Community* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1998), 14.

cultural method of the movement, has opened them to an untapped market among young people,²⁶⁷ offering opportunities for their peer group to gather in a faith context.²⁶⁸

Ronald Rolheiser affirms these tendencies towards *Koinōnia*, holding that,

Our primary task today is to live as community. If we can do that, then the visible body of Christ, the Church, will have an incredible resurrection.²⁶⁹

In the Irish context this rests in the capacity to ‘claim the birth of new life among us’, to be attentive to ‘signposts seen in the “Upper Room” of the Church’²⁷⁰ It is to go forth again from the upper room marked by the ‘New Pentecost’, the event of the Second Vatican Council. This is to receive the Spirit of the expression of Church we are in fact living,²⁷¹ and is, therefore, central and necessary to the task of the 40 days facing the contemporary Irish Church. As such, grounding our assessment in terms of this ‘New Pentecost’, marking the invitation to the intimacy of *Koinōnia*, and remembering Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor’s emphasis on the charism of the basic Christian community, we move to explore attempts at symbiosis of these elements. It is in that light that we move to address the phenomenon of New Ecclesial Movements.

²⁶⁷ Gerard Gallagher, *Are we losing the Young Church?* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2005), 181.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lillies* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 269.

²⁷⁰ Brendan Leahy, ‘People, Synod and Upper Room’, 74.

²⁷¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 152.

Chapter VI

A Reflection on New Ecclesial Movements

Evidence of 40 Day Engagement in the Irish Church

6.1 LIFE AND SPIRIT

6.1.1 Establishing a Context

Drawing from our deliberations marking the invitation to intimacy named by the 40 Day mandate, to 'grieve what you have lost and adjust to the new reality',¹ a central and defining task has emerged. This task addresses the capacity of the Church in Ireland to embrace the 'New Pentecost' named by the event of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, integrating the capacity to 'name our deaths', and thus embrace the freedom to 'claim our births', it is seen that the mandate to implement the Council 'is a matter of life and death for the Church'.² In that regard, Rolheiser, referencing this task, discusses it in terms of tensions relative to possessing 'life' and possessing 'spirit'.³ Applied to the paschal journey of the Irish Church, it is the task to claim the spirit for the new life it is in fact already living.⁴

The objective of this chapter is to seek evidence of the realisation of this mandate within the experience of Irish Catholicism. To that end it will address what is widely acknowledged as a manifestation of the 'new Pentecost' in contemporary ecclesial expression, namely the status of New Ecclesial Movements and Lay Associations.⁵ On that basis, drawing perspective from the fusion of the Marian and the Petrine dimension of Church, the 'Mary-Church',⁶ we move

¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 143. The task to 'name your deaths' and to 'claim your births'.

² Kiko Argüello, 'Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith', in Michael Hayes, *New Religious Movements in the Catholic Church* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005), 135-148 at 139.

³ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Congress of Ecclesial movements and new communities, 'You Express Church's Fruitful Vitality', 27 May 1998 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1998]. Pope John Paul describes the Movements as 'one of the most significant fruits of that springtime in the Church which was foretold by the Second Vatican Council'.

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, conjoining two Pauline images of Church, those of 'body' and 'bride', speaks of the Church as the 'Body-Bride' of Christ, naming it as 'Mary-Church' (Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 59). In this way, he establishes a dialogue between the 'body' image representing 'a partaking of the personality of Christ' (expressed externally in sacramental forms), and the 'bride' image, representing the response in love to Christ, the bridegroom and head of the Church (ibid). Correlative to the 'institutional' and 'charismatic' dimension' of the Church (the 'objective' and 'subjective'), this dialogue defines the double principle of the Christian experience: Petrine and Marian. See further Benedict XVI, 'Homily at the shrine of St Mary de Finibus Terrae', Santa Maria di Leuca, 14 June, 2008 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2008].

to explore the new Movements and Associations relative to their place in the life of the Church. This reflection will address:

- i. A reading of the New Ecclesial Movements and Associations in the context of the event of Vatican Council II.
- ii. An historical analysis on the place of Movements within the Church. The purpose of this is to establish precedence and context – that is, to locate the Movements against the pattern of recurring ‘irruptions of the Holy Spirit’, which are designed to continuously revitalise and renew the Church.⁷
- iii. A consideration of a number of New Ecclesial Movements – allowing for an evaluation of their contribution to a re-awakening of the lay apostolate. Specifically, it will reflect on the *Neo-Catechumenal Way*, *Communion and Liberation*, the *International Parish Cells Movement*, and the *Columba Community* (an indigenous Irish response to the Charismatic movement).
- iv. An assessment of the Movements in the Irish context. This will explore approaches towards a coordinated and collaborative integration of these Movements and Associations – particularly initiatives sponsored by the Irish Episcopal Commission.

Our point of departure, critically, relative to the import of this chapter, is to recognise that these groupings are seen to ‘find a point of reference in the Second Vatican Council with its universal call to holiness and to the active apostolate’.⁸

6.1.2 New Ecclesial Movements

6.1.2.1 Rooted in Vatican Council II

The Movements have been described variously as ‘a typical feature of the contemporary Church’,⁹ ‘a luminous sign of the beauty of Christ and of the Church’,¹⁰ and ‘the re-awakening of the laity to their proper role in the Church’.¹¹ Again, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger reflected on their presence within the Church: ‘suddenly here was something that no one had

⁷ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, ‘The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements’, 482.

⁸ Michael Hayes, *New Religious Movements in the Catholic Church* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005), 2.

⁹ Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko, ‘Preface’, *International Associations of the Faithful, Directory* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006).

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, ‘Message to ‘The participants of the Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 22nd May, 2006.

¹¹ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements: Communion and Liberation, Neo-Catechumenal Way, Charismatic Renewal* (New York: Alba House, 2006), Introduction xv.

planned. Here the Holy Spirit himself had, so to speak, taken the floor'.¹² The context in which he spoke was the first World Congress of Ecclesial Movements, held in Rome from 26th to 29th May 1998. The conclusion of this conference saw 400,000 members of 56 of these new communities and associations meet, for the first time together, with Peter. Addressing this unprecedented gathering at St Peter's Square, on the eve of Pentecost, Pope John Paul II identified their presence as 'tangible proof' of the outpouring of the Spirit, and as the 'providential response' to the 'great need for living Christian communities'.¹³

Reflecting on this phenomenon of Ecclesial Movements in the contemporary Church, Fidel Fernández traces their 'first steps' to the period immediately after the First World War, a period defined by the collapse of the modern project and the birth of post-modernity.¹⁴ Concurrently, a coalition of factors began influencing a new theology of the laity.¹⁵ Acknowledging this, Peter Hocken maintains that, although the origins of new ecclesial realities are established prior to the event of Vatican II, such movements were influenced predominantly by the renewal currents in biblical studies, in ecclesiology and in the lay apostolate that came to fruition at that Council.¹⁶ It is a reading that finds easy resonance in the assessment of commentators:

¹² Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements', in *Communio*, 25/3 (1998), 480-504 at 481.

¹³ John Paul II, Speech to 'Ecclesial Movements and New Communities', 30 May 1998 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1998].

¹⁴ Fidel González Fernández, 'Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church', in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, (Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2000), 71-103, at 100. It was a time characterised by the formation of numerous movements of Christian renewal, of 'secular institutes', and of other ecclesial groups 'that had difficulty in gaining acceptance in the juridical system of the Church' (ibid).

¹⁵ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 133: These factors include, (i) the incongruence of masses of inactive Catholics in democratic countries in terms of the call to participation in the political process; (ii) the Reformist inspired model of greater lay participation, together with increased interaction between Protestants and Roman Catholics; (iii) a symbiosis of theological, biblical, patristic, and liturgical movements pointing to the necessity of active involvement of the laity in the Church.

¹⁶ Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church* (Stoke on Trent: Alive Publishing Ltd, 2007) 145. Hocken includes as examples of pre-Conciliar movements *Foyers de Charité* (founded in France in 1936), the *Focolari* movement (founded in Italy in 1943). Others include the *Cursillo* movement (founded in Spain in 1949), and Communion and Liberation (founded, as *Gioventù Studentesca*, in Italy in 1954). See also Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 133: Hanna points to the evolution of historical and systematic scholarship in developing a theology of the laity. Theologians such as Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac, were attracted to the question because of their concern to rethink the nature of the Church.

- Undoubtedly Vatican II had a huge impact on the Church's understanding of the lay apostolate and this was pivotal in enabling the new movements to secure a place in the heart of the Church.¹⁷
- The flourishing of new movements in the Catholic Church is one obvious fruit of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁸
- The movements are the fruit of Vatican Council II, in so much as the Council made possible, if not their birth, at least their growth and maturation.¹⁹
- In order to understand the place and the significance of the movements and new communities in the life of the Church today, we need to look at them in the light of the Second Vatican Council.²⁰
- It is not by chance that the Pope's teaching on the movements is mainly situated in the context of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Nor is it a coincidence that the growth of the ecclesial movements in our time is closely linked to the conciliar event.²¹

More specifically, commentators point to the teaching of the Council on the nature of the Church, particularly as enunciated in *Lumen Gentium*, as critical in the evolution of the movements. Reflecting this teaching, the 'People of God' is a phrase which in a sense echoes the whole spirit and direction of Vatican II,²² giving recognition to all the baptised as participants, 'with full rights', in the vocation and mission of the Church.²³ Moreover, while it is clearly outlined that the Church is hierarchical, it is seen that the definitions 'laity' and 'clergy' are expressed as 'the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or

¹⁷ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, xvi.

¹⁸ Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church*, 145.

¹⁹ Guzmán Carriquiry, 'The Ecclesial Movements in the Religious and Cultural Context of the Present Day', in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, 47-69 at 50.

²⁰ Charles Whithead, 'The Role of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the Life of the Church', in Michael Hayes, *New Religious Movements in the Catholic Church*, 15-29 at 19.

²¹ Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, 'The Event of 30 May 1998 and its Ecclesiological and Pastoral Consequences for the Life of the Church', in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, 23-46 at 31.

²² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 'The Church – People of God', # 781. See further JMR Tillard, 'The Church', in Michael Walsh (ed), *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 178-204 at 182. Tillard writes: 'That part of the text of the *Catechism* which is concerned with the People of God is faithful to Vatican II. But there should have been more emphasis on the "priesthood of the baptized" as a participation in the priesthood of the people *as such*.'

²³ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 141. See also Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2003), 90. Reflecting on *Lumen Gentium*, Lakeland holds that 'the baseline for understanding the People of God is as a community of radical equality before God, in virtue of a common baptism'.

hierarchical priesthood'.²⁴ Again, without the renewal of ecclesiology following Vatican II, and without the associated Petrine approval, ecclesial movements would have struggled to survive.²⁵ As such, the reclamation at the Council of the concept of Church as *Koinōnia* is seen as critical in giving new impetus to emerging lay groups, and fostering innovative forms of the lay apostolate, many of which have been since categorized under the term 'new ecclesial movements'.²⁶

In that context, Pope John Paul holds that the Movements and Associations represent 'one of the most significant fruits of that springtime in the Church which was foretold by the Second Vatican Council'.²⁷ At the same time, while clearly recognising their existence as a manifestation of the Spirit's work of renewal begun at Vatican II, he, further, outlined the challenge of the 'new stage' unfolding before them, 'that of ecclesial maturity'.²⁸ Thus, directing them to seek the unity in diversity that marks their being 'in the same communion and for the same mission',²⁹ he reminds them that 'every charism is given for the common good, that is, for the benefit of the whole Church'.³⁰ As such, identifying the Movements as an expression of the Church's charismatic dimension,³¹ he affirms that the charismatic dimension and the institutional element (the Marian and Petrine) within the Church act as 'co-essential' in the building up of the people of God and in their witness to the inbreaking of the Kingdom.³² Against that, Pope John Paul further emphasises the importance of the

²⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 2:10. See, further, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11. Referencing the right and duty of the laity to fulfil their mission in the world (AA, 9), the document specifies aspects of this mission. These include 'assistance in the operation of schools, helpful advice and material assistance for adolescents, help to engaged couples in preparing themselves better for marriage, catechetical work, support of married couples and families involved in material and moral crises, help for the aged not only by providing them with the necessities of life but also by obtaining for them a fair share of the benefits of an expanding economy.'

²⁵ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 137

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁷ John Paul II, Message for the World Congress of Ecclesial movements and new communities, 'You Express Church's Fruitful Vitality', 27 May 1998.

²⁸ John Paul II, Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 30 May 1998.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* This recalls the experience of the Second Vatican Council during which 'the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements' (*Ibid.*).

³² John Paul II, 'You Express Church's Fruitful Vitality', 27 May 1998. Both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the Church founded by Jesus, because they both help to make the mystery of Christ and his saving work present in the world. It is in this light that we speak of the new movements in terms of their relationship within the Church. Parameters are named by Hans Urs von Balthasar who characterises the ongoing mission of the Church in terms of a 'unity in distinction' linking the hierarchical structure of the Church with the dimension of personal holiness of the believer (Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* New York: New City Press, 2000, 124). As such, he holds that 'the Holy Spirit always lives in the Church as objective as well as subjective Spirit', as 'institution' and as 'inspiration', (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution*, 239). Further, he defines this relationship

movements submitting to ecclesiastical authority. Rhetorically questioning how it is possible to safeguard and guarantee a charisms authenticity, he posits that ‘no charism can dispense with reference and submission to the Pastors of the Church’.³³

On that basis, Bishop Stanislaw Rylko specifically benchmarks the call to ecclesial maturity against the ‘criteria of ecclesiality’ enunciated in *Christifideles Laici*.³⁴ Thus, referencing the template of criteria established by John Paul II he applies them to the Movements in order to establish, and authenticate, their ‘Ecclesial’ character. He names them as:³⁵

- a) The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness;
- b) The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith;
- c) The witness to a strong and authentic communion with the Pope and with one’s own Bishop;
- d) Conformity to and participation in the Church’s apostolic goals;
- e) A commitment to a presence in human society.

This bi-unitive tension marking the ecclesial relationship of Mary and Peter is central also in the teachings of Benedict XVI. In May 2006, addressing participants of the second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, Pope Benedict, referencing a growing awareness of the Marian and Petrine dialogue within the Church, outlined the critical and imperative verification of their collaboration: ‘The Holy Spirit desires unity, he desires totality’.³⁶ Drawing on this, like his predecessor, Benedict offered words to the movements on the importance of submission to ecclesiastical authority.³⁷ Similarly, addressing the Pastors of the Churches he asks that they ‘approach movements very lovingly’, and with

preferentially in terms of the Petrine and Marian principles of Church life (Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 124).

³³ John Paul II, Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 30 May 1998. He continues: ‘in the confusion that reigns in the world today, it is so easy to err, to give in to illusions.’

³⁴ Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, ‘The Event of 30 May 1998 and its Ecclesiological and Pastoral Consequences for the Life of the Church’, 33. Cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 30.

³⁵ Ibid, 34.

³⁶ Benedict XVI, ‘Homily of Solemnity of Pentecost’, Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, St. Peter’s Square, 3 June 2006 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2006].

³⁷ Benedict XVI, ‘Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 22nd May 2006. ‘Over and above the affirmation of the right to life itself, the edification of the Body of Christ among others must always prevail with indisputable priority. Movements must approach each problem with sentiments of deep communion, in a spirit of loyalty to their legitimate Pastors.’

‘fatherly concern, cordially and wisely’.³⁸ As such, the view of Benedict XVI is that the task of Pastors is to ensure that the Spirit is not extinguished, and the task of the New Movements is ‘to bring your gifts to the entire community’.³⁹

In that regard, referencing the vocation of the movements, Benedict outlines the expectations and hopes of the Church for them. Thus, relating to the membership of movements and communities as ‘the witness of those who have had a personal experience of Christ’s presence’, he calls on them to be ‘schools of communion’ such that, in fidelity to the witness of the Apostles, they may live in ‘the truth and love that Christ revealed’.⁴⁰ From this, conscious of his denunciation as a ‘dictatorship of relativism’⁴¹ a secularist vision of the world offering ‘fictitious forms of freedom’,⁴² Pope Benedict missions them to ‘bring Christ’s light’, to ‘dispel the darkness’, of such false ideology, and to witness to the freedom with which Christ set us free (cf. Gal 5:1).⁴³

6.1.2.2 Elements of Commonality

A conservative reading would identify more than 200 lay movements in the Church, many of them communities,⁴⁴ and ‘thousands of private associations’.⁴⁵ While these movements share

³⁸ Benedict XVI, ‘Address to Bishops and Representatives of Ecclesial movements and new communities’, 17 May 2008 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/].

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, ‘Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 22nd May 2006.

⁴¹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Homily during the Mass ‘for the election of the Roman Pontiff’, St. Peter’s Basilica, April 19, 2005 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html].

⁴² Benedict XVI, ‘Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 3 June 2006.

⁴³ Benedict XVI, ‘Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 22nd May 2006.

⁴⁴ Charles Whithead, ‘The Role of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the Life of the Church’, in Michael Hayes, *New Religious Movements in the Catholic Church* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005), 15-29 at 16. These movements include the Community of Sant’ Egidio (founded 1968), Communion and Liberation (1954), Focolare (1943), Cursillo (1949), Emmanuel Community (1972), Neocatechumenal Way (1964), Chemin Neuf (1973), Worldwide Marriage Encounter (1965), Bread Of Life (1976), Shalom Catholic Community (1982).

⁴⁵ Tony Hanna, ‘Lay movements play vital role in energising Church’ in *cinews*, March 8th, 2009 [Accessed March 2011 at <http://www.cinews.ie/article.php?artid=5782>]. Private Associations include the Family of God Community (Dundalk, Ireland), and the Columba Community (Donegal, Ireland). Recognising the scriptural foundation underpinning the rights of association(cf. Gen. 1:26-28), the Church identifies ‘Associations of the Faithful’ as an important element of her life and structure. These associations are identified in Canon Law (cf. Can. 298 § 1). Two broad categories of associations exist within the Church: public and private. Regarding public associations, the authority that erected it has direct supervision over the association. Regarding private associations, ecclesiastical authority must respect their autonomy but has the obligation to ‘take care that their energies are not dissipated and that the exercise of their apostolate is ordered toward the common good (Canon 323§2).’ Private associations exist by private agreement, freely made by the members of the Association. However, unless a private association receives juridic approval from competent ecclesiastical authority, the association itself has no rights or obligations in law.

elements of commonality, they are also quite distinct, marked individually with their own particular charism. Moreover, attempts at precise categorisation of the movements is complicated by the multiplicity of their forms, and the newness of their existence. However, identifying elements indigenous to these new ecclesial realities, commentators exhibit a broad degree of consensus.

The Particular Charism

The charism is the source of every movement's spiritual strength and innovative character.⁴⁶ Given to individual persons, the original charism of a movement, is, essentially, 'a new expression of the following in the footsteps of Christ',⁴⁷ and a 'revelation of the truth' given not just for the movements but, also, for participation in the mission of the Church.⁴⁸ In that light, addressing the ecclesial movements as a manifestation of a new ecclesiological paradigm (out of the vision of Vatican Council II), Antonio Sicari holds,

The charism is a gift whereby the Spirit *marks certain of the baptized*, makes them fall in love with Christ *in a special way*, *gathers* them in a spiritual homeland, assigns them particular tasks for the building up of the Church, and educates them with the *pedagogical persuasiveness* that characterizes the charism.⁴⁹

Fernandéz, concurring with this summation, identifies the gratuitous nature of the granting of the charism with the sense of Divine providence as manifest in the history of salvation. That is, it is seen that 'God normally uses men and women with whom he has identified himself', and through whom 'the Mystery dwells and in whom the Mystery is manifested'.⁵⁰ Again, observing a pattern shown throughout the history of the Church, Fernandéz holds that the recipient of the particular charism communicates it for the benefit of the ecclesial community and for the world, and, 'once he has entered into the glorious communion of saints, continues to act with his power of intercession'.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, 'The Event of 30 May 1998 and its Ecclesiological and Pastoral Consequences for the Life of the Church', 28.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 94.

⁴⁹ Antonio Maria Sicari, 'Ecclesial Movements: A New Framework for Ancient Charisms', in *Communio* 29 (Summer 2002), 286-308 at 293.

⁵⁰ Fidel González Fernández, 'Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church', 72.

⁵¹ Ibid, 73.

The Community

Given as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the particular charism is experientially present as ‘an amazing newness of life’.⁵² As such, the universal character of the charism effects a ‘spiritual affinity’ among persons drawn by its capacity to fascinate, attract, and involve those ‘who are different by culture, tradition, age’.⁵³ In this way, adherents of the charism are formed into a ‘collective’,⁵⁴ which, although overwhelmingly a lay phenomenon,⁵⁵ includes, often, consecrated persons and presbyters among their number. In that regard, the founder of the collective – the one called to communicate a particular charism – has a pivotal and exclusive role. Pope John Paul explains:

The passage from the original charism to the movement happens through the mysterious attraction that the founder holds for all those who become involved in his spiritual experience.⁵⁶

Again (in language suffused in 40 Day parlance), a primary attraction of the ecclesial community is that it is seen as ‘a place for encountering Christ’, and, therefore, a place to live the Christian vocation in ‘a full and coherent way’.⁵⁷ In that light, echoing the Pauline exhortation to the Church at Corinth, communities formed on the basis of the original charism, indicate that they too ‘have a wisdom to offer those who have reached maturity’ (1 Cor 2:6). Corresponding to this, movements have become places of education in the faith, encouraging ‘a more faithful and systematic intelligence of faith’.⁵⁸ Further, central in the *zeitgeist* of the new ecclesial community is the experience of fraternity, of journeying as ‘believers on the way together’.⁵⁹ Indeed, the force of attraction of the movements consists precisely ‘in their ability to bring people together on the basis of an ideal lived as a community’.⁶⁰ Thus, as Sicari illustrates, the new ecclesial movements gather to themselves a variety of the states of Christian life: single, celibate, married and clerical.⁶¹ Moreover, demonstrating the ‘ecclesiology of communion’ set forth by the Second Vatican Council,

⁵² Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, ‘The Event of 30 May 1998 and its Ecclesiological and Pastoral Consequences for the Life of the Church’, 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church*, 148.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, Speech to ‘Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 30 May 1998.

⁵⁷ Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, ‘The Event of 30 May 1998 and its Ecclesiological and Pastoral Consequences for the Life of the Church’, 30.

⁵⁸ Guzmán Carriquiry, ‘The Ecclesial Movements in the Religious and Cultural Context of the Present Day’, 64.

⁵⁹ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 14.

⁶⁰ Adrianus Johannes Card. Simons, ‘Pastoral Experiences of the Bishops’ in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops* (Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2000), 111-139 at 112.

⁶¹ Cf. Antonio Maria Sicari, ‘Ecclesial Movements: A New Framework for Ancient Charisms’, 289.

they make the reception of charism available, not as an end in itself, but firmly at the service of ‘the one mission of the Church’.⁶²

Again, and critical in terms of the papal imperative demanding ‘unity in diversity’,⁶³ Fernández links the diversification inherent in the communities of the ecclesial movements to the experience of the embryonic Church. Referencing particularly the Church at Corinth, where the Gospel was proclaimed by various messengers (cf. 1 Cor 3:5-14), he recalls the counsel of Paul when advocating the call to unity – that is, ‘a recognition of belonging each to each, or rather, of each to the unity in Christ’.⁶⁴ In that regard, it is seen that, collectively, the ecclesial movements and new communities offer enormous diversity in the life and ministry of the Church.⁶⁵

Formation and Mission

Invoking the principle of Christian activity, ‘You will know them by their fruits’ (Mt 7:16), Rylko holds that, relating this principle to the activities of the ecclesial movements, that ‘we have to admit that these fruits are not few in number’.⁶⁶ Offering an assessment of the fruits named by the presence of the ecclesial movements he categorises them in terms of ‘formation’ and of ‘mission’. In the first place he recognises ‘fundamental common denominators’ among the movements in terms of a Christian formation that ‘cannot leave Pastors indifferent’.⁶⁷ Among those listed, he includes:⁶⁸

⁶² Antonio Maria Sicari, ‘Ecclesial Movements: A New Framework for Ancient Charisms’, 289.

⁶³ See, for instance, Benedict XVI, ‘Homily at the meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, Solemnity of Pentecost, 3 June 2006: Addressing members of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities Benedict stated, ‘It is precisely here that diversity and unity are inseparable. He wants your diversity and he wants you for the one body, in union with the permanent orders - the joints - of the Church, with the successors of the Apostles and with the Successor of St Peter’. Also, John Paul II, ‘Message for the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, Rome 27- 29 May, 1998 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1998): ‘This multiplicity is lived in the unity of faith, hope and charity, in obedience to Christ and to the Pastors of the Church. Your very existence is a hymn to the unity in diversity desired by the Spirit and gives witness to it.’

⁶⁴ Fidel González Fernández, ‘Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church’, 74.

⁶⁵ Charles Whithead, ‘The Role of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the Life of the Church’, 20. These areas of ministry include ‘works of mercy’, Christian initiation, catechesis, social and political involvement, as well as pro-active engagement with the ‘new evangelisation’.

⁶⁶ Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, ‘The Event of 30 May 1998 and its Ecclesiological and Pastoral Consequences for the Life of the Church’, 41.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 42.

⁶⁸ Ibid (inclusive of the bulleted points named).

- that their formation is based on the baptismal vocation of every Christian;
- that the Gospel is taken seriously and as something to be lived to the full;
- that they ‘are not afraid of making radical demands on their members’;
- that, grounded in a strong Christian identity, members are conscious of their particular vocation and mission in the Church;
- that they produce ‘mature Christian personalities with a strong sense of belonging to the Church.’

Furthermore, the critical and overarching common denominator is established – ‘The personal, existential encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ always stands at the centre’.⁶⁹

Closely related to the journey of formation are the ‘fruits’ associated with the field of mission. In that regard, Rylko outlines some of the main features of the movements’ apostolic commitment:

- *Apostolic drive and courage for mission.*⁷⁰ Thus, renewing the apostolic and missionary courage in lay people, the ecclesial movements help them ‘overcome the barriers of timidity, fear and inferiority complex in facing the world’.⁷¹
- *Direct proclamation.*⁷² Reflecting apostolic times, the Movements emphasise the proclamation of the word, giving priority to the *kerygma* ‘that concentrates on what is essential for Christianity and what tends to rekindle faith’.⁷³
- *Creativity and originality.*⁷⁴ Giving witness at the frontiers of the modern Areopagus, the new Movements do not limit their apostolate to traditional contexts, but ‘dare to propose new methods and forms’.⁷⁵
- *Missionary community.*⁷⁶ Gathered together and formed through participation in the same charism, the place and experience of community is important in offering ‘great support and an inspiration for missionary commitment’.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 44.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 45.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The framework of Rylko's remarks is grounded in the understanding that the missionary mandate of the Risen Christ, the task of evangelisation, is not carried out 'through the sacraments and ministries alone but also through special graces among the faithful'.⁷⁸

Truly the Church

Such has been the impact of the new ecclesial realities on the life of the Church that, at a seminar entitled 'Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops', Cardinal Simons enquired of Joseph Ratzinger whether, in the future, 'there will be a separate Congregation for the movements'.⁷⁹ Specifically, he queried if the 'classes' in the Church will be named as 'priests, religious, members of the movements, and laity'.⁸⁰ In reply, Ratzinger stated his opinion that the traditional tripartite division (priest, religious, laity) would remain as the fundamental expression of the structure of the Church. However, given that, 'after Vatican Council II, there has been greater communication between the three states', a new context has emerged – a context realised in new forms of cooperation, and greater communication, between the vocations attaching to each of the states.⁸¹ Moreover, within 'all the great movements', a particular symbiosis of the three sectors is seen in fact to have already evolved.⁸²

Similarly, Charles Whitehead, president for eleven years (until 2000) of the International Council for Catholic Charismatic Renewal, outlining that the membership of the new ecclesial movements are predominantly lay people, points out that they also contain bishops, presbyters and religious among its members.⁸³ In addition, the fact that some lay members of these movements consecrate their lives through fidelity to the evangelical counsels, or that some presbyters of these communities are ordained to serve the charism of particular

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Brendan Leahy, 'Charism & Institution – a new ecclesial maturity', in *The Furrow*, May 1999, 50/5 (1999), 278-285 at 279.

⁷⁹ See 'Dialogue with Joseph Card. Ratzinger' in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops* (Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2000), 225-258 at 228. This seminar was held in Rome from 16th to 18th June 1999. It was promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in collaboration with the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 228. See also, Allan Figueroa Deck, 'Where the Laity Flourish', in *America*, August 14, 2006. Deck holds that a survey of the Catholics in Spain revealed that 'at least 45 percent of Spanish Catholics related to the church primarily through a movement and not through a parish.'

⁸¹ Ibid, 229.

⁸² Ibid. Cardinal Ratzinger names specifically the Focolare Movement, Communion and Liberation, and the Neocatechumenal Way (ibid, 230).

⁸³ Charles Whithead, 'The Role of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the Life of the Church', 15.

movements, underscores a fundamental reality – that, relative to the community of the baptised, enunciated in the New Testament (and in *Lumen Gentium*),⁸⁴ these new movements and communities are, in essence, ‘truly the Church’.⁸⁵

Read in that context, a central principle underpinning the existence of the movements is that the Church is made up of all the baptised, who all share the same Holy Spirit. Thus, while distinctions will come later, they verify that the hierarchical and the charismatic elements come from the one source, are in close association with each other, and are ‘coessential’ to the life of the Church.

It is on that basis, and having positioned the New Movements and Associations relative to the event of Vatican Council II, that we move to locate them within the tradition of the ‘irruptions of the Holy Spirit’,⁸⁶ within the Church.

6.2 ‘WAVES’ OF NEW MOVEMENTS IN THE CHURCH

6.2.1 The Early Church

In a keynote address to the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements, held in Rome in 1998, Cardinal Ratzinger outlined an historical and ecclesiological context of such movements. In that regard, drawing reference from the structure of the nascent Church, he establishes a foundational paradigm regarding the coexistence of two evolving structures – those of ‘the apostolic ministry’ and ‘the local ecclesial ministries’.

Pursuing this, Ratzinger holds that after Pentecost the immediate bearers of Christ’s mission to the world are the twelve, who were quickly identified as ‘apostles’.⁸⁷ Issuing from their universal missionary activity (‘the apostolic ministry’), local churches came to birth which, in

⁸⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 7: Through Baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: ‘For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’. Cor. 12, 13. See also *Lumen Gentium*, 12: ‘allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills, He [the Holy Spirit] distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit”.’

⁸⁵ Charles Whithead, ‘The Role of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the Life of the Church’, 15.

⁸⁶ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, ‘The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements’, 482.

⁸⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 488.

turn, required the development of leadership and structure at local level. This ultimately became manifest in the emergence of fixed and permanent forms of ministry – a tripartite division of bishops, priest and deacons (‘the local ecclesial ministries’). At that time, throughout the latter half of the second century, the ministries of the universal Church gradually disappeared.⁸⁸ Correlatively, with the development of the episcopal ministry, those who presided over the local churches came to recognise that they were now successors of the apostles and the bearers of the apostolic mandate.⁸⁹

Ratzinger outlines a two-fold challenge attaching to this development: the danger of the priestly office being perceived ultimately in purely institutional and bureaucratic terms,⁹⁰ and a concern that the universal element of the Church might become usurped by a distorted emphasis within the local ecclesial ministry.⁹¹ Critically, it is the historical response to this conundrum that the Cardinal identifies as ‘perfectly logical’ and, indisputably, in terms of the life of the Church, a ‘movement’.

6.2.2 Anthony and Basil

He gives the example of Anthony the Abbot (c. 251–356), a central figure at the beginning of what Ratzinger identifies as the ‘movement’ of monasticism. Towards the end of the third century, driven by a desire to live the *vita evangelica* in its totality, Anthony separates himself from a Christianity that he experienced as grafting itself to the demands of worldly life.⁹² Thus, departing into the Egyptian desert in order to embrace the ascetic life and to follow Christ more perfectly, he removed himself from ‘the solidly established local ecclesial structure’.⁹³ As time passed, however, a number of young men joined with Anthony in order to follow his way of life. Drawing a critical lesson from this, Ratzinger talks of Anthony as

⁸⁸ These two types of office – the universal and local – continued to coexist (evidentially uneasily at times) far into the second century. Regarding this sense of uneasiness see the Third letter of St John which shows us a very clear example of such a conflict situation.

⁸⁹ Cf. Brendan Leahy, ‘Charism & Institution – a new ecclesial maturity’, 280. Regarding confirmation of this development by Irenaeus of Lyons see also Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 236.

⁹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 491.

⁹¹ Ibid. Essentially, he believes, the impulse ‘that drives us to bring the gift of Christ to others’ is terminally threatened by such a development, and, therefore, the universal dimension of apostolic succession must remain indispensable.

⁹² Ibid, 492. see also, Athanasius of Alexandria, ‘Life of Antony, 3’, in *Early Christian Lives*, trans. Caroline White (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 10. Motivated particularly by the challenge of Jesus to the rich young man – sell what you have, give to the poor, come follow me (Mt 19:16-22) – Anthony experienced a deep desire to imitate the life of the Apostles and the early Christians.

⁹³ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 492.

inaugurating ‘a new spiritual fatherhood’, one which supplemented ‘the fatherhood of bishops and priests by the power of a wholly pneumatic life’.⁹⁴

Ratzinger then draws on the experience of Saint Basil of Caesarea (c.329–379), in whose experience ‘we see the very set of problems that many movements have to face today’.⁹⁵ He recalls that Basil did not set out to establish a separate institution alongside that of the Church, but rather sought the way of Christian perfection. Basil’s conversion was motivated, like Anthony, by a strong impulse to live the gospel literally, and to let Christ alone give identity to his life. Thus, again like Anthony, Basil divided his fortunes among the poor, and then went into solitude. However, the ideal of solitary life held little appeal to him and by the year 358 he was gathering around him a group of like-minded disciples, who, together, founded a monastic settlement at Arnesi in Pontus.⁹⁶ It was here that Basil wrote his *Enchiridion*, so influential as the Rule of monastic communal life.⁹⁷ However, in its conception Basil saw it not as the rule of an order but as an ecclesial rule, as the ‘manual’ for the committed Christian.⁹⁸ Critically, however, Basil came to recognise that the desire to follow Christ in such an uncompromising manner cannot be completely merged with the local church.⁹⁹ In that light it is seen that the monastic movement does not replace the local ecclesial structure but rather, as a new centre of life, acts as a vitalising force within it.¹⁰⁰

Having established (in Anthony and Basil) the precedence and foundational elements attached to the development of new movements in the Church, Ratzinger then reflects on the evolution of these movements throughout the history of the Church, outlining five such ‘waves’ of new movements. He names as the first ‘wave’ the missionary activity which flourished in the three centuries from Gregory the Great (590–604).¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Ibid. In this way, Ratzinger interprets Anthony’s actions as continuing, in a renewed form, the apostolic universal ministry prevalent in the first two centuries of the church. Cf. also Brendan Leahy, ‘Institution and Charism’, 281.

⁹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 492.

⁹⁶ On the northern coast of modern Turkey, with its shores on the Black Sea.

⁹⁷ See Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 238.

⁹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 492.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 493. This is evidenced in his *Asketikon* (the second draft of a rule) in which Basil sees the movement as a ‘transitional form between a group of committed Christians open to the Church as a whole and a self-organizing and self-institutionalizing monastic order’ (ibid).

¹⁰⁰ Brendan Leahy, ‘Institution and Charism’, 281.

¹⁰¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 494.

6.2.3 Gregorian Mission

The first of the popes to come from a monastic background Gregory recognised the missionary potential of monasticism.¹⁰² Perhaps most famous for the ‘Gregorian Mission’, the sending of Augustine of Canterbury to evangelise the pagan Anglo-Saxons of England (in 595), he is also credited with re-energizing the Church's missionary work among the Germanic peoples, and thereby the building up of the new Christian Europe.¹⁰³ In this way, ‘monasticism now became the great missionary movement’.¹⁰⁴ Again, in referencing the papacy of Gregory II (715–731) and Gregory III (731–741), Ratzinger alludes to the continuation of these missionary efforts among the Germanic peoples, and to the strengthening of papal authority in the churches of Britain and Ireland.¹⁰⁵ Generically, this time period also covers the great Irish missionary movement, marking the bringing of the Gospel from Ireland to Scotland and England and to Gaul and Italy. Cardinal Ratzinger further associates particularly with this monastic ‘movement’ the 9th century missionaries of Christianity among the Slavic peoples, ‘the monk brothers Cyril and Methodius’.¹⁰⁶

Critically, he holds that ‘Two of the constitutive elements of the reality of "movements" clearly emerge from all this’.¹⁰⁷

- i. While the papacy did not create the movements, it did become their principal reference point in the structure of the Church, their ecclesial support. In practice this demonstrates that movements, which transcend the structural and ecclesial parameters of the local church, ‘always go hand in hand with the papacy’.¹⁰⁸
- ii. It becomes apparent that the *vita evangelica* includes fundamentally the dimension of service to the mission of evangelization. Indeed, ‘this service is the goal and the intrinsic reason for the *vita evangelica*’.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Ibid..

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

6.2.4 The Cluny Reform Movement

Ratzinger posits as the second ‘wave’ of new ecclesial movements the reform movement of Cluny. He recalls that this was a movement that engendered the emancipation of the *vita religiosa* from the anarchic and corrupt synergy relative to the Church and the feudal system of the time.

A confluence of events, particularly the deaths of the emperor Charlemagne in 814 and Pope Nicholas I in 867, coalesced to impact destructively on the relationship between Church and State. The response that followed within the Church, giving witness to a spiritual revival throughout Europe, is dominated by a single occurrence – the establishment of the Abbey at Cluny in 910.

A Benedictine monastery, founded with the intention of being free of secular influence,¹¹⁰ Cluny was established with the purpose of restoring the original charism of St. Benedict. Such was its impact on the life of the Church, and the renewal of the spiritual fervour of the universal Church, that it gave rise to a form of ecclesial life known as *Ordo Cluniacensis Ecclesiae*.¹¹¹ Rejecting the incumbent practice of simony and Nicolaitanism, the Cluny movement brought about a refounding in monasticism that ultimately gave rise to a pan-European reform movement throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹¹² Largely inspired by the ‘restorer of monasteries’, the second Abbot of Cluny, St. Odo (c. 878 – 942),¹¹³ the movement progressed its reformation on three underlying principles:¹¹⁴

- i. It adopted a federated model of monastic organisation.
- ii. It adopted a style of preaching that resulted in a considerable lessening of secular influence in Church affairs.

¹¹⁰ See Brian Moynahan, *Faith: A History of Christianity* (London: Aurum Press, 2002), 216. William I of Aquitaine donated his hunting preserve in the forests of Burgundy for the foundation of Cluny abbey. Unprecedented at that time he released the house from any future obligation to him and his family other than prayer.

¹¹¹ Fidel González Fernández, ‘Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church’, 86.

¹¹² Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹³ See ‘St. Odo of Cluny’ at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/MARY/STODO.HTM> [accessed March 2011].

¹¹⁴ Cf. Fidel González Fernández, ‘Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church’, 86.

- iii. It placed the federation of monasteries directly under the guidance and protection of the Papacy in Rome, ultimately overseeing the restoration of complete autonomy to the Papal office.¹¹⁵

6.2.5 Francis & Dominic

Cardinal Ratzinger lists as the third wave of new ecclesial movements ‘the evangelical movement that exploded in the thirteenth century’, associated particularly with Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and Dominic Guzman (1170-1221).¹¹⁶

Perceiving as ‘remarkably similar’ the conversion story of Saint Francis with that of Anthony the Abbot, Ratzinger draws out elements consistent in the development of both movements. He observes that neither set out with the intention of founding a community apart. Rather, their inspiration was a desire to follow the gospel literally, in a spirit of utter humility and radical poverty. For Francis, like Anthony, this involved separation – away from a place of privilege in Assisi to a place at the margins of that society. In both cases it was their extraordinary commitment to the gospel that drew others to them.¹¹⁷ Again, Ratzinger draws conclusions from the witness of Francis and his companions. Recognising that their motivation was simply to renew the Church with the gospel, he holds that it was inextricably, also, the motivation to live the evangelical life, ‘to go beyond the borders of Christendom, to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth’.¹¹⁸

Similarly, it is unlikely that Dominic harboured any intention to establish a religious community. Central to the foundation of the Dominican Order was the journey of Dominic through the Languedoc area of southern France in 1206. This province was then at the heart of the Albigensian heresy.¹¹⁹ An element of the Albigenses proselytizing was a deep-seated and large-scale resentment with the corrupted and scandalous nature of those tasked with

¹¹⁵ Ultimately, recognizing the fragility and dangers inherent in political appointments as successor of Peter, the Clunaic Reform led to the ending of this practice. In 1059 the Roman Curia created the College of Cardinals, which was dominated by reformers, and granted it the privilege of naming the successors to St. Peter.

¹¹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 495.

¹¹⁷ Especially Clare of Assisi (1194-1253). From a wealthy background, Clare became one of the first followers of Francis. She founded the Order of Poor Ladies, a monastic religious order for women in the Franciscan tradition. Following her death, the order she founded was renamed the Order of Saint Clare, commonly referred to today as the Poor Clares.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 495.

¹¹⁹ A neo-Manichaean sect that flourished in southern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Church authority. Reflecting this, Dominic, having met the papal legates charged with countering the heresy of the Albigenses, suggested that their mission might be more productive were they to focus less on their attachment to ecclesiastical pomp and more on the embrace of humility and poverty. The prophetic nature in which this proposal was both embraced and successful symbolises what Dominic established as a fundamental characteristic in the spirituality of the Order of Preachers – the embrace of poverty, not as an end, but as a means to give their preaching credibility.¹²⁰ Similarly, the direct encounter of Dominic at this time with the heretical dialectic gives light to the emphasis of Dominican study on scriptural literacy as the conduit of convincing preaching. Dominic was granted papal sanction for the ‘Order of Preachers’ in 1216,¹²¹ and spent the remaining four years of his life organizing the order, and establishing new houses. Throughout, the support of Pope Honorius III, himself a campaigner for a spiritual reform of the entire Church, was crucial and decisive.¹²²

The manner in which the charism of the Dominican and Franciscan movements met the needs of 13th century Christendom is defined by the circumstances of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, where, tradition reports, Dominic and Francis met. Pope Innocent III, outlining to the Council the signs of the times, names complex and entrenched difficulties regarding the status of the Church.¹²³ The cumulative effect of such, and other, ecclesial deficiency was a pervasive spiritual malnutrition of people. Consequently, the need arose among peoples to seek alternative (from Rome) life-giving interpretations of the Gospel.

Francis and Dominic were able to interpret the new sensitivity and the new needs of the people. The ability, and mobility, of their mendicant preachers to appeal to the intellect (primarily Dominican) and to the heart (primarily Franciscan) proved effective. Their

¹²⁰ Ronald J. Zawilla, ‘Dominican Spirituality’, in Michael Downey (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 286-294 at 290.

¹²¹ Only after much struggle, including the escalation of the conflict with the Albigenses into a violent crusade.

¹²² To facilitate the spread of the order, Honorius III, on 11 February, 1218, addressed a Bull to all archbishops, bishops, abbots, and priors, requesting their favour on behalf of the Order of Preachers. Again, in January, February, and March of 1221 three consecutive Bulls were issued commending the order to all the prelates of the Church.

¹²³ These include not only the Albigensian heresy but also the Waldensian heresy. Significantly this was a Christian lay movement established around Peter Waldo in Lyons. Seeking a more strict application of the imitation of Christ they were opposed to relics and the cult of Saints, to honouring and praying for the dead, and to worshipping in a Church. In common with the Albigensians they promoted a violent anti-clericalism and anti-Roman sentiment in their preaching. The ‘difficulties’ included also a (not unrelated) resentment at the perceived un-Christian lives of many in Church officialdom, and a deep-rooted alienation from the method of Church catechesis.

presence, manifesting a rediscovery of the task Jesus entrusted to his disciples, when he commissioned them to proclaim the Gospel in pairs, and instructed them not to take anything with them on the journey, but to live in poverty, found a ready welcome and acceptance among peoples more than prepared for the message they brought.

6.2.6 The Company of Jesus

The experience of grace evidenced in the life of Ignatius of Loyola occurred at ‘a particularly crucial and taxing moment’ in the history of the Church.¹²⁴ The expression of Christian life at that time ‘was in a pitiful condition’,¹²⁵ while, externally, new forces evolving in European society tended to detach themselves from the Church and, indeed, to act against the Church.¹²⁶ It is in that context that the Society of Jesus is perceived as the most important religious order founded during the sixteenth century.¹²⁷ It is also the fourth in the wave of new movements named by Cardinal Ratzinger.

The charism of Ignatius (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuits,¹²⁸ stemmed from a profound religious conversion. Injured in the battle against French forces for Pamplona on May 20th 1521, Ignatius was returned to Loyola, in Northern Spain, for recuperation.¹²⁹ His recovery progressed slowly and painfully, but as he did so, to pass the time, he began to read about the lives of the saints and the life of Christ.¹³⁰ His experience while contemplating these stories

¹²⁴ Fidel González Fernández, ‘Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church’, in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, (Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2000), 71-103, at 93.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 94.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 91.

¹²⁷ John Patrick Donnelly, ‘New religious orders for men’, in R. Po-Chia Hsia (ed), *The Cambridge History of Christianity (Volume 6), Reform and Expansion 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162-179 at 170.

¹²⁸ See J. Carlos Coupeau, ‘Five personae of Ignatius of Loyola’, in Thomas Worcester (ed), *The Cambridge Companion To The Jesuits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 32-51 at 40. Coupeau, observing that no papal bulls founding the Society mention a founder of the Order, holds that the recognition of Saint Ignatius as the founder of the Company of Jesus constitutes essentially an interpretation.

¹²⁹ See David Mitchell, *The Jesuits: A History* (London: Macdonald Futura Publishers, 1980), 26. The injuries came from a cannon-shot that shattered Iñigo’s right leg and damaged the other. Having had his injuries roughly set by a French surgeon he was returned to Loyola. There he endured the torture of twice having the bone re-broken and re-set in the hope of straightening the leg, and the further agony of having a protruding lump of bone sawn off. Mitchell holds, further, that it was during this time of convalescence that the displacement of his given name of Iñigo, in favour of Ignatius, effectively began. This name he later adopted in memory of the early Christian martyr, St Ignatius of Antioch (ibid, 27).

¹³⁰ See Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism 1450-1700* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1999), 30. Bireley names these books as *The Life of Christ* by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony, and the *Golden Legend*, a volume of lives of the saints, compiled by James of Voragine, a 13th Century Dominican.

proved qualitatively different from any other he knew, particularly the after-effect of such contemplation. He recognised this effect as an abiding presence of contentedness and a concomitant desire to imitate the deeds of the saints. Specifically reflecting on the lives of St Francis and St Dominic, Ignatius wondered if, like them, he was being called to be ‘a Christian warrior in a different sense’.¹³¹ The experience effected a spiritual awakening in Ignatius, prompting, in that light, a great remorse and suffering in him over his sins of the past.¹³² In time, associating this call to conversion as an experience of spiritual discernment, it was to form the basis of what he was later to describe in his *Spiritual Exercises*.¹³³ This discernment at Loyola was a first conversion. Over the following year (1522), having renounced his status as a courtier, and living in a cave outside the town of Manresa, Ignatius received the second conversion of a deep mystical transformation.¹³⁴ Recording the fruits of his prayer at Manresa Ignatius arranged them into the structured version of his *Spiritual Exercises*.¹³⁵

Having then journeyed to the Holy Land in 1523, Ignatius returned to Spain the following year with the intention of receiving an education sufficient for him to study for the priesthood.¹³⁶ In 1528, he commenced study at the University of Paris, and there became strongly influential in the lives of some of his fellow students (including his roommates

¹³¹ David Mitchell, *The Jesuits: A History*, 27. His reading too would have influenced this. The *Golden Legend* abounded with military metaphors, and *The Life of Christ* prompted him to consider application to enter the strictly enclosed Carthusian monastery near Seville. It also provided him with the basis for the *Spiritual Exercises*. Moreover, left with a permanent limp Ignatius chose to interpret it as a sign that God had a purpose other than soldiering for his life.

¹³² David Mitchell, *The Jesuits: A History*, 27.

¹³³ That not only the intellect, but also the emotion and feelings can help us to come to a knowledge of the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

¹³⁴ See Thomas Worcester, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Worcester (ed), *The Cambridge Companion To The Jesuits*, 1-10 at 1. Intending to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Ignatius crossed northern Spain to the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat, where, at Manresa, he spent months praying for guidance in his desire to follow Christ. See also Brian Moynahan, *Faith: A History of Christianity* (London: Aurum Press, 2002), 419. Moynahan outlines that Ignatius spent three days confessing his sins at the abbey of Montserrat and came to identify a single passion in himself: ‘to serve the Lord’. Regarding his ‘transformation’ see also James Broderick, *Saint Ignatius Loyola: The Pilgrim Years*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1956), 110. It was on the banks of the river Cardoner, outside Manresa, that Ignatius experienced a divine encounter that enabled him to regard creation with new meaning and relevance, inspiring the Ignatian mantra of finding God in all things. Broderick writes: ‘In the life of St. Ignatius it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of his mystical experience on the banks of the Cardoner. It was the great turning-point, the decisive hour, from which flowed all that was to come in his marvellous story’.

¹³⁵ The ‘Spiritual Exercises’ (formally approved by the Church in 1548) acted as a guide for a retreat master leading a retreatant through a programme of prayer over (approximately) 30 days, had a two-fold task: 1) to introduce the retreatant to a life of prayer; 2) to help the retreatant discern the vocation to which God was calling her in the service of the Kingdom.

¹³⁶ Thomas Worcester, ‘Introduction’, 3. In 1524, Ignatius began to study at the universities of Alcalá and Salamanca, in order to receive tuition in Latin, and in philosophy and theology, ‘matters he knew little about’.

Francis Xavier and Peter Favre), directing them in the 30 day prayer outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Inspired to live a life of witness for God, six of these students, together with Ignatius, gathered at Montmartre in August 1534 and committed themselves by vows of poverty and chastity as a religious family, the ‘companions in Christ’,¹³⁷ and particularly offering ‘special obedience to the Supreme Pontiff’.¹³⁸

When the original intention of the ‘companions’ (travelling on pilgrimage to Jerusalem) proved impossible, they instead ‘tried to relive the apostolic way of life in the West’.¹³⁹ They placed themselves at the disposal of the pope, and, in November 1538 they were received by Paul III at Rome. After a period of discernment they sought approval as a religious order, the ‘Society of Jesus’,¹⁴⁰ submitting a canonical description of their way of life, required before ecclesiastical approval. This was granted by the bull *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae* promulgated by Pope Paul III on September 27, 1540, which gave a first approval to the Order.¹⁴¹ The group proceeded to the election of its first Superior. All the votes cast were for Ignatius.¹⁴²

Consistent with the mandate for evolving ecclesial movements to meet the specific needs of the Church in their time, so Ignatius and his companions are very much of their own time. The backdrop was the dramatic age of the Renaissance, including the schismatic event of the Protestant Reformation. Yet, commentators are reticent to unduly interpret the mission of the Jesuits as exclusively, or indeed predominately, as being at the vanguard of the Catholic ‘Counter Reformation’.¹⁴³ Indeed, Bireley holds that the term itself (‘Counter-Reformation’)

¹³⁷ Harvey D. Egan, ‘Ignatian Spirituality’, in Michael Downey (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 521-529 at 521.

¹³⁸ Brian Moynahan, *Faith: A History of Christianity*, 420. See further, Philip Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola*, (London: William Collins & Co. Ltd, 1990), 85-86. Caraman identifies those present at Montmartre as, in addition to Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Peter Favre, Simon Rodrigues, Diego Laínez, Alfonso Salmerón, Nicolás Bobadilla del Camino.

¹³⁹ J. Carlos Coupeau, ‘Five personae of Ignatius of Loyola’, 35.

¹⁴⁰ See Brian Moynahan, *Faith: A History of Christianity*, 420: “Seeing that there was no leader among them, nor any superior other than Jesus Christ,” Ignatius recalled, “it seemed appropriate to call themselves the Society of Jesus”.

¹⁴¹ The final approval, with the removal a restriction on the membership number (which had been sixty), came in the bull *Exposcit debitum* of July 21, 1550, issued by Pope Julius III.

¹⁴² Philip Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola*, 126. Ignatius begged his companions to reconsider, and, after some days of prayer and discernment, a second ballot was held. This ballot came out as the first, unanimous for Ignatius, except for his own vote (ibid).

¹⁴³ John O’Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 127. O’Malley holds that ‘opposing Protestantism was peripheral and occasional to them [the Jesuits] for their first ten or fifteen years.’ See also J. Carlos Coupeau, ‘Five personae of Ignatius of Loyola’, 41: ‘The idea of Loyola founding an army against the Reformation is misleading.’

is problematic in that it defines the Church largely in relation to the Reformation, and overlooks many developments in 16th century Catholicism that had little to do with Protestantism.¹⁴⁴ He agrees that it is preferential to speak instead of ‘Catholic Reform’,¹⁴⁵ or, indeed, the alternative ‘Early Modern Catholicism’.¹⁴⁶ Such a reading places Church developments more clearly in the broader context of the time. Primary among these, and central to the Society’s work, was what had quickly evolved into their ‘flagship’ activity – the area of education.¹⁴⁷

Ignatius had not initially imagined his order as taking on the responsibility of running schools, yet, by the late 1540s, it had become critical in their ministry.¹⁴⁸ A confluence of factors influenced this, including the enthusiasm integral to the Renaissance period for learning,¹⁴⁹ the invitation by ecclesial and civil authorities to establish centres of learning,¹⁵⁰ and the need to establish colleges for the formation of Jesuit seminarians.¹⁵¹ Such was the success of their educational mission that it brought about a reorientation in the original intention of the order to work primarily among the poor and sick. Giving leverage to the Society among the rich and the powerful they soon ‘became the specialists in upper-class schooling’.¹⁵² In this way ‘Catholic Reform’ took root in cities across Europe, ‘often fostered by the foundation of a Jesuit college’.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁴ Robert Bireley, ‘Redefining Catholicism; Trent and beyond’, in R. Po-Chia Hsia (ed), *The Cambridge History of Christianity (Volume 6), Reform and Expansion 1500-1660*, 145-161 at 146. See also, Jonathan Wright, *The Jesuits: Missions, Myths and Histories* (London HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 24. Wright holds that the aspiration underpinning the Order’s endeavours at this time focused on the need to ‘counter’ a widespread spiritual malaise and moral crisis, and to bring about a spiritual renewal. Moreover, ‘the spirituality they espoused was not envisaged as some counterblast to Protestant heresy’.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Bireley, ‘Redefining Catholicism; Trent and beyond’, 145. A term that recognises ‘that the Church had begun the necessary process of reform long before 1517’.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism 1450-1700*, 3.

¹⁴⁷ See J. Carlos Coupeau, ‘Five personae of Ignatius of Loyola’, 38. See further Robert Bireley, ‘Redefining Catholicism; Trent and beyond’, 146, 154. Bireley, addressing new developments in the Catholic Church, emerging essentially independent of the Protestant influence, identifies the arrival of new religious orders such as the Jesuits and the Ursulines as indicative of a renewed and innovative focus in the area of education.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Worcester, ‘Introduction’, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Bireley, ‘Redefining Catholicism; Trent and beyond’, 154.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Worcester, ‘Introduction’, 3.

¹⁵¹ J. Carlos Coupeau, ‘Five personae of Ignatius of Loyola’, 38. Robert Bireley, ‘Redefining Catholicism; Trent and beyond’, 154. The Jesuits established their first college at Messina in Sicily in 1548; by 1600 there were 236 in existence.

¹⁵² Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 302. See J. Carlos Coupeau, ‘Five personae of Ignatius of Loyola’, 38. Coupeau indicates the pace of development of the educational mission: ‘Colleges became centres for the formation of would-be Jesuits only on 1540, like the one at the University of Paris, where several candidates moved to study. The King of Portugal founded the first college in Coimbra (1541); the General staffed it with Jesuits, sent from Rome and Paris. Some other experiments in Spain (Valencia, Valladolid, Gandiá), and especially the new school in Messina (Italy) from 1547, taught the General how to take up new challenges like a centre of studies for the clergy (the Roman

Notwithstanding the argument naming the broader context of this period in Church history, the argument naming a specific context is made – namely, that it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of Ignatius and the Society of Jesus to the Counter-Reformation.¹⁵⁴ Addressing this in terms of ‘the reconquest by Catholicism of countries that had defected to Protestantism’,¹⁵⁵ Jean Delumeau holds that the Counter-Reformation was particularly characterised by the militant action of new or renewed religious orders – ‘among the new religious orders, the Jesuits were in the front rank’.¹⁵⁶ In that regard, one of the most influential of the early Jesuits was Peter Canisius (1521-97).¹⁵⁷ He fought against the spread of Protestantism across central Europe, and his work is seen as critical in the restoration of the Catholic Church in Germany at this time. Christopher Hollis, in his study of the Jesuits, sums up the work of Canisius, now venerated as a Doctor of the Church:

The general effect of Canisius' work was immense. He turned the course of history. In each of the great colleges he built there were up to a thousand students. He was the first Jesuit to enter Poland. By 1600, there were 466 Jesuits there. When he entered Germany in 1550, he entered with 2 Jesuits as his companions. When he left it over 30 years later there were 1,111 Jesuits at work in the country.¹⁵⁸

An important dimension in the history of new religious movements is their relationship to the chair of Peter. For the Jesuits this alliance was consolidated during the Council of Trent, and the order was accorded ‘almost unlimited freedom to expand throughout Europe (and in the overseas Spanish and Portuguese missions) as propagandists and educators’.¹⁵⁹ Thus,

College, 1551), a residence for seminarians attending that centre (the German College, 1552), and a series of secondary schools.’

¹⁵³ Robert Bireley, ‘Redefining Catholicism; Trent and beyond’, 154. See Thomas Worcester, ‘Introduction’, 3. Worcester points to the broader context of the educational mission for the Society: ‘Schools became a central locus of Jesuit ministries that also went beyond the classroom, with Jesuit communities attached to schools serving as a kind of base of operations for a broad range of pastoral and other ministries.’

¹⁵⁴ Christopher O’Donnell, ‘Ignatius of Loyola’, in *Ecclesia*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 207-208 at 207.

¹⁵⁵ Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire: a New View of the Counter-Reformation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1977), 31.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 34.

¹⁵⁷ David Mitchell, *The Jesuits: A History*, 69. Canisius (also Peter Kanis), was a Dutchman from Nijmegen. He became ‘the most tireless Jesuit apostle in Central Europe’. He challenged the ascendance of Protestantism in Germany, Austria, Bohemia (Czech Republic), and Switzerland.

¹⁵⁸ Christopher Hollis, *The Jesuits: A History* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), 25. See also John Patrick Donnelly, ‘New religious orders for men’, 175. Donnelly names as ‘the most influential early Jesuit theologians’ Peter Canisius and Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621); both wrote polemical works against Protestants, catechisms republished in hundreds of editions, and popular devotional books.

¹⁵⁹ Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, 302. See Thomas Worcester, ‘Introduction’, 6. Observing that many of the first generation of Jesuits were Portuguese or Spanish, Worcester holds that, coming from homelands proactive in European exploration and conquest, these Jesuits were facilitated in the evangelisation of the Pacific and Atlantic worlds.

Ratzinger recalls, they ‘now also take up the world-wide mission’.¹⁶⁰ At the forefront of this mission is Francis Xavier (1506-52), the first Jesuit missionary to Asia. Sailing from Lisbon in 1541, he laboured in India, in Indonesia, in Japan. He died while seeking to enter China and before his mission there had got under way.¹⁶¹

At the time of the emergence of the Companions of Jesus, the broader context is of a Church immersed in a sea of corruption,¹⁶² disconnected from the personal and spiritual needs of its people,¹⁶³ and confronted with a growing opposition to the authority of the papacy. In addition to pervasive ecclesiological tensions, a juxtaposition of a complex alliance of political and social factors conspired in the realisation of the call to Reformation. Yet, against that background, and within 12 years of its foundation, the Companions were seen as ‘the most vibrant, most provocative religious order the Catholic Church had yet produced’.¹⁶⁴ When Ignatius of Loyola died in 1556, the Society totalled more than one thousand members, and administered a hundred foundations. A hundred years later there were more than 15,000 Jesuits and 550 foundations.¹⁶⁵

Addressing the place of Ignatius in the evolving telling of the Christian story, Fernández reflects on the most compelling understanding that he had of his charism: ‘He is a Christian sinner called by Christ to follow him in Company for the service of souls’.¹⁶⁶ As such, relative to the circumstances of the time, the witness of Ignatius and the Society of Jesus ‘was clearly in the tradition of the *sequela Christi*’. It is in that light that we read their formation as a new religious movement – namely ‘the most dynamic element in the Roman Church between 1550 and 1650’.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 497.

¹⁶¹ Brian Moynahan, *Faith: A History of Christianity*, 425. Xavier ‘baptized tens of thousands in India and Ceylon’ before founding a mission in Japan. He died on an island off Canton in 1552 before his mission to China got started.

¹⁶² See Brian Moynahan. *The Faith: A History of Christianity*, 343-345. Moynahan, reflecting on the Church of the 16th Century, sees it immersed in an unholy litany of nepotism, scandal, simony, abuse. He holds that, for Luther, the Holy See was more corrupt ‘than Babylon or Sodom’; the Pope, Leo X, ‘in him who calls himself holy and most spiritual, there is more worldliness than in the world itself’.

¹⁶³ See Christopher O’Donnell, ‘Ignatius of Loyola’, in *Ecclesia* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 207-208 at 207.

¹⁶⁴ Jonathan Wright, *The Jesuits: Missions, Myths and Histories*, (London: Harper Perennial 2005), 2.

¹⁶⁵ Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire*, 34.

¹⁶⁶ Fidel González Fernández, ‘Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church’, 93.

¹⁶⁷ Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire*, 35.

6.2.7 Missionary Congregations

Referencing the fifth wave of ecclesial movements as the missionary congregations of the nineteenth century, Ratzinger identifies elements peculiar to their development. Thus, unlike previous forms of new associations, who had focused on the renewal of Church life, the emphasis of these new congregations was the call to mission. It was, moreover, a call rooted in the Church's mission to go to the ends of the earth in pursuit of its task to baptise and to teach (cf. Acts 1:8) – that is, 'to those continents that had hardly been touched by Christianity'.¹⁶⁸

Again, naming a distinguishing characteristic of these apostolic movements, the Cardinal points to a fruitful collaboration between the orders and the local churches. A number of elements influenced particularly this revival in missionary activity. These included the formation of the *Society for the Propagation of the Faith* in 1822,¹⁶⁹ the direct support of the Holy See to missionaries,¹⁷⁰ in addition to the politico-economic ambitions of colonial interests.¹⁷¹ A distinguishing feature of this particular charismatic irruption is that the apostolic movement of the nineteenth century was above all a female movement.¹⁷² A new emphasis on 'Mission', as inclusive of education, healthcare and social work, enabled women religious, hitherto essentially excluded from working abroad,¹⁷³ to now come 'powerfully to the fore'.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 498. See also L. Nemer, 'Mission History 1: Catholic', in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia, 2nd Edition*, 9 (Washington D.C.: Gale, 2003), 690-693 at 693: A characteristic of many of these missionaries is that they came from the conservative, devotional stream of Catholicism. They would propagate these devotions and be ultramontane in sentiment and practice, as well as reluctant to embrace other cultures.

¹⁶⁹ This was founded by Pauline Jaricot in France (Lyon). Its vision was as an international association for the spiritual and financial assistance of Catholic missionary activity engaged in preaching the Gospel in non-Catholic countries. The official Latin designation for it is the society 'Propagandum Fidei'.

¹⁷⁰ For example Gregory XVI (1831 – 1846), and Pius IX (1846 – 1878).

¹⁷¹ See P.K. Meagher, 'Missions', in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion, Volume F-N* (Washington D.C.: Corpus Publications, 1979), 2389-2391 at 2390.

¹⁷² Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 498.

¹⁷³ See 'Missions' in E.A. Livingstone (ed), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd edition, revised* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 110-1102 at 1101.

¹⁷⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 498. See also Cardinal J. Francis Stafford, 'Institutional and Charismatic Aspects: Quasi Coessential to the Church's Constitution', in *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly Edition in English), 26 April 2000, 6. Cardinal Stafford includes here the Sisters of Mercy, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mother Cabrini's sisters and others.

6.2.8 Charismatic Irruptions

Drawing conclusions from his overview of the place of new movements throughout the history of the Church, Cardinal Ratzinger identifies the relationship between the permanent structure of Church order and the ever new charismatic irruptions which ‘ceaselessly revitalise and renew this structure’.¹⁷⁵ In that context he concludes his historical survey with three observations:¹⁷⁶

- i. That there must always be missions and ministries in the Catholic Church that are not attached to the local Church alone, but serve the universal proclamation of the Gospel.
- ii. That, at any given time in history, the Pope must rely on these ministries and they on him.
- iii. That the collaboration between the two dimensions (the institutional and charismatic) ‘completes the symphony of the Church's life’.

Developing Ratzinger’s ‘waves of movements’ template, Fidel Fernández outlined the evolution of New Ecclesial Movements in the twentieth century.¹⁷⁷ He traces their development to repeated invitations from Leo XIII (Pope 1878-1903) for the laity to structure themselves in order to play a more active role in the life of society and the Church.¹⁷⁸ This development was engendered by the ‘crisis’ which saw the marginalisation of the Church to the fringes of civil society, particularly in the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789–1799). As such, it drew on the core understanding among laity regarding the significance of the Christian missionary dimension to the lay state.¹⁷⁹ Fernández holds that this proposal of Pope Leo was repeated by the popes of the twentieth century, which, encouraging the initiative of Catholics, issued in the advent of various movements of ecclesial life, in addition to catechetical and liturgical renewal.¹⁸⁰

This is corroborated in *Christifideles Laici* where Pope John Paul II, acknowledging the presence historically of lay associations in the Church, reflected that ‘in modern times such

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements*, 482.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 499.

¹⁷⁷ See Fidel González Fernández, ‘Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church’, 100-103.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 101.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

lay groups have received a special stimulus' rooted in the ecclesiology named by the Second Vatican Council, whereby they act as a 'sign of communion and of unity of the Church of Christ'.¹⁸¹ As such, they represent 'the lay faithful's hearkening to the call of Christ the Lord to work in his vineyard, to take an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church in this great moment in history'.¹⁸² Thus, again consistent with the pattern historically associated with the emergence of ecclesial movements, they act today as a providential irruption of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.¹⁸³ In that regard, and consistent with the purpose of this chapter – reflections on the capacity of the Church in Ireland to embrace the 'New Pentecost' named by the event of the Second Vatican Council – we move now to examine a number of the more prominent of these movements.

6.3 COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

6.3.1 Origins

Communion and Liberation (CL) is an ecclesial movement whose purpose is the education to Christian maturity of its adherents and collaboration in the mission of the Church in contemporary society.¹⁸⁴ Placing the centrality of the method of the Incarnation at the heart of its mission, CL seeks to communicate the awareness that Christ is the one true response to the deepest needs of people in every moment of history.¹⁸⁵

The movement traces its origins to Milan, Italy, in 1954. At that time, a religion teacher at Berchet high school in the city, Fr Luigi Giussani (1922-2005), discerning a serious deficiency in the ability of students to assimilate a knowledge of Christian orthodoxy with a practice of Christian life, was inspired to abandon the teaching of theology and, instead, focus his efforts on building 'an apostolate among schoolchildren'.¹⁸⁶ Benedict XVI, recalling these

¹⁸¹ *Christifideles Laici*, 29.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Cf. Fidel González Fernández, 'Charisms and Movements in the History of the Church', 101-102.

¹⁸⁴ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 34.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁸⁶ See Msgr. Luigi Giussani, 'Testimonies by the Movements and Communities', in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, 141-184 at 155. Fr Giussani reports that a primary motivating experience occurred for him when, on the train to Rimini, he encountered three young men: 'I found them terribly ignorant and full of prejudice about Christianity. That was what prompted me to ask my superiors to abandon the teaching of theology in seminary and dedicate myself to an apostolate among schoolchildren in Milan'. He then left his position on the faculty of the theological school of Venegono to go to teach religion at Berchet high school in Milan.

origins of the movement, outlines that, at a time when common opinion perceived Christianity as a 'difficult and oppressive' way to live,

Fr Giussani then committed himself to awaken in youth the love for Christ, "Way, Truth and Life", repeating that only he is the way towards the fulfilment of the deepest desires of the human heart, and that Christ does not save us regardless of our humanity, but through it.¹⁸⁷

To this end, Guissani initiated student groups with the intent of facilitating their encounter with Jesus, not merely as an individual experience, but within the living Church community.¹⁸⁸ Marking the 50th anniversary of the initiation of these student groups (at the celebration of the Jubilee of *Communion and Liberation*), Pope John Paul II outlines their 'original pedagogical intuition' as the capacity to propose in a compelling way, and in harmony with contemporary culture, the Christian event, 'perceived as a source of new values, which can give the whole of life a direction'.¹⁸⁹

Convinced by his experience with this small group of students from his school, Fr Giussani recognised the potential of such gatherings. Soon, the experience spread to other schools and in time led to the development, in 1954, of *Gioventù Studentesca* (GS – 'Student Youth'). Further, strongly encouraged by the Archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, *Gioventù Studentesca* spread to other Italian cities, and after 1968 it also began to involve undergraduates and adults among its membership.

In the 1960s, driven by ideological and political tensions, divisions in the forward direction of GS emerged. Adopting the social and political ideals popular among student movements in Italy at the time, by 1968 a significant number of GS members had left to join the secular revolutionary student movement. It was out of this period of rapid change, both in Italian society and within the Catholic Church, that CL emerged from the GS experience. The group within GS that openly opposed these new insurgent movements in the universities, as well as opposing the new direction of the official Catholic organisations in withdrawing from

¹⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, 'Speech to the members of Communion and Liberation Movement on the 25th anniversary of its Pontifical Recognition', 24 March 2007 [Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007].

¹⁸⁸ Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church*, 152.

¹⁸⁹ John Paul II, 'Letter to Msgr. Luigi Giussani on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Movement "Communion and Liberation" ' [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2004].

partisan politics, evolved into CL. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger reflects on his experience of encounter with these GS members:

I saw that, at the time of the great Marxist revolution, there were others – in this case especially young university students – who had grasped the need for a Christian revolution, and who did not respond to the Marxist revolution against the bourgeois condition in the world with a form of conservatism, but with the new and far more radical revolution of the Christian faith.¹⁹⁰

Thus, in 1969 the movement was first identified as *Communion and Liberation*. Against the background of the student turbulence of 1968 this name was chosen to express the conviction that the Christian event lived out in communion is the foundation of authentic human liberation.¹⁹¹

Political turmoil and conflict was close to the evolving story of CL during the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike many other Catholic movements, whose focus was specifically on spiritual renewal, Giussani advocated, in addition, a commitment to political engagement.¹⁹² Church analyst and author John Allen offers perspective in that regard:

To most Italian Catholics, *Comunione e Liberazione* represents a right-wing alternative to the "mainstream" lay movement in the country, *Azione Cattolica*. Though tensions date back to the early 1960s, the definitive rupture came in 1986, when *Azione Cattolica* made its so-called "religious choice," which meant in effect distancing itself from the Christian Democratic Party with which the church had been identified since 1948. The idea was that the church should be in dialogue with all social forces, including the left. CL, on the other hand, argued for a more active "presence" of Catholics in political life, which in practice translated into a closer identification with the Christian Democrats and with the right.¹⁹³

In 1975 CL members were among those who founded *Movimento Popolare*, a political organisation that supported candidates favourable to CL's social views. In the context of the Italian First Republic they were regarded as unequivocally right-wing politically, and orthodox in their Christian rationale. Further, their presence as the political arm of CL was perceived as confessionally arrogant and methodologically aggressive.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, their

¹⁹⁰ 'Dialogue with Joseph Card. Ratzinger', in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, 225-258 at 226-227.

¹⁹¹ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 36.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 44. Giussani believes that such engagement with the political process is 'a risk which the true Christian must take'.

¹⁹³ John Allen, 'The Word from Rome', in *National Catholic Reporter*, Vol 4, No. 45, August 26, 2005.

¹⁹⁴ *Movimento Popolare* exerted considerable influence in Italian politics in the 1980s and 1990s and successfully engineered the election of many of its representatives. The alignment of CL to the right wing political voice in Italy attracted militant opposition. Episodes of aggression and violence began against

close alignment to the controversial weekly newspaper *Il Sabato* helped intensify levels of resentment and antagonism against CL.¹⁹⁵ The seismic shift occurring in Italian politics in the aftermath of the 1993-1994 corruption scandals, which implicated, among others, members of *Movimento Popolare*, led to a complete reorientation of CL. The political arm of CL ceased all its operations in 1993 and the focus of CL's activities shifted away from political participation and towards a renewed emphasis on the problem of education.¹⁹⁶ Recognising that (what they term) the 'confrontation of ideas' had essentially lost the capacity to engage people on a personal level, CL today places emphasis on articulating positive educational proposals in a society that seems at times 'definitively exhausted and emptied of all its urge to idealism'.¹⁹⁷ Thus, locating the focus of CL's efforts against a tendency (within Western society especially) to marginalise the Christian event, Giussani speaks of countering this 'reduction of what Christ wished to achieve' through the catechetical and evangelical proclamation of the centrality of 'the nature of the gift of Christ'.¹⁹⁸

Further, although it remains primarily an Italian phenomenon, since the 1980s CL has moved to develop its presence internationally. Thus, in circumstances imbued with the call to mission intrinsic to the symbolic import of 40 day encounter, this expansion of CL's presence is located against the mandate accorded it by John Paul II who entrusted it with the call to 'Go to all the world and bring the truth, the beauty and the peace, which is encountered in Christ the Redeemer'.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, 'Fr Giussani made those words the programme of the whole Movement', resulting for *Communion and Liberation* in 'the beginning of a

adherents to the Movement and continued for some years, reaching a peak in 1977 with a total of 120 attacks on persons and offices belonging to CL throughout Italy. See <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/storia.htm> [accessed March 2011].

¹⁹⁵ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 43. Motivated by the need to defend orthodoxy, and against the criticism of believing they were in 'exclusive possession of the truth', *Il Sabato* engaged in an ever more critical and vitriolic campaign against the undermining of Catholic truth which, in their viewpoint, was endemic in Italian and Western society (ibid). There was, as they believed, 'a huge conspiracy, involving Communists, Protestants, secular humanists, liberal Jesuits, and Catholics committed to ecumenical dialogue' (ibid). Many Italian bishops publicly voiced their displeasure with the newspaper, which had begun to question the orthodoxy of certain groups and individuals within the Italian church. Against this background, CL's relationship with the Italian episcopacy, and in particular Milan's Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, became increasingly strained. In a gesture of deference to church hierarchy Giussani declared in 1989 that *Il Sabato* was no longer officially aligned to CL. The paper continued to publish without Giussani's official endorsement for a few more years, ceasing publication in November 1993.

¹⁹⁶ See 'CL: A reality in the church' at <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/comlibe/clreal.htm> [accessed March 2011]. 'In recent years, the presence of CL in society has become more specifically attuned to its educational, cultural, and social nature. ... [Particularly] the movement is concentrating on the crisis at the root of all the social and political crises: the crisis in education.'

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ See Msgr. Luigi Giussani, 'Testimonies by the Movements and Communities', 154.

¹⁹⁹ John Paul II, letter 'to Fr Giussani on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of *Communion and Liberation*', February 22, 2004.

missionary season', a development which has established its presence in 80 countries.²⁰⁰ The Movement, which is seen to have particular influence in Spain and Brazil,²⁰¹ came to Ireland in 1979.²⁰²

In the light of these developments, Pope John Paul II, again in language suffused in 40 Day imaging, commends the Movement for its capacity to help profoundly change people's lives, offering a faith experience, through the experience of a personal encounter with Christ, 'that can take root in the most varied cultures'.²⁰³ As such, establishing perspective on the place of CL as a manifestation of the 'springtime' in the Church emanating from the Second Vatican Council, he locates it at the centre of this call to renewal:

"Communion and Liberation" is a Movement that together with a whole range of other associations and new communities can rightly be considered one of the new shoots of the promising "springtime" inspired by the Holy Spirit in these past 50 years.²⁰⁴

6.3.2 Charism and Mission

Defining a charism as 'a gift of the Spirit, given to a person in a specific historical context, so that this person can initiate an experience of faith that might in some way be useful to the life of the Church', Giussani holds that it is an 'ultimate terminal of the Incarnation'.²⁰⁵ As such, a charism manifests 'a particular way in which the Fact of Jesus Christ Man and God reaches me, and through me can reach others'.²⁰⁶ In that light, *Communion and Liberation* hold that the essence of the charism underpinning their existence is grounded in three interrelated factors.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ Benedict XVI, address 'to the members of Communion and Liberation Movement on the 25th anniversary of its Pontifical Recognition', Saturday, 24 March 2007.

²⁰¹ From *Communion and Liberation* Official International Website: <http://www.clonline.org/whatiscl.html>

²⁰² See Paola Ronconi, 'A Real Guinness Beer', in *Traces*, November 2001 (the movement's official publication is the monthly *TRACCE – Litterae Communionis*): 'In 1978, on the occasion of a university students' meeting with the Pope in Rome, the Pontifical Secretary of the time, an authentic Irishman, Msgr John Magee, met with Fr Giussani, and conversationally proposed that Giussani send some of "his kids" to Ireland. No sooner said than done: the following year, Guido and Nicola set out from Milan to continue their studies in Dublin. In 1980, they were joined by Mauro, a political science student from Catania' (ibid).

²⁰³ John Paul II, 'Letter to Msgr. Luigi Giussani on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Movement "Communion and Liberation"', 22 February 2004.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ See 'The Charism of CL', <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/comlibe/carisma.htm>.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko (ed.), 'Fraternity Of Communion And Liberation' in *International Associations of the Faithful, Directory*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006).

- i. The proclamation that God became Man;
- ii. In the affirmation that this man – Jesus of Nazareth, who died and rose again – is a present event, whose visible sign is communion, that is to say, the unity of a people led by a living person, the Bishop of Rome;
- iii. In the awareness that it is only in God made man, and, therefore, within the life of the Church, that humankind is more true and humanity is truly more human.

Outlining the development of this understanding of the charism attaching to CL, Giussani locates it specifically in terms of the announcement that ‘The Word became flesh’ (Jn 1:14). He recalls the event of his ‘awakening’ to the import of this proclamation.²⁰⁸ Referencing it in terms of a personal and radically transforming event, Giussani holds that, when the significance of the Incarnation was ‘explained’ to him by a teacher at his seminary, it effected in him the belief that all things ‘beautiful, true, attractive, fascinating, even just as a possibility, found its *raison d’être* in that message’.²⁰⁹ He, further, represents the consequence attaching to this belief – namely that ‘the response to the needs of the human heart, the ultimate object of everyone’s desires’ has become flesh.²¹⁰ Everything for Giussani, from that moment, was imbued with the sacredness of the Incarnate: ‘The passing moment, since then, was no longer banal to me’.²¹¹ Critically, in terms of understanding and appropriating this experience in terms of ‘charism’, Giussani, ‘many years later’, came to realise that this ‘passion of the heart’ for the ever newness of life represents a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in generating an ‘affection for Christ in a particular historical context’.²¹² Moreover, ‘the person who receives it “must” participate in Christ’s mandate: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mk 16:15)’.²¹³ Referencing the impact of this charism in the pastoral context of his diocese, Cardinal Simons holds:

²⁰⁸ The notion of ‘awakening’ is referenced here in terms of the psychological, and religious, concept of ‘coming to awareness’. In that respect ‘awareness’ is recognised as that ‘aspect of consciousness that is noticed, recognised, appreciated, or otherwise *sensed* by a given person’ (Gerard May, *Will & Spirit*, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982, 46).

²⁰⁹ Luigi Giussani, ‘Testimonies by the Movements and Communities’, 155.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, 156.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 157.

The charism that lies at its origin consists in living consciously on the basis of the incarnation of God in Christ, in the conviction that this must have an effect on our way of being men and women in society, in the world of politics and culture.²¹⁴

Recalling the application of this charism within the context of the *Gioventù Studentesca*, Msgr Giussani names it in a manner that exudes 40 Day symbolism. Thus, drawing echoes of St Anselm, he proposes a symbiotic ‘correspondence’ relative to the belief of faith and the seeing of understanding. His method was to evidence for his students an indissoluble continuum linking Christian proclamation, free adherence to this proclamation, and ‘the needs of their hearts’.²¹⁵ As such, it represents an approach that is experientially and systematically consistent regarding the pattern of encounter with the Easter story,²¹⁶ and its consequence, the formation in identity and mission.²¹⁷ Accordingly, by particularising the charism of CL in affirming Jesus of Nazareth as ‘a present event’, Giussani reflects the *sine quo non* of Christian belief – the need to experience a present-tense encounter with the Jesus proclaimed in the gospels and in the emerging Christian community.²¹⁸ Moreover, the fruitfulness of this charism is corroborated by Pope John Paul II when, reflecting on the influence exerted by CL on people’s lives, he holds that ‘it drives them to a personal encounter with Christ’.²¹⁹ Furthermore, again reflecting a fidelity to the established Easter pattern, this encounter acts as the determining factor in the call to ‘recognition’ and the call to ‘mission’.²²⁰

The dynamic of recognizing and verifying the presence of Christ makes anyone become creative, and a protagonist himself, and enables him to discover that the Christian’s activity is by its very nature missionary.²²¹

Related to this sense of Christian awareness, the practice of mission is central in the life of the movement:

²¹⁴ Adrianus Johannes Card. Simons, ‘Pastoral Experiences of the Bishops’ in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, (Vatican Press: Vatican City, 2000), 111-139 at 111.

²¹⁵ See ‘The Charism of CL’, <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/comlibe/carisma.htm>

²¹⁶ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

²¹⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 5. See also Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, 12.

²¹⁸ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Free to Believe*, 92. Gallagher continues, ‘for beyond this, Christian belief is either stunted or else impossible’.

²¹⁹ John Paul II, ‘Letter to Msgr. Luigi Giussani on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Movement “Communion and Liberation”’.

²²⁰ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51: five point Pattern of Encounter.

²²¹ Msgr. Luigi Giussani, ‘Testimonies by the Movements and Communities’, 157.

Communion and Liberation is an ecclesial movement whose purpose is the education to Christian maturity of its adherents and collaboration in the mission of the Church in all the spheres of contemporary life.²²²

Since its foundation CL has engaged in this mission with the intention of re-establishing an authentic Christian presence within a cultural milieu predominantly secular, and essentially opposed, toward any such engagement. This is on the basis that Christianity, viewed by the incumbent cultural mores as a redundant hypothesis in terms of constructive dialogue, has been marginalised by the prevailing culture in terms of a valid reading of reality.²²³ Challenging this position CL places at the heart of its missionary outreach its core message, and foundational charism: its insistence on the centrality of Jesus Christ – that is, the belief that salvation is possible for everyone, requiring only that Christ be recognised as immediately present.²²⁴ That the Movement proactively embraces this mission in (what is often perceived as) an ‘aggressive and direct manner’,²²⁵ is merely characteristic, Giussani holds, of the mindset driving this sense of mission and charism:

The dynamic of recognizing and verifying the presence of Christ makes anyone become creative, and a protagonist himself, and enables him to discover that the Christian’s activity is by its very nature missionary, i.e. an urge to share the method of Christ himself, who created the Church, to make him known throughout the world. The aim of the Christian existence is therefore to live for the human glory of Christ in history.²²⁶

6.3.3 Organisation and Structure

The organisational structure of *Communion and Liberation* is flexible by nature.²²⁷ It does not issue membership cards or keep an official register of adherents, opting instead for a free and flexible form of membership.²²⁸ CL’s adherents are predominantly lay Catholics. However, there are also presbyters and religious who belong to the movement, as well as consecrated lay women and men who are committed to lifelong celibacy, known as the ‘Memores

²²² Cf. ‘CL: A Reality in the Church’: <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/comlibe/clreal.htm>

²²³ See ‘The three dimensions of experience’ (culture), <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/comlibe/tredimen.htm> [accessed March 2011].

²²⁴ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 37.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²²⁶ Msgr. Luigi Giussani, ‘Testimonies by the Movements and Communities’, 157.

²²⁷ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 37.

²²⁸ ‘CL: A Reality in the Church’.

Domini'.²²⁹ Within that structure, the whole life of the Movement is sustained economically by free voluntary contributions from members.²³⁰

The system of administration and governance employed by CL operates in terms of a hierarchical format. The leaders of the movement include both lay persons and priests. At the head of its leadership structure is the General Council, commonly known as the 'Center'. This was presided over by Giussani until his death in 2005, and from then by his successor, Spanish priest Julián Carrón. The General Council acts to unite the directors in Italy and abroad for every sphere which the Movement operates.²³¹ Each of these spheres is led by its own group of leaders. On the local level – national, regional, or city – the Movement is guided by *diakonias*, that is, groups of leaders available for service to the life of the community.²³² The governing council also includes representatives of the other entities that have emerged from the CL charism: the *Memores Domini* Lay Association;²³³ the priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St Charles Borromeo;²³⁴ the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption.²³⁵ The leaders in CL are chosen from among those who show the clearest awareness of the Movement's aims and most generous witness and dedication of service to the community.²³⁶

²²⁹ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 46.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

²³¹ 'CL: A Reality in the Church'.

²³² Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 38.

²³³ Sometimes called the 'Adult Group', the Association known as *Memores Domini* unites the members of *Communion and Liberation* who follow a vocation of total dedication to God while living in the world. They originated in Milan in 1964, from within the experience of *Gioventù Studentesca*. Through the sharing of a common life, associates aim at pursuing a life of Christian perfection by practicing the Evangelical Counsels – Obedience, Poverty, Chastity. Approved canonically by the Bishop of Piacenza, on 14 June 1981, the *Memores Domini* were approved by the Pope John Paul II on 8 December 1988. This established their juridical status as a 'Private Universal Ecclesial Association'.

²³⁴ This Fraternity was established in September 1985 within *Communion and Liberation* as a priestly association. Encouraged by Fr Giussani, the priests who formed it wished to support each other in their presbyteral vocation and to respond to the call issued to CL by John Paul II during the papal audience for the thirtieth anniversary of the movement: 'Go into all the world to bring truth, beauty and peace that are found in Christ the Redeemer' (September 29, 1984). The result was a missionary Fraternity, recognised in 1989 as a Society of Apostolic Life by Cardinal Ugo Poletti. The priests of the Fraternity offer their availability to go wherever the needs of the Church and the life of the Movement require their presence.

²³⁵ The religious Institute of the *Sisters of Charity of the Assumption* was established in 1993 by Pontifical Decree as an autonomous Institute, separate from that of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, which many young women from CL had entered from the 1960s onwards. Historical developments in the Church following Vatican Council II gave rise to a new focus, and led to the birth of this new religious family. This Institute found in Giussani the guide for a contemporary expression of the originating charism of Little Sisters of the Assumption (established in Paris by Fr Etienne Pernet, 1824-1899, in 1865). The work of the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption is aimed at the family, through helping in the home, caring for the sick, for children in difficulty, and for the elderly. The Institute is today made up of some one hundred Sisters (*Traces* magazine, February 2006). It is present in Italy in Milan, Turin, Trieste, Rome, and Naples, and in Spain, in Cordoba.

²³⁶ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 38.

Although in existence since 1954 the canonical status of CL was established only under the authority of John Paul II. This reflects a belief that, while the relationship between CL and both John XXIII and Paul VI are seen as ‘not that warm’,²³⁷ during the pontificate of John Paul II the movement enjoyed an unparalleled ascendancy. Indeed, in terms of the importance of Movements, CL is named as one of the two ‘papal favourites’ at this time.²³⁸ An extremely close relationship between Pope John Paul II and CL was apparent from the outset of Karol Wojtyła’s papacy. Addressing a gathering of young people of *Communion and Liberation* in May 1984, John Paul said that ‘we as a Church, as Christians, as the CL [*come ciellini*], we must be visible for others’.²³⁹ His identification with the term *Cielini*, the colloquial name for members of CL, indicates the commonality of CL with the philosophy of John Paul II – a reality concretised in the distinctive CL emphasis on both evangelisation and inculturation.²⁴⁰

The spirit of affinity shared between CL and John Paul II is seen to continue under Benedict XVI. Addressing members of the Movement gathered to mark the 25th anniversary of the Pontifical recognition of the Communion and Liberation Fraternity, Pope Benedict speaks of Giussani, whose requiem Mass he presided at, as ‘a true friend of mine’.²⁴¹ Further, identifying the Movement as ‘a community experience of faith’, he grounds the originating impetus for it in a renewed encounter with Christ and thus, ‘by an impulse derived ultimately from the Holy Spirit’.²⁴²

Since 1982 CL’s official canonical recognition within the Catholic Church is through a structure called the *Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, an association composed of the more committed members of the Movement.²⁴³ On February 11 1982, with the Papal decree

²³⁷ Ibid, 46.

²³⁸ Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2003), 123. The other ‘favourite’ is named as Opus Dei.

²³⁹ John Paul II, Speech ‘To the young people of Communion and Liberation’, May 13 1984. Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1984].

²⁴⁰ Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church*, 153.

²⁴¹ Benedict XVI, Address ‘To the Members of Communion and Liberation Movement on the 25th Anniversary of its Pontifical Recognition’, 24 March 2007 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007]].

²⁴² Ibid. Moreover, in a letter of 2nd February 2006 to Father Julián Carrón, marking the first anniversary of the death of Msgr Giussani, Pope Benedict wrote: ‘I assure you of my prayers, as I ask the Lord to obtain that Communion and Liberation serves the cause of the Gospel joyfully, persevering in the work begun by its venerable Founder’.

²⁴³ The first “Fraternity” groups were formed around the mid-1970s at the initiative of some former university students who wanted to go more deeply into what it means to belong to the Church, also within the conditions of adult life and the responsibilities it brings, in communion with others. See ‘The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation’, at <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/formevita/frater.htm> [accessed March 2011]. Belonging to the Fraternity calls for a minimal rule of: a) personal asceticism; b) daily moments of prayer; c) participation in

Consilium Pro Laicis, John Paul recognised the Fraternity as a Lay Association of Pontifical Right, under papal jurisdiction. On that basis the group could operate in any diocese in the world without specific episcopal authority. The letter accompanying the decree, signed by Cardinal Opilio Rossi, recognises that the Fraternity of CL's contribution to the Church in her work of evangelisation is of 'outstanding importance and pastoral urgency'.²⁴⁴ The Directory recording details of the 'International Associations of the Faithful' registers the number of members in the Fraternity at 48,000.²⁴⁵ These are found in 64 countries, outlined as follows: Africa (9), Asia (7), Europe (28), Middle East (3), North America (7), Oceania (1) and South America (9). It holds, further, that over 60,000 people share the CL experience.

The various groupings attaching to the Movement allows for participation in the activities of CL to take place at different levels.²⁴⁶ It can involve a relatively low degree of commitment, such as attending a weekly catechesis meeting known as a 'School of Community',²⁴⁷ or a higher degree of commitment such as enrolment in the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

6.3.4 The Irish Context

The presence of CL in the Irish context is calculated numerically at between 50-100 members.²⁴⁸ This number includes members of family groupings, university students, and other adherents both Irish and non-Irish. It includes also four Italian members of the *Memores Domini* lay association (all men), based in their Community house in Clonskeagh, in Dublin.

encounters of spiritual formation including an annual retreat; d) commitment to the support, financial and otherwise, of the charitable, missionary, and cultural initiatives promoted or sustained by the Fraternity (ibid). It was in 1980 that *Communion and Liberation* was first canonically recognised. This was by the Ordinary Abbot of Montecassino, Mgr Martino Matronola.

²⁴⁴ See 'The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation', [Accessed March 2011] at

<http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/formevita/frater.htm>

²⁴⁵ Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko (ed.), 'Fraternity of Communion and Liberation' in *International Associations of the Faithful, Directory*.

²⁴⁶ Such as those named: *Memores Domini* Lay Association; the priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St Charles Borromeo; the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption.

²⁴⁷ The main method by which members of CL are formed in the faith is a weekly catechesis meeting, known as a "School of Community". Each School of Community is a group typically of several up to 10 people. See <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/comlibe/tredimen.htm> [accessed March 2011] The Schools of Community usually open up with prayer, followed by the singing of songs. Next, the School of Community will read and discuss together some text, focusing both on what it says and comparing it to one's own lived experience. Often, the text comes from a portion of Msgr Giussani's writings – the same text being reflected upon by each 'School of Community' throughout the world. The catechesis will close with prayer, often a Marian prayer.

²⁴⁸ Mauro Biondi, designated leader of *Communion and Liberation* in Ireland (in dialogue, January 2011).

Members gather on Friday evenings in Rathgar parish for the ‘School of Community’. The designated leader of CL in Ireland is Mauro Biondi. Originally from Sicily, he came to Ireland in 1980 and was part of the vanguard in establishing a presence of CL in the country. Although relatively small in number, the influence exerted by CL in Ireland is significant. The President of the Irish Republic, Mary McAleese, has officially participated in a number of CL sponsored events.²⁴⁹ The Movement includes among its supporters Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, and John Waters, the writer and columnist. Each Good Friday CL sponsors a public ‘Way of the Cross’ in the Phoenix Park in Dublin, led by Archbishop Martin.²⁵⁰

Rooted in the charism of CL – that the mission of the Church is about encountering Jesus, the human incarnation of God, the One who leads to the discovery of our true humanity – the Movement in Ireland has been consistent in identifying a deficiency in the approach to catechesis within the Irish Church. Its initial prognosis, in November 1981, interpreted the incumbent model of Christian expression in Ireland as significantly separate from the story of Christian encounter. It had become, in their view, in effect, a sociological and cultural legacy attaching to the residue of historical religious expression in Ireland. Thus,

the proposal of salvation and happiness ... has lost a large part of its fascination in Ireland, and has given way to a Christianity made of rules, precepts, and dying customs, instead of what once was a living culture.²⁵¹

They, further, identify a contributory, and critical underlying factor giving rise to this reading of Irish Catholicism – namely that the teaching of the Christian story, effectively subjugated to secularist expectation, is seriously diminished in its capacity to speak to the experience of its hearers. As such, the story is commonly encountered as

a subject like math, and children do Communion or Confirmation together with the whole class just like they were doing a history assignment.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ These include visiting the CL exhibition ‘From the Land to the Peoples’ when it was held in Dublin (1998); and an official participation in the presentation of *The Religious Sense* in November 2001: see Paola Ronconi, ‘A Foretaste of Heaven’ in *Traces*, December 1st 2001. In August 2010 President McAleese delivered the opening address at the Rimini Meeting for Friendship Amongst Peoples.

²⁵⁰ Also, on four occasions since his appointment as Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin has presented a keynote address at CL sponsored conferences (2004, 2006, 2010, 2011). Indeed, his intervention at the 2004 conference – a meeting to present the book *Why the Church* by Luigi Giussani, founder of *Communion and Liberation* – was his first public appearance as Archbishop of Dublin. See also Michael Kelly, ‘The Pope’s Rambos’, in *The Irish Catholic*, 2nd September 2010. Kelly holds that, ‘as a senior prelate and a frequent visitor to Rimini, Dr Martin’s patronage is much-prized by the cielini.’

²⁵¹ Paola Ronconi, ‘A Real Guinness Beer’, in *Traces*, November 2001.

An underlying current driving this assessment finds echoes in the writings of Ronald Rolheiser. Reflecting on the ‘dark night’ of restlessness integral to the human spirit, ‘kindled in love by yearnings’,²⁵³ Rolheiser holds that the contemporary age, and the Western, secularist dominated, culture, militates against the consummation of the ‘dark night’ – perpetuating instead ‘a virtual conspiracy against the interior life’.²⁵⁴ So too, CL, addressing the Irish context, speaks in terms of ‘impediments’ placed in the way of knowledge, to the extent that ‘knowledge is defined by the rejection of Christ’.²⁵⁵ They would challenge also the unwitting compliance of the method of religious education in the Irish school system in this rejection. Thus, holding that central to the charism of Giussani are the pillars of reason, education and freedom, a tendency for (primarily) school-based catechesis to emphasise (in their view) life in Christ as, essentially, adherence to an ethical code, acts as an impediment to the realisation of that ‘fully human’ life.²⁵⁶ This echoes the defined position of Giussani: ‘to educate means to help the human soul enter into the totality of the real’.²⁵⁷

In a similar vein, responding to Pope Benedict’s pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland, CL spoke of ‘the real heart of the question, the forgotten focus’, the ‘something that can shatter the inexorable weight of our evil’,²⁵⁸ and identifies it with embracing Christ, the Incarnate One. Thus, the task of the Church in Ireland must be to remember ‘the wholly different measure that He introduces into the world’.²⁵⁹

In all of this, they remain consistent with the originating charism named by Giussani in establishing the Movement that was to evolve into *Communion and Liberation*. In his letter addressed to Pope John Paul II marking the fiftieth anniversary of CL, Giussani wrote:

²⁵² Ibid. Ronconi continues, ‘if you’re lucky, you get a teacher who is a practicing Catholic’. Further, in the interpretation of CL, this is why they had ‘to come to the rescue of our children’ (ibid). Thus, engaging in a separate catechesis from school, ‘weekly they teach their children and classmates who Jesus is, His life, and all the rest’ (ibid).

²⁵³ From John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*. The entire stanza reads: *On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings – oh, happy chance! – I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.* See John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 36.

²⁵⁴ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 29. ‘Consumation’, that is, in terms of the reading of Saint Augustine: *You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you* (Confessions 1:1).

²⁵⁵ John Waters, from an oral presentation given at a *Communion and Liberation* conference in Dublin, January 5th 2011: ‘Seeking the Human face’, a reflection on Msgr. Luigi Giussani’s book *The Religious Sense*.

²⁵⁶ Mauro Biondi, designated leader of *Communion and Liberation* in Ireland (in dialogue, January 2011).

²⁵⁷ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny* (New York: Crossword Publishing Company, 2001), 105.

²⁵⁸ See ‘Greater than Sin, Reflection on the Pope’s Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland’, at <http://www.clonline.org/ie/GreaterthanSin.pdf> [accessed March 2011]

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Not only did I have no intention of ‘founding’ anything, but I believe that the genius of the Movement that I saw coming to birth lies in having felt the urgency to proclaim the need to return to the elementary aspects of Christianity, that is to say, the passion of the Christian fact as such in its original elements, and nothing more.²⁶⁰

6.4 THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY

6.4.1 Origins

Reflecting on the new charisms awakened periodically in the Church by the Holy Spirit, in order to inspire ‘greater fidelity to the Gospel’, Pope John Paul II identifies the fruit of the Second Vatican Council as one such awakening.²⁶¹ Moreover, in so doing, he unequivocally identifies the Neocatechumenal Way as one of the ‘new institutions’ inspired to put these charisms into practice.²⁶² The ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, also known as the ‘Neocatechumenate’ or, colloquially, ‘The Way’, is an organisation within the Catholic Church dedicated to the bringing to Christian maturity, and ongoing religious formation, of adult Catholics – what it terms ‘the rediscovery of Christian initiation by baptized adults’.²⁶³ It was initiated in Madrid in 1964 as a response to the Second Vatican Council,²⁶⁴ and in 2008 was given definitive approval by the Holy See, receiving the status under Canon Law of a ‘public juridical personality’.²⁶⁵ The Neocatechumenal Way does not lay claim to forming a movement itself, but to helping parishes to open up a way of Christian initiation to Baptism, in order to discover what it means to be Christian. It is, concisely, ‘an instrument, in the parishes, in the service of the Bishops, to bring back to faith many people who have abandoned it’.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁰ Luigi Giussani, ‘Letter to John Paul II on the 50th anniversary of the birth of *Communion and Liberation*’ (January 26, 2004), in *Traces*, April 2004, 1.

²⁶¹ John Paul II, *Ogni Qualvolta*. Letter to Bishop Paul Joseph Cordes, Responsible “ad personam” for the Apostolate of the Neocatechumenal Communities, 30 August 1990 [Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/1990]

²⁶² Ibid. ‘Among the movements brought forth by the Spirit in our day are the Neocatechumenal Communities, founded by Mr K. Argüello and Miss C. Hernandez in Madrid, Spain.’

²⁶³ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 5, § 1.

²⁶⁴ Kiko Argüello, ‘Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith’, in Michael Hayes, *New Religious Movements in the Catholic Church*, 139.

²⁶⁵ See *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 1, § 3.

²⁶⁶ Kiko Argüello, ‘Brief Comment for the Vatican Press Office relating to the Letter of the Holy Father on the Neocatechumenal Way’, in Ezekiel Pasotti, *The Neocatechumenal Way according to Paul VI and John Paul II* (Maynooth: St Pauls, 1996), 21-22 at 21.

Although declaring that he did not see himself ‘to be a founder of anything’,²⁶⁷ the *Statute of the Neocatechumenal Way* recognise Kiko Argüello, along with Miss Carmen Hernández, as ‘initiators of the Neocatechumenal Way’.²⁶⁸ Following on a profound existential crisis, Argüello embarked on a religious conversion that resulted in him dedicating his life to Jesus and to the Church.²⁶⁹ Drawing on his experience of the *Cursillos de Cristiandad*,²⁷⁰ Argüello outlines that he felt called by the Lord to live among the poor, because ‘in the most deprived and impoverished people on earth’ he recognised the presence of the crucified Christ.²⁷¹ Thus, abandoning his studies as an artist and a musician, he went to live among the poor people of the slums of ‘Palomeras Atlas’ in the outskirts of Madrid, among those who ‘bear the consequences of the sins of our society’.²⁷²

I wanted to place myself there, kneeling at the feet of Christ crucified in these people. I went to live in a wretched shantytown: shacks of cardboard and corrugated iron built onto caves in the rock, inhabited by gypsies, beggars, vagrants, almost all illiterate.²⁷³

It was there that he encountered, living ‘in another shack’,²⁷⁴ Carmen Hernández, a Spanish woman, and a graduate in Chemistry and Theology. Her background too proved critical in the evolution of the Neocatechumenal Way. Possessing a licentiate in theology, and awareness of the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council, as well as a particular ‘knowledge of the paschal mystery’,²⁷⁵ her collaboration with the artistic temperament of Argüello enabled

²⁶⁷ Kiko Argüello, ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, 141-184 at 158.

²⁶⁸ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 34, § 1.

²⁶⁹ Attempting to make sense of his experience of the suffering of the innocents, Argüello draws on the existential questioning of Nietzsche and Sartre, and reflects on it in terms of his experience of the Christian encounter. See ‘The Origins of the Neocatechumenal Way’, [accessed March 2011 at]

<http://www.camminoneocatecumenale.it/new/default.asp?lang=en&page=storia01>

²⁷⁰ Cf. Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko (ed.), ‘World Organisation of the Cursillo Movement’ in *International Associations of the Faithful, Directory* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006). *Cursillos in Christianity (Cursillos de Cristiandad)* was founded in Spain in 1944 by a small group of laypeople and priests. They felt the need to provide religious instruction for people to enable them to restore a Christian impetus to a life that had ceased to be Christian. Based on the conviction that, through the strength of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, the lay faithful have a specific role to play in the mission of evangelization, the Movement strives to set up groups of baptised Christians to act as leaven for the evangelization of the places in which they live and work. The ‘World Organisation of the Cursillo Movement’ was established in 1980 as an organisation to ‘coordinate, promote, and disseminate’ the experience of Cursillos, which is present in 63 countries (ibid).

²⁷¹ Kiko Argüello, ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, 159.

²⁷² Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández, ‘The Neocatechumenal Way: a brief synthesis’, in Ezekiel Pasotti, *The Neocatechumenal Way according to Paul VI and John Paul II* (Maynooth: St Pauls, 1996), 127-135 at 127.

²⁷³ Kiko Argüello, ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, 159.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 48.

the proclamation of the Gospel among the poor with whom they were living.²⁷⁶ It was a collaboration that created 'the laboratory' in which a kerygmatic, theological and catechetical synthesis came into being.²⁷⁷ This kerygmatic synthesis found easy welcome, and 'immense gratitude', in the hearts of the poor people of the slums.²⁷⁸

This word, at first weak and stammering ... began to take shape in a catechetical synthesis: a powerful Kerygma which, in the measure in which it descended upon these poor people, brought about the birth of a new reality: koinonia. To our astonishment, we witnessed a word which, taking flesh among these poor people who welcomed it with joy, brought to birth a community and a surprising liturgy.²⁷⁹

Thus, in 1964, the first Christian community of the Neo-Catechumenal Way was born. In time, this new catechetical experience attracted the interest of the Archbishop of Madrid, Casimiro Morcillo (1904-1971), who encouraged Argüello and Hernández to spread it to the parishes of the diocese.²⁸⁰ This was on condition that parishes invite the Neocatechumenate into their community, and that the parish priest remained at the centre of the initiative.²⁸¹ In this way, this experience of evangelisation spread gradually through the Archdiocese of Madrid and to other Spanish dioceses.²⁸²

In 1968, the initiators of the Neocatechumenal Way arrived in Rome and settled in the Borghetto Latino, 'an area full of shacks'.²⁸³ With the permission of Cardinal Dell'Acqua, Vicar of the Pope for the diocese of Rome,²⁸⁴ the first catechesis began in the parish of Our

²⁷⁶ Decree of the Pontifical Council for the Laity: Approval Of The Statutes Of Neocatechumenal Way "*Ad Experimentum*", 29 June 2002. Mr Argüello and Ms Hernández, 'at the request of the poor with whom they were living, began to announce to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.' Hernández recalls that 'What I brought, on a platter, was not myself, nor was it mine, it was the Second Vatican Council, Easter and the resurrection of the dead', see <http://www.camminoneocatecumenale.it/new/default.asp?lang=en&page=storia01>

²⁷⁷ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 48.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁷⁹ Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández, 'The Neocatechumenal Way: a brief synthesis', 128.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Kiko Argüello, 'Neocatechumenal Way', 159. Argüello recounts how, when the police decided to demolish the shantytown, he called upon Archbishop Morcillo (who he knew from his time in the *Cursillos*) 'to defend us from the police'. The Archbishop was 'deeply impressed' when he encountered the small ecclesial community that had formed in the slums.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² See Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández, 'The Neocatechumenal Way: a brief synthesis', 128. Reflecting on the development of the Way, the initiators say: 'To our surprise, even in these parishes where the social environment was quite different from that of the shanty town, we saw how communities on a way towards conversion were born after the announcement of the kerygma and two months of catechesis'.

²⁸³ Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández, 'The Neocatechumenal Way: a brief synthesis', 9.

²⁸⁴ Argüello recalls: 'As is our practice, before beginning the catecheses, we presented ourselves to Cardinal Dell'Acqua to ask his permission to preach in his Diocese.' This permission was granted on condition that it was 'always with the agreement of the parish priest.' He continues, 'After that, as if by a miracle, the first Neocatechumenal Community was born, with fifty brothers'. Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández, *The Neocatechumenal Way: a brief synthesis*, 10.

Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and the Canadian Martyrs,²⁸⁵ and from there spread to parishes throughout the diocese. At this time, the response to requests from parish priests in other dioceses, gave rise to the ‘charism of itinerant catechists’.²⁸⁶ Since then, the Way has extended its presence to dioceses around the world. To meet these needs the Movement has continued to diversify. These developments include the advent of ‘Families in Mission’,²⁸⁷ the formation of ‘Redemptoris Mater’ diocesan missionary seminaries,²⁸⁸ and the construction of the *Domus Galilaeae* centre.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Throughout, Archbishop Morcillo remained central to the development of the *Neocatechumenal Way*. Discerning the Movement as the action of the Holy Spirit, and as a compelling response to the teachings of Vatican II, he wrote a letter of recommendation for Cardinal Dell’Acqua, and another for Cardinal Florit, Archbishop of Florence. Moreover, when the priest of the parish of the Canadian Martyrs in Rome was reticent to allow the Way into the parish, Archbishop Morcillo travelled there to personally vouch for the Movement.

²⁸⁶ Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández, ‘The Neocatechumenal Way: a brief synthesis’, 128. These are catechists who leave their own communities for a certain time, and make themselves available to take the Neocatechumenate to the dioceses who ask for it (ibid, 129).

²⁸⁷ These are families of the Neocatechumenal Way who volunteer to leave their homes and to go on mission in the World according to the needs of the Movement. Succinctly, wherever these families go, Neocatechumenate communities flourish and multiply (Elena Curti, ‘Who are the Neo-Cats?’, in *The Tablet*, January 6, 2001). Their sending, which usually takes place in the presence of the local Bishop, has found the favour of Papal authority. On 30th December, 1988, John Paul II gave his blessing to 72 Families in Mission, and, again, to 200 Families on 12th December 1994, and to more than 100 families in November 2000. Benedict XVI too bestowed a missionary mandate on more than 200 families on 12th January 2006, and a similar number on January 17 2011. At this sending Benedict reflects that ‘they have made themselves available with great generosity and are leaving for the mission, joining in spirit the almost 600 families that are already working on the five continents’ (Benedict XVI, Address ‘To the Members of the Neocatechumenal Way’, 17 January 2011). The Families in Mission remain united with their original parish and Neocatechumenal Community. They are free to interrupt or terminate their missionary experience at any time.

²⁸⁸ See Kiko Argüello, ‘Brief Comment for the Vatican Press Office relating to the Letter of the Holy Father on the Neocatechumenal Way’, *The Neocatechumenal Way: a brief synthesis*, 22. Linked to an effective Kerygma of the Families in Mission, many people were coming back into the Church, particularly from the sects. This ‘success’, however, was impeded by an insufficient number of clergy available to meet these additional needs. Further, Argüello holds, the neocatechumenate sponsored renewal has cultivated an ‘important fruit in the local Church’, namely ‘the flourishing, once again, of numerous vocations. This, in turn, ‘has given rise to the birth of missionary diocesan seminaries’. Drawing council from *Presbyterorum ordinis* (10) which suggests the opening of international missionary seminaries to meet the need for clergy, it was decided that the Neocatechumenate should establish a missionary diocesan seminary from which the presbyters might be sent anywhere. After successfully petitioning Pope John Paul II, the ‘Redemptoris Mater’ seminaries came into being. Argüello recounts that the originality of these seminaries is that they involve a serious Christian initiation – the Neocatechumenate – in the formation of presbyters. The first international missionary seminary ‘Redemptoris Mater’ was opened in Rome in 1987. Following on this initiative, many bishops have decided to open these seminaries in their dioceses: ‘in Rome, Madrid, Warsaw, Medellin, Bangalore, Callao (Lima), Newark (New Jersey, USA), Takamatsu (Japan) and many other countries where they have begun to function’. See further, *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 18, regarding ‘Initiation to and formation in the priestly vocation’.

²⁸⁹ A fervant desire of Pope Paul VI was to build in Israel a centre where Seminarians could complete their formation. At the beginning of the 80’s, the Neocatechumenal Way was offered the possibility to build a centre of formation, for studies and retreat, on a piece of land situated on the Mount of Beatitudes, directly in front of Lake Tiberias. The corner stone for the centre, which contained a fragment of the tomb of St. Peter, was laid in 1999. Their vision for this centre, *Domus Galilaeae*, is that Christians, especially seminarians and presbyters, will have ‘a direct contact with the living tradition of Israel, following the footsteps of St. Justin, Origen, and St. Jerome as well as many other Fathers of Church who returned to their Hebrew roots to understand the meaning of prayer, of feasts, and Hebrew liturgies’. The centre, opened in year 2000, was inaugurated by the Pope John Paul II in his Millennium visit to the Holy Land. See www.camminoneocatecumenale.it [accessed March2011].

Corresponding to these developments, the Neocatechumenate has been closely associated with the patronage of papal authority, especially that of John Paul II. Central to the ‘New Evangelisation’ called for by Pope John Paul is his belief that a renewed proclamation is needed for those already baptised.²⁹⁰ It is in that context that we locate his appraisal of the Neocatechumenal Way as ‘an effective means of Catholic formation for society and for the present time’.²⁹¹ Moreover, the Way itself, establishing ‘The nature of the Neocatechumenal Way’ on that basis,²⁹² name themselves definitively as ‘a post-baptismal catechumenate’.²⁹³ As such, recognising that the Church finds herself in the midst of a ‘secularized and pagan world’, Argüello holds that its first task should be to ‘revive the practice of Christian initiation in parishes’.²⁹⁴

Throughout his pontificate Pope John Paul was supportive of the Way,²⁹⁵ and proactively encouraged their pursuance of formal juridical recognition.²⁹⁶ This affirmation was critical in facilitating a decree of the Pontifical Council of the Laity whereby the Statutes of the Neocatechumenal Way, ‘the result of a laborious process of collaboration between the

²⁹⁰ He is, moreover, unambiguous in outlining the rationale driving this assessment: ‘Many of the baptized live as if Christ did not exist: the gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus. The great certainties of the faith are being undermined in many people by a vague religiosity lacking real commitment’. (*Ecclesia in Europa*, 47)

²⁹¹ John Paul II, *Ogni Qualvolta*. 30 August 1990. See especially *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 1, § 1. These are the opening words of the *Statute* and recall that ‘The nature of the Neocatechumenal Way is defined by His Holiness John Paul II’.

²⁹² *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 1, § 1

²⁹³ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 1, § 3, 1st. It so doing it draws inspiration from papal documents. See *ibid* (footnote 5): It references such as, *Christifideles Laici*, 61: The Synod Fathers have said that a post-baptismal catechesis in the form of a catechumenate can also be helpful by presenting again some elements from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults with the purpose of allowing a person to grasp and live the immense, extraordinary richness and responsibility received at Baptism; *Catechesi Tradendæ*, 44: Among the adults who need catechesis ... [are] those who, although they were born in a Christian country or in sociologically Christian surroundings, have never been educated in their faith and, as adult are really catechumens; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 44: One sees that present conditions render ever more urgent catechetical instruction, under the form of the catechumenate, for innumerable young people and adults.

²⁹⁴ Kiko Argüello, ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, 166.

²⁹⁵ For instance, ‘The catechumens of the first centuries were a very important reality in the Church. I believe that what they did for the faith in those days, the Neocatechumenal Communities are doing’, (John Paul II: ‘visit to the parish of St Timothy, Rome, February 1980, in Ezekiel Pasotti, *The Neocatechumenal Way according to Paul VI and John Paul II*, Maynooth: St Pauls, 1996, 27; ‘Your movement is centred on this process of becoming children of God, of becoming Christians. It is very important’, (John Paul II: ‘visit to the parish of St Francesca Cabrini, 4th December 1983, in *ibid*, 34); ‘Through your Neocatechumenal Way, one can almost reconstruct what was once the true catechumenate, and perhaps it can be made even deeper. For this is how we arrive at all the fruits of baptism being lived, just as they were lived by the early communities’, (John Paul II: ‘visit to the parish of St Maria Goretti, Rome, 31st January 1988, in *ibid*, 37.

²⁹⁶ See Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 52. On 24th January 1997, at an audience granted to those responsible for The Neocatechumenal Way throughout the world, Pope John Paul expressly urged that Statutes be drafted by them, in order that they might move towards formal juridical recognition by the Church.

initiators of the Neocatechumenal Way and the Pontifical Council for the Laity',²⁹⁷ were approved *ad experimentum* (for a period of five years) on June 29th 2002.²⁹⁸ At the conclusion of this period, which facilitated the reviewing of the text of the statutes, and the insertion of some modifications 'that were seen as necessary', the Pontifical Council for the Laity granted definitive approval of the statutes on May 11th, 2008, the Solemnity of Pentecost.²⁹⁹ Addressing the content of these 'modifications', Benedict XVI holds:

Precisely to help the Neocatechumenal Way to render even more effective its evangelizing action in communion with all the People of God, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments recently imparted to you in my name certain norms concerning the Eucharistic Celebration.³⁰⁰

The Statutes also outline the leadership structure applying to the Neocatechumenal Way. The Movement is led by the 'International Responsible Team of the Way', which is composed of its initiators, Argüello and Hernández, together with Father Mario Pezzi.³⁰¹ Under the terms of the statutes they will remain in place for life, after which an electoral college of senior neocatechumenal catechists will elect a new team which, with the approval of the Pontifical

²⁹⁷ James Francis Card. Stafford (*President*), Stanisław Ryłko (*Secretary*), 'Decree of the Pontifical Council for the Laity: Approval of the Statutes of Neocatechumenal Way "*Ad Experimentum*"', 29 June 2002.'

²⁹⁸ See 'Decree of the Pontifical Council for the Laity: Approval of the Statutes of Neocatechumenal Way "*Ad Experimentum*"', 29 June 2002.'

²⁹⁹ Pontifical Council for the Laity, 'Recognition and approval of statutes', in *News*, 16/2008 [Accessed at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/laity_en/pubblicazioni/rc_pc_laity_doc_20080816_notiziario-16-2008_en.html#Recognition_and_approval_of_statutes (March 2011)].

³⁰⁰ Benedict XVI, 'Address to Members of the Neocatechumenal Way', 12 January 2006. See Cardinal Francis Arinze, 'On Liturgical Norms for the Neocatechumenal Way', 16 February 2006, at <http://www.zenit.org/article-15304?l=english> [accessed March 2011]. The reference here ('certain norms') is to a letter of 1st December 2005 from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to the leaders of the Neocatechumenal Way. Cardinal Francis Arinze, then Prefect of the Congregation, outlines that the letter, containing six (6) directives from Benedict XVI, came 'at the conclusion of many talks over a period of at least two years or more'. Of the six points detailing the pope's directives, only one permits the Neocatechumenate to continue exactly their incumbent practice. This was in relation to placing the exchange of peace before the offertory, a traditional practice still used, for example, in the Ambrosian Rite in Milan. Accordingly, the Way are permitted to continue using the indult already granted. In all the other (5) points the Movement is called upon to amend some of its liturgical innovations. 1) *Sunday is the Lord's Day*. Therefore, the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way, at least one Sunday a month, must participate in the Mass of the parish community. 2) *Any admonitions issued before the readings must be brief*. Adherence must also be shown to what is set out in the 'General Instruction of the Roman Missal', and to the praenotanda of the 'Lectionary for Mass'. 3) *The homily is to be given always by the priest or the deacon*, although a brief occasional intervention may be made that does not have the appearance of a homily. 4) *In regard to the manner of receiving Holy Communion*, the Neocatechumenate is to move from its distinctive practice, (for example, seated, using an adorned table place in the centre of the church, instead of the dedicated altar), to the normal manner for the whole Church of receiving holy Communion. 5) Finally, the Neocatechumenal Way must also use the other Eucharistic Prayers contained in the Missal and not only the second Eucharistic Prayer.

³⁰¹ Originally a member of the Italian based Combonian Missionary Order, Fr Pezzi has been involved with the Neocatechumenal way since 1970. He joined the Diocese of Rome in 1992, when he left the Combonians in order to follow this new Way.

Council for the Laity, will have a mandate to lead the Way for a period of seven years until new elections are held.³⁰²

Kiko Argüello holds that the Neocatechumenal Way today is present in more than 110 countries in all the six continents, in nearly 900 dioceses, and in around 8,000 parishes with more than 30,000 communities, 19,000 of which are found in Europe.³⁰³ The Neocatechumenate came to Ireland in 1980.

6.4.2 Method

Outlining the inspiration attaching to the method of the ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, Argüello references the experience of the early Church:

In the ancient Church, in the midst of paganism, when someone wanted to become a Christian, he had to undertake a journey of formation in Christianity, which was called ‘catechumenate’.³⁰⁴

The elements of this journey of preparation for baptism created a synthesis between word (*Kerygma*), liturgy and morality.³⁰⁵ Primary in this regard, the *primum christianum*, was the proclamation of the *Kerygma*, of that which gives faith. Drawing on Saint Paul, Argüello recalls that ‘It was God’s own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the gospel’ (1 Cor 1:21). Applying an efficacious reading to this verse, Argüello interprets it, from the Greek text, as literally ‘through the folly of the *Kerygma*’, that is, through ‘the Good News that changes for good the life of the person who receives it’.³⁰⁶ Thus, in the embryonic Church, the catechumenate was formed out of a synthesis between Word and Morality – the proclamation of the *kerygma*, and a change of life in the one who accepts it. Moreover, when a person was seen to change their life, marked by the abandonment of sin, it was a sign that

³⁰² *Statute of the Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 34-35.

³⁰³ See Kiko Argüello on ‘Facebook’ social networking page [accessed March 2011] at <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Kiko-Arguello/20847473494>. His figures differ slightly from what is reported on the official Neocatechumenal webpage. There, the presence of the Way is calculated at 900 Dioceses, in 105 Nations, with over 20 thousand communities in six thousand parishes: See www.camminoneocatecumenale.it [accessed March 2011].

³⁰⁴ Kiko Argüello, ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, 161.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* See also, Richard Kugelman, ‘The First Letter to the Corinthians’, in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (eds), *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. II, 254-275 at 257. Kugelman holds that this is not a mere speculative knowledge of God’s ‘existence and attributes, but a practical knowledge that renders him homage and obeys his will’. Moreover, ‘to those who surrender themselves to God revealing his wisdom and love in Christ, the preaching of the cross brings salvation’ (*ibid.*).

the power of the Holy Spirit was present in them. They were then, having completed the 'itinerary of Christian initiation', admitted to baptism.³⁰⁷ This is the context out of which Argüello speaks of the *raison d'être* of the Neocatechumenal Way. It is, definitively, a 'new' catechumenate, an itinerary of the rediscovery of Christian initiation, in order to bring the Christian to the experience of 'adult faith'.³⁰⁸

Drawing from the practice of the early Church, the method of the Neocatechumenal Way is, essentially, restorationist in concept, in that it seeks to create 'a synthesis between kerygmatic preaching, change in moral life and liturgy'.³⁰⁹ Theoretically, the movement aims to recreate the lengthy period of training and teaching that catechumens underwent in the early Church.³¹⁰

Pope Paul VI, addressing a gathering of the Neocatechumenal communities in 1977, outlined the framework within which this method of the 'Way' is applied. Aligning established approaches to (infant) baptismal discipline, 'as currently practised',³¹¹ to the context of a fundamentally Christian society, he reflects that such a context, relative to 'the social environment of today', represents, effectively, a redundant hypothesis.³¹² Accordingly, against the prevailing cultural and societal mores, baptismal initiation does not continue to have the same capacity for development, at least in its didactic preparation. Therefore, the method of baptismal initiation requires augmentation, by further instruction, in order that 'the inestimable treasure of the Sacrament' is integrated into 'the proper life style of the Christian'.³¹³ Critically, in terms of the rationale for the Neocatechumenal Way, this requires a gradual and intensive period of post-baptismal instruction which 'recalls and renews in a certain way the Catechumenate of earlier times'.³¹⁴ In this regard, Paul VI, acknowledging the practice of the Neocatechumenal Communities in presenting the 'instruction, completion and education' of catechesis, subsequent to the event of baptism, applies a supportive reading to their methodology:

³⁰⁷ Kiko Argüello, 'Neocatechumenal Way', 165.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

³⁰⁹ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 8, § 3.

³¹⁰ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 51.

³¹¹ Paul VI, General audience, 12th January 1977.

³¹² *Ibid.* Rather, 'today our society is no longer uniform, homogeneous. It is pluralistic, and indeed in itself is full of contradictions and obstacles to the Gospel'.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

This is the secret of your formula, which provides religious assistance, a practical training in Christian faithfulness, and effectively integrates the baptised into the community of believers which is the Church. They have already entered it from the supernatural point of view, but it was like a seed that has not yet had the advantage of developing. Here we see the rebirth of the name 'Catechuminate'.³¹⁵

Corresponding with the analysis of Pope Paul VI, Kiko Argüello too addresses elements which act to frustrate a comprehensive baptismal catechesis and Christian initiation. In that light, echoing the context of 'the loss of Europe's Christian memory and heritage',³¹⁶ he reflects on the changed circumstances within which the Easter Story is proclaimed. Thus, immersed in 'a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference',³¹⁷ Argüello holds that Europe, especially, is apostatising from Christianity.³¹⁸ Moreover, driven by a culture that is contrary to the values of the Gospel, the rejection of the Christian Story becomes manifest in the de-Christianisation of universities and schools,³¹⁹ and in the dehumanisation of society.³²⁰ Again, the ongoing process of secularisation interprets Christian ethical and moral values as impractical and implausible and, essentially, therefore, to be discarded.³²¹ Further, the catechesis against the Gospel is so unrelenting that it has led to many people abandoning the faith and the Church.³²²

The impact on the Church of this secularist mood of culture is clear:

Entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.³²³

Hence, the urgency of the oft-repeated call of Pope John Paul to a 'new evangelization'.³²⁴ Argüello, reflecting this assessment, holds that to persist with the 'maintenance' model of

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 7.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Kiko Argüello, 'Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith', 135.

³¹⁹ Ibid. 137.

³²⁰ Ibid, 136. See also, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 9: 'We are witnessing the emergence of a *new culture*, largely influenced by the mass media, whose content and character are often in conflict with the Gospel and the dignity of the human person.'

³²¹ Kiko Argüello, 'Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith', 135-136.

³²² Kiko Argüello, 'Neocatechumenal Way', 161.

³²³ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 33.

³²⁴ See, for example: *Ecclesia in Europa*, 2, 23, 37, 45, 79; *Redemptoris missio*, 2, 3, 30, 40, 59, 73, 85; *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 2, 8, 18, 47, 54, 82. See especially *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 33: 'Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the *new evangelization*. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost.'

parish ministry acts, essentially, as anathema to the mission of the Church.³²⁵ Moreover, and concisely, it is an approach to mission that offers ‘no possibility of evangelizing’.³²⁶ This is why it is necessary to begin a renewed journey of formation in the Christian life.³²⁷ In that regard, it is necessary also to find a presence of Jesus Christ that does not presuppose faith.³²⁸ This presence, the language of Christian proposition, Argüello names as the witness to paschal love.³²⁹ And this, fundamentally, in his reading, is what the Neocatechumenal Way is doing:

We go to a parish and we say: ‘In order to reach all these people we need to form a community where people love each other as Christ loved us on the cross. To reach that stature in the faith we need to implement a Christian initiation.’ How can we reach that dimension of faith? How can we make that faith grow in us? By following an itinerary of Christian initiation where we go through all the stages of baptism.³³⁰

In that regard, confirming the Neocatechumenate as ‘an instrument at the service of the bishops for the rediscovery of Christian initiation by baptized adults’,³³¹ Neo-Catechumenal communities are never established in a diocese without the approval of the local ordinary,³³² and then only in coordination with the role and function of the parish priest in each community.³³³ As such, the method of the Way, seeking to restore the period of ‘gestation’ integral in the early Church, is to (re)create a synthesis between the word (the proclamation of the *Keyrgma*), morality (the bringing about of a change in life) and liturgy (the ritualising of baptism by stages).³³⁴ It articulates this primarily through the formation of communities of the Neocatechumenate within parishes,³³⁵ and, modelled on the Holy Family of Nazareth

³²⁵ Kiko Argüello, ‘Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith’, 140. For, when the Church is no longer missionary, it is no longer acting ‘as the Church of Christ’ (ibid). This difficulty has been named in the Irish context: Donal Harrington, reflecting on the urgency of renewal in the Irish Church argues, ‘Concisely, maintenance persists when mission is needed’, (Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 81).

³²⁶ Kiko Argüello, ‘Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith’, 140.

³²⁷ Kiko Argüello, ‘Neocatechumenal Way’, 161.

³²⁸ Kiko Argüello, ‘Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith’, 140.

³²⁹ Ibid. Argüello asks, ‘Does such a presence of Christ exist, that when one sees it he is drawn to him? Yes, it exists. Let us see what is written in the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ says: “Love one another as I have loved you. By this love that man will know that you are my disciples. If you are perfectly one, that man will believe.” That man who today has no faith, if he sees love among us, he will believe.’

³³⁰ Ibid, 141.

³³¹ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Title I, Art. 5, § 1.

³³² See John Paul II, *Ogni Qualvolta*. The Holy Father imparts his blessing on Neocatechumenal Communities in conjunction with ‘the guidelines proposed by the initiators, [namely] in a spirit of service to the local ordinary and of communion with him.’

³³³ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Title I, Art. 6 § 2.

³³⁴ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 57. ‘Gestation’ is a term used specifically by the Way regarding the formation of Community, and formation in the faith (*Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 8, § 5).

³³⁵ The practice of the Way is to inaugurate its presence within parish communities, in a manner ‘coordinated with the role and function of the parish priest’ (*Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 6 § 2).

(‘the historical place where the Word of God, made man, becomes adult’),³³⁶ the promotion of a ‘tripod’ basis of catechesis: Word, Liturgy, and Community.³³⁷ In that light, following the pedagogy of the catechumenate of the early Church, the ‘method’ of the neocatechumenal itinerary is progressed in three phases: the precatechumenate,³³⁸ the catechumenate,³³⁹ the election.³⁴⁰

6.4.3 Criticisms

Since its inception the Neocatechumenal Way has regularly drawn criticism. One of the most prevalent criticisms is that it offers an exclusivist model of the Christian life, focused entirely on the Way, and with an excessive emphasis on sin.³⁴¹ Again, the communities of the Way have been described as ‘secretive and authoritarian’,³⁴² with unconditional loyalty demanded to its vision and authority structure.³⁴³ Further, their methodology has been compared to that of a cult, with accusations of psychological intimidation.³⁴⁴ Not unrelated, social anthropologist Gerald Arbuckle has cautioned Catholic religious orders on the need to limit

³³⁶ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 7, § 2.

³³⁷ Michael Hayes, ‘Introduction’, in Michael Hayes (ed), *New Religious Movements in the Catholic Church*, 1-14 at 12. See also *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 8, § 2.

³³⁸ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 19. This first phase is divided into two steps. The first step, which lasts approximately two years, is designed to ‘help the neocatechumens to be emptied of false concepts of themselves and of God and to descend into their reality of being sinners in need of conversion’. In the concluding celebration of the *first scrutiny* they receive the sign of the cross of Christ. In the second step, of similar length, time is given to the neocatechumens so that ‘they may prove to themselves the sincerity of their intention to follow Jesus Christ’. In the concluding celebration of the *second scrutiny*, ‘they renew before the Church the renunciation of the devil and they manifest the will to serve God alone’.

³³⁹ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 20. This second phase of the Neocatechumenate is a time ‘of spiritual battle to acquire the interior *simplicity* of the new man who loves God as the only Lord’. It involves three steps. (i) The neocatechumens are initiated into liturgical and personal prayer; (ii) they study and celebrate the Apostles’ Creed and then confess their faith during Lent (and are sent to preach it, in pairs, to the homes in the parish); (iii) The neocatechumens’ formation in liturgical and contemplative prayer culminates with the catechesis on the Lord’s Prayer, and the welcoming of the maternal love of the Virgin Mary. Henceforth, on the weekdays of Advent and Lent, before going to work, they begin to have a communitarian celebration of Lauds and the Office of Readings in the parish, with a time of contemplative prayer.

³⁴⁰ *Statute of The Neocatechumenal Way*, Art. 21. This third phase of the Neocatechumenate is the rediscovery of the election, ‘summit of the entire catechumenate’. Having studied and given witness to the individual passages of the Sermon on the Mount, the neocatechumens solemnly renew their baptismal promises in the Paschal Vigil presided over by the bishop. In this liturgy they wear white garments as a reminder of their baptism. Then, during the 50 days of Eastertide, ‘they solemnly celebrate the Eucharist every day and make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land as a sign of their wedding with the Lord’. With the rediscovery of the election the Neocatechumenate is concluded.

³⁴¹ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 62.

³⁴² Elena Curti, ‘Who are the Neo-Cats?’, in *The Tablet*, January 6, 2001, 10-11 at 10.

³⁴³ Gerald Arbuckle, ‘Is the Neocatechumenal Way Compatible With Religious Life?’, *Religious Life Review*, 33/164 (1994), 2-7 at 7.

³⁴⁴ Elena Curti, ‘Who are the Neo-Cats?’, 10.

the involvement of their members with the Neocatechumenal Way.³⁴⁵ In particular he criticised the Way's rejection of 'the Gospel commitment to inculturation'.³⁴⁶ Their method is said to be authoritarian, and sometimes coercive. Claims are made that, as it is their duty to be good Catholics, and therefore open to life, women within the movement are pressurised to 'having a baby every year'.³⁴⁷ Again, the suggestion of a gnostic quality attaching to the Catechumenate is intimated in the belief that they see themselves as radically different from other Catholics.³⁴⁸ Moreover, attempts to challenge this position is 'like working with alcoholics in denial'.³⁴⁹

Their manner of celebrating Eucharist has especially attracted comment. Each of the Neo-Catechumenate communities is very much focused in on itself and celebrates its own Eucharist on a Saturday night. In that regard, on the basis of changes required for the approval of their statutes, specifically 'certain norms concerning the Eucharistic Celebration',³⁵⁰ the movement was required not to restrict attendance at Mass to its members. However, it is said that the compromise is that, while anyone is welcome to attend Eucharist with the community, they are advised to 'embark on a catechesis from the beginning'.³⁵¹ Apologist for the Way, Fr Alan Fudge, explains: 'It's rather like a university course. You can't start in the middle. It might become a bit difficult if every week we had large numbers of visitors'.³⁵²

Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, a supporter of the Way, speaks of challenges stemming from the pastoral experience of the movement in his diocese. Thus, addressing the involved nature of ethical and social issues, and the need for theological competency in that regard, he indicts the Neocatechumenate for their 'tendency toward an over simplistic view of the world

³⁴⁵ Gerald Arbuckle, 'Is the Neocatechumenal Way Compatible With Religious Life?', 2, 7.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 5. See also Gerald Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for the Pastoral Worker* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 15-25. See further Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 51: 'Little or no cultural knowledge of the area to be evangelized is necessary; all that is needed is zeal and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit'.

³⁴⁷ Elena Curti, 'Who are the Neo-Cats?', 11. This idea that women in the Neo-Catechumenate are pressurised into having lots of children is dismissed as 'crazy' by Fr Alan Fudge, whose church in Ogle Street in central London has six communities and is a hub for the movement. He is equally dismissive of the claim that the movement is secretive (ibid). See further, Kiko Argüello, 'Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith', 147. Argüello designates the second 'altar' (of three) marking the Christian family as 'the nuptial bed where the spouses give life to children'.

³⁴⁸ Elena Curti, 'Who are the Neo-Cats?', 11.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, 'Address to Members of the Neocatechumenal Way', 12 January 2006.

³⁵¹ Elena Curti, 'Who are the Neo-Cats?', 11.

³⁵² Ibid.

and society'.³⁵³ Further, addressing the relationship of the Way within the local parish, and particularly their approach to Christian initiation, he warns against such formation being undertaken by anyone lacking appropriate theological training. Therefore, he outlines the need for the movement to foster an adequate distinction between the lay catechist (integral to each community of the Neocatechaumenate), and the role and office of the local priest. Specifically, the priest 'must not be relegated to the position of a sacramental functionary'.³⁵⁴

The *modus operandi* of the Neocatechaumenate within parishes has aroused proactive opposition. Gordon Urquhart reports that the introduction of the Neocatechumenate into the parish of St Germain-des-Prés in Paris resulted in such protracted disputation that the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal François Marty, blocked any further expansion of the Way before his retirement in 1981.³⁵⁵ Again, in a meeting with Benedict XVI (December 13, 2010), Japanese bishops requested that the Neocatechumenal Way be obliged to cease activities in Japan for a period of five years. Describing the Movement as a 'serious problem', whose 'powerful sect-like activity' was the cause of 'sharp, painful division and strife within the Church', the bishops, further, held that Way members promote their celebrations as superior to the 'imperfect' way the Mass is celebrated by ordinary diocesan priests.³⁵⁶ The request by the bishops was rejected.³⁵⁷

In 1996, Mervyn Alexander, Bishop of Clifton, in England, established a panel of inquiry to explore claims made by parishioners in at least three parishes that their communities had been harmed by the activities of the Neo-Catechumenal Way. This issued ultimately in the publication of 'The Clifton Report'.³⁵⁸ Elements of the report included that

³⁵³ Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, 'Pastoral Experiences of the Bishops' in Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops*, 111-139 at 129.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Gordon Urquhart, *The Pope's Armada: Unlocking the Secrets of Mysterious and Powerful New Sects in the Catholic Church* (New York: Bantam, 1995), 109.

³⁵⁶ Alan Holdren, 'Japan's Bishops want Neocatechumenal Way to leave for five years', December 16, 2010. <http://www.ewtnnews.com/catholic-news/World.php?id=2326> [accessed March 2011].

³⁵⁷ Alan Holdren, 'Pope Rejects Plan To Expel Neocatechumenal Way From Japan, Will Appoint Delegate', January 17, 2011. <http://www.ewtn.com/vnews/getstory.asp?number=110936> [accessed March 2011].

³⁵⁸ See *Report into the presence and activities of the Neo-Catechumenal Way in the Diocese of Clifton*. 1 November 1996 ('Clifton Report'). This report was commissioned by the Bishop of the Diocese, Mervyn Alexander. The rationale underpinning the commissioning was 'to consider the claim made by some parishioners in at least three parishes in the Diocese that their parishes have suffered harm and neglect through the presence and activities of the Neo-Catechumenate (Clifton Report 1.1). The Report addressed specifically the activities of the Way in these three Parishes of the Diocese: St Nicholas of Tolentino in Bristol, St Peter in Gloucester and Sacred Hearts at Chariton Kings in Cheltenham.

- People were caused ‘considerable stress’ by the method of the Neocatechumenate, as well as ‘spiritual, personal and mental anguish’.³⁵⁹
- A team of the Way catechists from outside the parish (‘strangers’) would publically castigate the commitment to God of parishioners (in calling them ‘to conversion’), and intimate that they had little or no faith.³⁶⁰
- The activities of the Neocatechumenate were judged to endanger the unity of the parish communion.³⁶¹
- There were ongoing difficulties in the relationship relative to the co-existence in parishes of the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults and the method of the Neocatechumenal Way.³⁶²

On the basis of the report, particularly ‘information which have cast doubts on the efficacy and diserability of the Neocatechumenal Way in this diocese’,³⁶³ Bishop Alexander decided to discontinue the Neocatechumenate within the Clifton diocese.

6.4.4 The Neocatechumenate in Ireland

In 1979, following the direct intervention of Kiko Argüello, a new team of Itinerant Catechists was formed with the purpose of initiating the Neocatechumenal Way in Ireland.³⁶⁴ The first catechesis was given in the Spring of 1980 in the Cathedral Parish of Cork. Gradually the movement developed new communities in Killarney, Dublin, Belfast, and in the archdiocese of Armagh. At the end of 2010 the number of Neocatechumenate communities in Ireland was recorded as twenty-seven (27),³⁶⁵ established as follows:

³⁵⁹ Cf. Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 64.

³⁶⁰ *Clifton Report*, 3.30.

³⁶¹ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 67.

³⁶² *Clifton Report*, 4 P.1: There are competing claims and competition between the NC Way and the RCIA where these exist in a Parish. Also, 4 P.12: Difficulties have arisen in the parishes where the RCIA and the NC co-exist. ... A fundamental point was raised as to how the parish could have 'parallel catechumenates.' In other words, two different 'catechumenates' offer a path to faith, bring people to a closer knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ, and yet do not share the same methods.

³⁶³ Right Reverend Mervyn Alexander, Bishop of Clifton, ‘Letter to the Clergy and People of the Diocese’, 28 January 1997. Published in Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 100.

³⁶⁴ Claudio Bandini (the Responsible of the team that presently leads the Neocatechumenal Way in Ireland, in correspondence, February 2011). This team was led by Claudio Bandini, and included his wife Emmanuela (better known as Nenei), their 3 children (later to be 10), Fr. Renzo Moro an Italian Presbyter, and Alfred Greck from Malta. This response addressed the question, ‘When did the Neocatechumenate come to Ireland?’

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* The response addressed the question, ‘How many communities of the Neocatechumenate are there in Ireland? Where are they?’

Cork, 15 communities
Killarney, 2 communities
Dublin, 4 communities
Drogheda, 1 community
Dundalk, 1 community
Newry, 1 community
Belfast, 3 communities

The majority of the communities are made up of between 30 and 35 members.³⁶⁶ While there is a 'Local Responsible' for each community constituted at parish level, the numbers in the diocese of Cork allow also for the creation of a Diocesan Centre and the appointment of a 'Main responsible'.³⁶⁷ At national level, an 'Itinerant Team' of catechists oversees the Neocatechumenate in the whole of Ireland. The 'Main responsible' at this level is Claudio Bandini, with his wife Emmanuela (Nenei) Trevisan, together with a priest of the diocese of Rome, Fr Pierino Pini and Peter Paul Sultana, a Maltese seminarian from the Redemptoris Mater Seminary of Macerata in Italy.³⁶⁸

The Neocatechumenate interpret their relationship with dioceses and parishes in Ireland as 'the relationship that the Lord allows us to have'.³⁶⁹ While this includes a 'good relationship' with Cardinal Séan Brady of Armagh, it is a relationship not generally shared by the priests of his diocese on the basis that 'it appears to bring more work on them'.³⁷⁰ Similarly, in Dublin, where 'the Way started with the strong approval of Bishop McNamara in 1985',³⁷¹ the level of commitment involved 'in accepting something "new" ' has led to resistance among the presbyterate to the presence of the movement.³⁷² The diocese of Cork has proved the most fruitful for the Neocatechumenal Way in Ireland. From the outset the relationship

³⁶⁶ Ibid. The response addressed the question, 'What numbers of people are involved in these communities?'

³⁶⁷ Ibid. The response addressed the question, 'Is there a "leader" of the Neocatechumenate in Ireland?' The 'Main Responsible' in the diocese of Cork is Mr Ken Twohig.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. The response addressed the question, 'What kind of relationship exists between the Neocatechumenate and local parishes, and dioceses?'

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid. Further, it is reported that the Neocatechumenate 'never received proper appreciation under Cardinal Connell'. Also, after an initial spell of cooperation with Archbishop Martin, the Way now believe they 'have arrived at a standstill'. Furthermore, in the Diocese of Down and Connor, the Way, having initially entered into dialogue with Bishop Cahal Daly, continued 'in the form of tolerance' with Bishop Patrick Walsh, and are now in the process of initiating dialogue with Bishop Noel Treanor (ibid). In Killarney, 'the Way saw a fantastic start with Bishop McNamara.' This was, however, followed by a time of 'hibernation' as the successors of Bishop McNamara imposed restrictions on the Way, 'and the priests in general showed no interest in this new reality' (ibid).

with the local bishop has been positive, a fact reflected in the presence of Communities throughout the diocese. Again, ‘even though the local clergy do not seem to see the need of a new evangelisation,’ the support of some diocesan and religious clergy has facilitated the growth of the Movement in Cork, ‘and given some magnificent fruit’.³⁷³

Claudio Bandini, the ‘Main responsible’ of the Neocatechumante in Ireland, although observing ‘that the Lord does not allow the Way to spread so rapidly in Ireland’, holds that ‘as Catechists we can see marvellous fruits being born in the Irish communities’.³⁷⁴ He outlines the basis of his reasoning.³⁷⁵

- Families being gradually rebuilt and couples open to life;
- The numerous presence of young people in the communities;
- The presence of vocations to the priesthood (four presbyters have already been ordained, three members are in various seminaries);
- Four Irish families are presently in Mission in Asia and Africa;
- Some sisters are working in mission and young adults are acting as ‘itinerant catechists.’

6.4.5 Papal Affirmation

A particular criticism directed at the Neocatechumenal Way relates to concerns about the orthodoxy of its teachings and the validity of its liturgical practices. There is related evidence of negative evaluations on the part of bishops and priests, who find the Neocatechumenate seeming to set up parallel structures in the parish or diocese, and too closed or elitist.³⁷⁶ Yet, in what may be the strongest argument against the charges levelled at the Neocatechumenal Way, the support for the Movement implicit in the declarations from the Vatican is irrefutable. As such, it has been the recipient of impressive affirmation from Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In that light, the two strongest signs of support are the approval of the Statutes in 2008 and in the reaffirmation of the Orientations for the Teams of

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Claudio Bandini (correspondence, February 2011: Summation).

³⁷⁵ Ibid. Inclusive of the bulleted points.

³⁷⁶ Christopher O’Donnell, ‘Ecclesial Movements’, in *Ecclesia: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 313-315 at 315.

Catechists, also known as the Catechetical Directory, in January 2011.³⁷⁷ These indicate the approval of the Church in both the structure of the Neocatechumenal Way and also of the teachings which it proclaims in the name of the church. Moreover, broadening the viewpoint of any criticisms of the Way, Tony Hanna postulates that the local Church must accept some responsibility for ongoing tensions relative to their relationship with the Neocatechumenate. This is on the basis that their parochial perspective can be so ‘narrow’, and ‘comfortable’, that the ‘zeal and dedication’ of the Way will inevitably be experienced by the parish as challenging and upsetting.³⁷⁸

Not unrelated, Argüello is unequivocal in the mandate afforded the ‘Way’ in its missionary endeavours. He holds that, inspired by the Holy Spirit (who is aware of the new context of faith), the Second Vatican Council initiated in the Church a new ecclesiology, the Church as *Lumen Gentium*.³⁷⁹ In that light, similar to the ‘new ecclesial realities’ raised up by the Holy Spirit to implement the teachings of the Council of Trent (‘charisms like the Jesuits’), so, today, the Neocatechumenal Way ‘are one of the new realities bringing the Second Vatican Council to the parishes’.³⁸⁰

6.5 PARISH CELLS OF EVANGELISATION

6.5.1 Origins

Acting as a challenge to the passive, tired and discouraged Christianity of many within the Catholic faith community, the president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko, holds that the New Ecclesial Movements manifest a faith ‘full of joy,

³⁷⁷ See Benedict XVI, Address to ‘The Members of the Neocatechumenal Way’, 17 January 2011: ‘The process of drafting the Statute of the Neocatechumenal Way has been successfully completed over the past few years and, after a suitable trial period “*ad experimentum*”, it was definitively approved in June 2008. Another significant step has been taken in the past few days with the approval of the *Catechetical Directory of the Neocatechumenal Way* by the competent Dicasteries of the Holy See ... The Church has recognized the Neocatechumenal Way as a special gift inspired by the Holy Spirit.’

³⁷⁸ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 77. Accordingly, ‘it is now the responsibility of those dissenting voices with the Church to perhaps reappraise their often critical perspective’.

³⁷⁹ Kiko Argüello, ‘Christian Initiation and the Transmission of Faith’, 137.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 139.

enthusiasm and courage'.³⁸¹ It is a reading that, synoptically, traces the origins and formation of the Catholic dimension of the International Parish Cells Movement.

In the 1980s, Irish born priest, Monsignor Mike Eivers, was working as the pastor of St. Boniface Parish, Pembroke Pines, in the Archdiocese of Miami in Florida. An impassioned evangelist and committed priest, he found himself questioning many aspects of the lived experience of parochial and ecclesial life, as he encountered it. His reflections were dominated, somewhat, by a sense of disillusionment with the state of Catholic life and practice. It had become, in his reading, largely functionary, routine and insipid in its fundamental expression. His intuition, however, pointed to a hunger among his parishioners for a more authentic demonstration of their Christian vocation, one expressed through a longing for a deeper commitment and a desire for a proactive involvement in their Catholic faith. Moreover, this desire was, essentially, concomitant with the impulse of new religious Movements for an adult faith experience expressed through the need for a deeper spirituality.³⁸²

Seeking resolution to this conundrum, Fr Eivers sought out Christian communities where this sense of faith experience was manifest. Thus, he identified churches which were vibrant and active, and where growth and mission were strong features. Tellingly, none of these churches were Catholic, but were, in the main, Pentecostal.³⁸³ He undertook a study of these churches in order to determine the reasons for their growth, and ultimately, in 1983, his research brought him to Seoul, in South Korea, where the concept of 'cell groups' had found remarkable success as an evangelising tool. There he met with Paul Yonggi Cho, Pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church, a church that had 20,000 cells with 250,000 members.³⁸⁴

Reflecting on his experience, Eivers drew a number of conclusions about these growing churches.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko 'The President to the readers', (Pontifical Council for the Laity, *News 14/2007*). http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_pc_laity_doc_20070724_notiziario-14-2007_en.html#The_President_to_the_readers [accessed March 2011]

³⁸² Charles Whithead, 'The Role of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the Life of the Church', 28.

³⁸³ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish: Building a Faith Community* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1998), 82.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.* In 2005 the numbers in this cell community were numbered at 1,000,000.

³⁸⁵ Cf. Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 82-83. Inclusive of bulleted points (adapted from Hurley).

- Each individual who participated had experienced a renewal of faith through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as at Pentecost. Their faith remained expectant of God's intervention to guide them through life's events.
- People met in large assemblies, where worship was joyful, with a great degree of participation.
- Of greater significance was that they also met in small house units. This enabled fellowship and friendship to be fostered. People knew they were welcomed, guided and encouraged. It was a natural place for a dialogue of faith, including personal questions, all of which were shared and looked at in terms of the scriptures.
- Prayer, the use of scripture, and catechesis were important.
- Participants had a strong commitment to evangelisation, to sharing faith in the public forum.
- The provision of leadership from across the membership was striking. In addition, all members were active in ministry in one form or another. Again, the role of the pastor was influential in providing teaching and shaping vision.

These elements of church – conviction of faith, growth in numbers, clarity of mission, levels of participation – stood in sharp contrast to the ecclesial experience of Fr Eivers.³⁸⁶ On that basis, a period of discernment and reflection followed for him, including consultation with members of his parish, and the counsel of others. Out of that, in 1983, the parish cell system of evangelisation, adapted to the Catholic tradition and culture, was initiated in the parish of St. Boniface.³⁸⁷ It became obvious, very quickly, that these cell groups answered a need in parishioners, and also inspired in many a renewed form of parish ministry, whereby it became truly *Koinōnia*, a 'communion' of co-workers in the mission of the Kingdom.³⁸⁸ In that light, aware that 'by their fruits you will know them' (Mt 7:16), Eivers claimed that, of all the

³⁸⁶ See also, Peter Hocken, *Church Forward: Reflections on the renewal of the Church*, 147. These attributes correspond, either directly or in spirit, with what Hocken lists as 'Characteristics of the New Movements'.

³⁸⁷ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 83.

³⁸⁸ Cf. Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 83. See also *ibid*, 94: Foundational texts, and 'motto of the cell community', are the commissioning rituals of the Lord (Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:16, 20).

initiatives he had ever undertaken, cell groups had yielded the most fruit.³⁸⁹ In turn, this ‘success’ attracted the attention of many others who were seeking approaches to building parish communities, particularly the capacity of reaching out to the lapsed and alienated. As such, the cell movement spread to other parishes, and to other dioceses, and to other countries, particularly so to Brazil and Venezuela.³⁹⁰

A pivotal moment in the evolution of the movement came in 1987, when Don Pigi Perini, parish priest in St. Eustorgio, Milan, visited St. Boniface with 10 parishioners to learn from their experience. This led to its establishment in Milan, which, in turn, acted as the catalyst in the development of parish cell groups throughout Europe, especially in the parishes of Italy and France,³⁹¹ but also in Belgium, throughout the United Kingdom, in Denmark and Sweden, in the countries of Eastern Europe, and in Ireland. In 1990, Fr Michael Hurley and three parishioners from the parish of St. John the Evangelist, in Dublin, visited the First European Seminar on cell evangelisation in Milan.³⁹² This led to the introduction of the movement into Ireland.³⁹³ From there, the cell initiative became part of the pastoral plans of parishes such as Carrickfergus (Co. Antrim), Nenagh (Tipperary), Callan (Kilkenny), Ferbane (Offaly), Doneraile (Cork), Leixlip (Kildare), and to more than forty parishes.³⁹⁴

6.5.2 *Oikos* Evangelisation

Echoing closely the biological interpretation of cells, as living and vibrant units in the human body, programmed to multiply or die, so too ‘multiplication’ acts as a central concept in the

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Isabelle Cousturie, ‘Changing the Face of Your Parish’, in *Zenit*, April 14, 2010, (Interview with Don Pigi Perini, president of the international organisation dedicated to parish evangelization cells). Accessed March 2011 at <http://www.zenit.org/article-28898?l=english>

³⁹¹ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 84. In 2005 the numbers in the cell community in the parish of St Eustorgio were numbered at 1,000, with 100 cell groups.

³⁹² Cf. Fr Michael Hurley, ‘The Church of the Future’, [Accessed March 2011 at <http://www.parishcellsireland.com/resources.html>] (from *The Goodnews Magazine*, 2007). Fr Hurley recalls: ‘In broken English Don PiGi communicated a vision of what is possible, which I have never forgotten. He outlined a strategy, which could mean hundreds of people being involved in small faith groups throughout a parish.’

³⁹³ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 83. At one time more than 300 were active in 31 cell groups throughout Ballinteer.

³⁹⁴ Noel Ryan, ‘A Way of Renewing Parish Life’, in *Intercom* 36/5 (2007), 7.

Parish Cells Movement.³⁹⁵ Hilary McCann, a pioneer in the development of the cell movement in Ireland, outlines the process.³⁹⁶

A cell consists of 4 to 12 people, who meet once a fortnight, in homes in our parish. The meeting lasts 1½ hours, and every six weeks all cell participants and their friends meet as a community, and we call this meeting a rally. When the cell has 10 to 12 people attending, we start the process of multiplication. The cell multiplies in two, and the process of inviting new people into the cells starts over again. The kernel of the cell is evangelization. For each of us, it is taking responsibility for sharing our faith at home and at work, among friends and neighbours.

Moreover, established as a pastoral initiative in the local church, the structure of the cell group is understood as a ‘particular movement of the Spirit’, designed to speak to contemporary culture.³⁹⁷ As such, the objectives of a cell group are outlined.³⁹⁸

1. To grow in intimacy with the Lord
2. To grow in love of one another
3. To share Jesus with others
4. To minister in the mystical body of the church
5. To give and receive support
6. To train new leaders
7. To deepen our Catholic identity

To meet these objectives the cell movement draws inspiration from (what they interpret as) the early church’s methodology for communicating Christ, indeed, the ‘God-designed means of sharing Christ’,³⁹⁹ that is, *Oikos* evangelism. From the Greek word for ‘household’ or a ‘house of people’, and often referring to one’s extended family, including ‘blood relations, slaves, clients and friends’, *Oikos* is encountered frequently in the New Testament.⁴⁰⁰ On that

³⁹⁵ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 91.

³⁹⁶ Hilary McCann, ‘The Cells – A Huge Blessing in my Life’, in *Reality*, May 2007. She was one of the three parishioners from Ballinteer at the 1990 workshop on cell groups in Milan. See further, Michael J. Eivers, A. Perry Vitale, Muriel Kroll, *Cell Leaders Training Manual*, Parish of Saint Eustorgio (by kind permission of St. Boniface Parish Pembroke Pines, Florida), 3. The manual defines ‘the fundamental characteristic of the cell, “either grow or die”.’

³⁹⁷ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 85.

³⁹⁸ Michael J. Eivers, A. Perry Vitale, Muriel Kroll, *Cell Leaders Training Manual*, 70.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 10, 11. A clear example is found in Acts 10 and 11. It says, ‘Cornelius ... and the whole of his household [*oikos*] were devout and God-fearing’ (Ac 10:2). An angel of God told Cornelius to send for Peter and that ‘he will save you and your entire household [*oikos*]’ (Ac 11:14). When Peter came to Cornelius (Ac 10:24) it says Cornelius ‘had asked his relations and close friends to be there.’ Other examples found in scripture include: Luke 8:26-39 (the demon-possessed man); Luke 5:27-32 (a tax collector named Levi); Luke

basis, *Oikos* evangelisation is rooted in the belief that the presence of God is given witness to in the daily lives of people, and through the ordinary relationships of people.⁴⁰¹ In the modern context it suggests those in our homes, in our neighbourhood, our places of work, and our places of leisure. These act as opportunities to evangelise, and constitute, essentially, our place of missionary activity. Moreover,

The cell group exists to help people to be alert to such moments, to train people to be sensitive and respectful in sharing with another, and to support them to have the courage to speak when it is correct to do so.⁴⁰²

Further, grounded in the recognition that this call to missionary activity is mandated in the baptismal vocation, the cell group imparts a confidence and a vocabulary to members in this call 'to speak', but always in the understanding that the true 'Evangeliser' is the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰³ It is in this respect that the underlying impetus, directing the course and method of cell evangelisation, is rooted, in the first place, in a study of their 'text books' of apostolic instruction,⁴⁰⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,⁴⁰⁵ *Redemptoris missio*,⁴⁰⁶ and *Christifideles laici*.⁴⁰⁷

A further guiding principle for the cell movement is sourced in the life and example of the early church, particularly (and integral to the 40 Day experience) the personal encounter with the Risen Lord, and the associated apostolic mandate, 'Go out to the whole world: proclaim

19:9 (Zacchaeus); John 1:44-45 (Philip and Nathaniel); John 4:50-53 (a royal official); Romans 16:3-16 (the Church structured in small, domestic communities); John 1:41 (Andrew and Simon Peter).

⁴⁰¹ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 88.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 94 (inclusive of the three Papal texts named). See also, Michael J. Eivers, A. Perry Vitale, Muriel Kroll, *Cell Leaders Training Manual*, 4: 'Both the parish presbyter and the "guiding group" (composed of five or six persons), with the purpose of guiding the course, must commit themselves to such study. The course itself must focus on an attentive study of these documents'.

⁴⁰⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75: 'Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit.' Cf. Michael J. Eivers, A. Perry Vitale, Muriel Kroll, *Cell Leaders Training Manual*, Preface: 'Techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit. The most perfect preparation of the evangelizer has no effect without the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit the most convincing dialectic has no power over the heart of man. Without Him the most highly developed schemas resting on a sociological or psychological basis are quickly seen to be quite valueless' (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75).

⁴⁰⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 21: 'The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission'. See especially 'Chapter III - The Holy Spirit: The Principal Agent Of Mission', (*ibid.*, 21-30 *passim*).

⁴⁰⁷ John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 13: 'With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, the baptized share in the same mission of Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour-Messiah'.

the Good News to all creation' (Mk 16:16).⁴⁰⁸ Stemming from this, elements central to the *raison d'être* of the Christian Community are named:

- The mark of being sent out from the community to establish local groups and churches;⁴⁰⁹
- The charism of leadership lived in the spirit of community service, and enacted in the spirit of team ministry;⁴¹⁰
- The gathering of small groups in people's homes, where 'it is easy to move from worship to fellowship, to addressing specific needs of those present, to celebration, to prayer and scripture'.⁴¹¹

These elements are interpreted unequivocally by the cell movement as clear evidence that the early church grew through the natural means of *Oikos* evangelism. Accordingly, 'The rule that we find in the early church could be summarised as follows: "Begin to share that small part of Jesus that you have met".'⁴¹² In that context, we recall the import of the 'axis of Christian faith', namely, that 'it is ultimately the same Spirit of the risen Jesus that touched the minds and hearts of the first disciples which touches the minds and hearts of Christians today.'⁴¹³ This principle acts as central in the motivation and inspiration of the cell community.⁴¹⁴

6.5.3 The Fruit of the Cell Experience

The typical format of a cell meeting remains faithful to the template designed by Monsignor Mike Eivers, adapted from the methodology and structure originally formulated by Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho:⁴¹⁵

⁴⁰⁸ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 95.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spirit and Institution*, 276-277: This recalls also that the redemptive movement of the New Covenant is not one of ingathering but of Eucharistic expansion, the sending of the little flock is understood as demonstratively centrifugal in nature and in task.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, 96.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 97.

⁴¹² Michael J. Eivers, A. Perry Vitale, Muriel Kroll, *Cell Leaders Training Manual*, 11.

⁴¹³ Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 93.

⁴¹⁴ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 94.

⁴¹⁵ See Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 92-93.

1. *20 minutes*: Prayer, song and scripture reflection.⁴¹⁶
2. *20 minutes*: A review of prayer and evangelistic experiences since previous meeting.⁴¹⁷
3. *10 minutes*: A teaching on audio or videotape about some aspect of faith.
4. *15-20 minutes*: A discussion on the teaching, aimed at its understanding and application.
5. *10-15 minutes*: Intercessory and also healing prayer.⁴¹⁸
6. A brief time of fellowship ends the meeting

Moreover, Eivers, outlining and prioritising the inspiration underpinning the cell community – essentially, the originating charism – draws distinctions between its context of catechesis and the narrow parameters attaching typically to parish catechetical initiatives. Thus, while the subtext of a cell group is the spiritual and personal nurturing of its members, it's very *raison d'être* is to act as an evangelising group with a multiplication mindset.⁴¹⁹ This represents the central and defining characteristic of the cell movement – that it is, in essence, a strategy for evangelisation. This, again, finds equivalence in the experience of the embryonic church, whose entire existence was organised 'so that it could give its message and its life away'.⁴²⁰ It, further, finds equivalence experientially in the manner of its presence within Irish Catholicism.

As such, speaking of the cell community as a 'huge blessing' in her life, one of the originators of the movement in Ireland reflects on the 'fruits' it offers:

We share in our cell the reality of our lives, our joys and our sorrows and in this way friendships and trust in each other deepen. We encourage each other to share the Good News we have experienced in knowing we are deeply loved by God, as we are. On this journey with Christ, each of us has experienced a "calling" to some way of serving in ministry in our parish.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁶ Each cell meeting begins with people quietly becoming aware of the presence of God. A few hymns or a spontaneous prayer greatly helps. There follows a reading and reflection upon scripture, the same text at each cell meeting.

⁴¹⁷ Those who wish briefly tells how they have seen the presence of God since they last met and of how they may have shared faith with another.

⁴¹⁸ This is a time of prayer for the parish, for world issues, for those of the *oikos*, for family members, etc.

⁴¹⁹ Michael J. Eivers, 'Parish Evangelizing Cells: The Fields Are White With the Promise of Harvest, But Where Can We Find the Reapers?', [Accessed at] <http://www.carrickparish.org/home.htm>

⁴²⁰ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 95.

⁴²¹ Hilary McCann, 'The Cells – A Huge Blessing in my Life', in *Reality*, May, 2007

Again, Noel Ryan, writing as National co-ordinator in Ireland for the Parish Cell Community of Evangelisation, reflects:

In hindsight, I now understand that my cell involvement was a call to me to be more involved with my church. It challenged me to move away from a private faith and openly witness to it. This call required a definite response from me, which was difficult as I was not perfect. However, I took courage from the encounter between Jesus and Simon in Luke 5:11 when Simon left everything to answer the call of Jesus.⁴²²

In this way, it is an expectation among the cell community that parishes where cell groups exist can expect to share in the ‘fruits’ of their prayer experience. This is because members bring ‘a great reservoir of energy and giftedness’, and a desire to incorporate this within the ministry and life of the parish.⁴²³ Furthermore, this desire is motivated, not merely by the ‘doing’ of activities, but by the call to share in the mission of the church.⁴²⁴

However, it is prudent to recall that Pope John Paul II, speaking of the ‘unexpected newness’ brought to the life of the Church by the New Ecclesial Movements, cautioned that their presence has also given rise ‘to questions, uneasiness and tensions’.⁴²⁵ This ‘tension’ is encountered in the experience of the cell community in Ireland. Indeed, in a manner echoing the pattern of encounter symbolised by the 40 Day template, a journey to recognition and acceptance of the ‘unexpected newness’ of the charism carried by the cell movement becomes necessary.⁴²⁶ Michael Hurley outlines the process.⁴²⁷

1. There is a resistance to change. This reflects an attempt to keep what is perceived as new at a distance and not to disrupt the comfort zone.
2. There follows a tolerance. This marks a recognition that there is good in what is proposed.
3. There is an acceptance of the ‘new thing’.⁴²⁸ This acts as an acknowledgement that here is something that is good and beneficial.

⁴²² Noel Ryan, ‘A Way of Renewing Parish Life’, 7.

⁴²³ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 104.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ John Paul II, Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 30 May 1998.

⁴²⁶ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

⁴²⁷ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 101.

⁴²⁸ Cf. Is 43:18-19: ‘Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a *new thing*; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?’

4. There is an assimilation of the 'new thing' into the life of the parish. This represents an identification, and involvement, with what is new, to the extent of proposing it as 'one's own idea'.⁴²⁹

In a practical application of this reading, Fr Hurley identifies particularly the place and disposition of the local clergy. He suggests, in that regard, that resistances in terms of the formation of cell groups are, at times, to be expected. In the first place, the presbyter may be reluctant to engage with the cell community on the basis of the large and additional workload that it will entail. Further, he may fear that it could undermine his position of authority, in working with parishioners 'who are informed and who operate from a living faith'.⁴³⁰ It could, again, render him more pastorally vulnerable than his training and practice has prepared him for, and, in his reading, allow for the confusion of role definition. Experience, however, shows that such resistances, effectively, dissipate in line with the pattern outlined. In this way, they are replaced by (in its description) a suffusion of elements characteristic of Easter encounter: an encounter that is inspirational, encouraging, appreciative, and joy-filled.⁴³¹

6.5.4 Recognition

The method of the cell community was recognised officially by the Holy See on 29th May 2009, as the *International Organization of Parish Cells of Evangelization*. The Cell Movement had not requested this recognition but it was, rather, accorded to them by the Pontifical Council for the Laity.⁴³² It is, moreover, a recognition of the orthodoxy and method of the movement, and an expression of the will of the Church that this method continue.

Bishop Joseph Clemens, who presided at the ceremony, spoke of the significance of this ministry for the Church. He outlined that what the Cell Community offers are

⁴²⁹ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 101.

⁴³⁰ Michael Hurley, *Transforming Your Parish*, 102.

⁴³¹ Ibid. See further, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 214: a pattern of renewal manifestly descriptive of the encounter with the Risen One. We recall the universal manifestation of Easter faith – 'They were filled with Joy'! (See, for example, Mt 28:8; Lk 24:32, 41, 52; Jn 20:20).

⁴³² Isabelle Cousturie, 'Changing the Face of Your Parish', in *Zenit*, April 14, 2010, (Interview with Don Pigi Perini, president of the international organisation dedicated to parish evangelization cells). Accessed march 2011 at <http://www.zenit.org/article-28898?l=english>

opportunities of personal and community conversion, knowing that to evangelize is the very vocation of the Church; an awareness to transmit to the lay faithful who, because of their membership in the Church, rooted in the sacrament of baptism, have by vocation the mission to proclaim the Gospel, and are then called to renew their adherence to the parish so that it will become a community of ardent faith directed to the evangelization of the most estranged.⁴³³

In that regard, Don Pigi Perini president of the international cell movement, speaks of evangelisation as, first of all, a commitment to prayer, the reason, he holds, why ‘in almost all the communities in which the cells are present, there is Eucharistic adoration’.⁴³⁴ Reflecting this, and the charismatic inspiration of the cell community, Michael Eivers outlines that the ‘two major links’ forged by the movement within the family of parish ministry are with the Life-in-the-Spirit seminars and the promotion of Eucharistic Adoration.⁴³⁵

Again, drawing on his experience since his first encounter with the cell evangelisation method, in 1983, Eivers holds that they represent the most effective way ‘to close the back door of the church’.⁴³⁶ They, furthermore, are rooted in the ‘evangelizing strategy’ employed by the Lord Jesus, who journeyed intimately with ‘his cell group of 12’.⁴³⁷ Building on that strategy, and recalling the Divine mandate of sending ‘labourers to his harvest’ (Mt 9:38), he concludes that ‘both the harvest and the reapers are in our own backyards’.⁴³⁸ It is in that context that, he believes, in the Spirit of the New Pentecost, the charisms of the Holy Spirit are exercised in cell meetings, ‘fanning into flame especially the charism of evangelization’.⁴³⁹

⁴³³ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ Michael J. Eivers, ‘Parish Evangelizing Cells’.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

6.6 THE COLUMBA COMMUNITY

6.6.1 Origins

Named after the Missionary and evangelist monk native to Donegal,⁴⁴⁰ and founder of the City of Derry,⁴⁴¹ the Columba Community, based in the Diocese of Derry, is canonically recognised since 1995 as a Private Association of the Faithful.⁴⁴² As such, it has its own constitution, developed its own ethos and enjoys its own autonomy. The Community was founded in 1980 by Fr.Neal Carlin.

Reflecting its originating impulse the Community aligns itself with, and derives from, the Charismatic Renewal Movement. Giving expression to the experience of a profound conversion and understanding of the Holy Spirit in their lives, members of the movement name the experience in terms of ‘baptism in the spirit’,⁴⁴³ that is, ‘the release of gifts already received in the Sacrament of Baptism’.⁴⁴⁴ Moreover, in terms of the ‘already’ of the embrace of the ‘new Pentecost’ of Conciliar renewal, it is seen that ‘one of the greatest fruits of the Second Vatican Council is the rise of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church’.⁴⁴⁵

The origins of the Community are found in an unexpected release of Fr Neal Carlin from parochial duties in the diocese of Derry in 1978. Although difficult and (to him) inexplicable, Fr Carlin retrospectively recognises this as a providential intervention introducing him to a way of life that was to become central in his practice of ecclesial life, that of the Basic Christian Community. It was a pivotal experience for him in a journey of formation:

⁴⁴⁰ Colmcille (Columba) was born at Gartan in County Donegal on the 7th of December 521. His father was King Feidlimid MacFergus and his mother was Eithne, Princess of Leinster. He was a great-grandson of Niall of the Nine Hostages.

⁴⁴¹ In 546 Columba’s cousin, Aedh, gave him a site on a hill covered with oak trees, and it was here he built his first monastery which became known as Doire Colmcille (Colmcille’s Oakgrove) and it is from this name that the city of Derry takes its name.

⁴⁴² See the homily given by Bishop Seamus Hegarty, on the occasion of the Canonical Recognition of the Columba Community, St. Eugene’s Cathedral, 31st August, 1995. Accessed at <http://www.columbacommunity.com/Contents.html> (cf. Canonical Recognition) [accessed March 2011]. To view *The Constitution of The Columba Community* see <http://www.columbacommunity.com/files/chconstitution.htm> [accessed March 2011].

⁴⁴³ Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 77.

⁴⁴⁴ Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 2006 edition, 4.

⁴⁴⁵ Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Homily of Pentecost 1995. Cited in Hanna, 77. In 1976, Fr Neal Carlin, a priest working in the diocese of Derry, convinced by this call to charismatic renewal formed a prayer group on that basis. Within two years the group membership had risen to three hundred members who gathered to give praise to God with a new awareness and to be baptised in the spirit. (See Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 2006 edition, 12). Fr Carlin, a native of the Derry Diocese, was ordained in 1964 for the Motherwell diocese in Scotland and returned after 11 years to Derry, with the prospect of being incardinated there, in November 1975.

I spent six months questioning myself about the system into which I was ordained and looking at the small Christian communities of Pecos New Mexico. I became convinced I still wanted to be a priest in a lay organisation. I saw an ideal model there for the kind of priesthood I felt called to. I was testing my vocation and at the same time developing my spiritual life. I returned to Ireland with this ideal as the foundation on which I would, God willing, build a Christian Community. A small group of individuals met to pray and share together on an ongoing basis and ask for God's guidance. Community began to happen.⁴⁴⁶

From this a basic Christian Community, known as *The Columba Community* was founded in 1980, and has continued to mature in the years since.

6.6.2. Four Apostolic Centres

6.6.2.1. Columba House

Through a complex conjunction of circumstances the Community was quickly enabled to establish a house of prayer and reconciliation at Columba House in Queen Street in Derry.⁴⁴⁷ Constituted as a prophetic witness in an Ireland where many are seeking alternative groupings that are clearly not Christ-centered,⁴⁴⁸ the Community name 'The Aims of Columba House' as Prayer, Community, Evangelisation, Repentance, Reconciliation.⁴⁴⁹ Critically, in terms of an evidencing of the 'new Pentecost' in the contemporary experience of Irish ecclesial life, Fr Carlin locates the *raison d'être* of this Community in the ecclesiology of Vatican Council II – specifically in the renewed appreciation of the role of the laity found there.⁴⁵⁰ It was, however, more his understanding that this vision 'has been generally overlooked' in the Irish Church that compelled him to structure the Columba Community on the basis of charismatic authority, and not clerical authority:

⁴⁴⁶ See 'A Man with a Mission to Bridge the Abyss' at <http://www.columbacommunity.com/files/fathercarlin.htm> [accessed March 2011]

⁴⁴⁷ Primary among these circumstances was a word given during a period of discerning prayer, one that 'came clearly and distinctly from the depth of the Spirit within: "In a few days a stranger will point out to you a house"' (Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 19). Fr Carlin recounts that, within a few days, 'after a meeting in a nearby alcoholic rehabilitation centre, a man from the city suggested to me that I needed a large house and brought me to look at one in Queen Street' (ibid, 20). The house was in a very poor state of repair – it had previously been used by the police but had remained abandoned after having been bombed and burnt out in 1970. Within days of Fr Carlin having been shown the house a benefactor purchased it on behalf of the Columba Community, and spent the first £10,000 on renovations. Another benefactor explained: 'I have just been given £29,000. I knew Jesus wanted me to use it somehow. Now I know you are to have it – free of interest, for as long as you need it' (ibid, 21).

⁴⁴⁸ Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 2006 edition, 'Update'.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 21-22.

⁴⁵⁰ Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 16.

Charismatic authority ... is surely what must be emphasised when we speak of the authority of the Christian priest, religious or laity. It is where this concept of Church authority has existed that clergy have become servants and are unafraid of allowing and encouraging laity to live as vibrant members of the Christian parish community.⁴⁵¹

On that basis the Columba Community places a strong emphasis on elements named as features of the 'new life' emanating from the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council – that is, on the ability to claim the new forms of life through which the Holy Spirit is manifest today. These include the call to collaborative discipleship,⁴⁵² the search for the sacred,⁴⁵³ the living of Church as *Koinōnia*:⁴⁵⁴

We have shared ministry among our 17 or so members and some 200 auxiliaries. Auxiliaries pray for us daily and we pray for them in groups each morning at group prayer. The auxiliaries attend meetings monthly (if possible), and members attend weekly meetings. We share time, finance, talents and prayer for the benefit of fellow members and those to whom we have apostolates.⁴⁵⁵

Again, consistent with the counsel of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI in calling new religious movements and associations to ecclesial maturity,⁴⁵⁶ the Columba Community lays stress on the cooperative dimension of its ministry within the diocesan and parochial structure.⁴⁵⁷ This is corroborated by Bishop Séamus Hegarty who, 'in the name of the Diocese of Derry', thanks the members of the Community for 'their work, their ministry and their personal witness'.⁴⁵⁸ He, further, reflects that the relational dynamic pertaining from his granting canonical recognition to the Columba Community 'very clearly and explicitly entails that for the future the Local Ordinary not only may but must exercise a supervisory role'.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Cf. Section 5.1.2, 'New Life – The Call to Collaborative Discipleship', 171. See especially Neal Carlin, 'Ministry: No Clerical Preserve', *The Furrow* 57/2 (2006), 99-102.

⁴⁵³ Cf. Section 5.1.3, 'New Life – The Search for the Sacred', 184.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. Section 5.14, 'New Life – Communion', 192.

⁴⁵⁵ Neal Carlin, (Correspondence, January 2010). The response addressed the question, 'In what way can you speak of *The Columba Community* as a 'Community'?

⁴⁵⁶ See Pope John Paul II, Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 30 May 1998; Benedict XVI, 'Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities', 22nd May 2006.

⁴⁵⁷ Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 17: The Community bases itself as a lay religious community, not in competition with, but as auxiliaries to the parish system.

⁴⁵⁸ Homily given by Bishop Seamus Hegarty, on the occasion of the Canonical Recognition of the Columba Community, St. Eugene's Cathedral, 31st August, 1995.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. He continues, 'I look forward to the Columba Community being at the service of the local church'.

6.6.2.2 Saint Anthony's Retreat Centre

In its inception the Community is inspired by and seeks to imitate, contextually, the life of the early Christian Communities named by the Acts of the Apostles. Moreover, again giving witness to the 'new Pentecost' in the Irish context, the Community associates specifically with the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).⁴⁶⁰ Further, reflecting significant linkage to the Charismatic dimension of the Church named by the Second Vatican Council,⁴⁶¹ the Community develops its identity with the embryonic Church in terms a specific link to the charism of Saint Anthony, and his desire to imitate the life of the Apostles and the early Christians.⁴⁶² This is demonstrated by one of its major works, the foundation of *Saint Anthony's Retreat Centre* in 1985. Located in rural Donegal, just across the border from Derry, this centre, acting a sister house to the Columba Community, seeks to facilitate the search for the sacred. Through the provision of structured prayer, spiritual accompaniment, purpose built hermitages, and access to extensive natural beauty, the Centre offers retreatants the opportunity to 'come away by yourselves to a desert place and rest awhile' (Mk 6:31). Members speak of Saint Anthony's as 'literally a God-send' on the basis that, similar to Columba House before it, it was 'providentially' (and unexpectedly) donated to Fr Carlin for the use of the Community.

6.6.2.3 White Oaks Rehabilitation Centre

A further, and central, pillar of the Columba Community, is its outreach, not to 'orphans and widows', but to the most needy in contemporary society. Thus, it names as 'the core ministry and charism' of the Community a 'care for the marginalised'.⁴⁶³ In that regard, responding to 'a growing compassion for prisoners and a desire to set captives free from all kinds of burdens and fetters',⁴⁶⁴ Fr Carlin and the Community developed, from the outset, an apostolate to prisoners (especially para-military) in Northern Ireland. This continued until the Good Friday agreement of 1998 and the release of prisoners policy associated with that. Guided by their charism the Community then moved to address 'the prevailing problem in

⁴⁶⁰ Neal Carlin, (Correspondence, January 2010). 'The Columba Community is in every way like the early Christian Community we read about in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2'. The response addressed the question, 'In what way can you speak of *The Columba Community* as a 'Community?'

⁴⁶¹ Cf. Pope John Paul II, 'You Express Church's Fruitful Vitality', 27 May 1998.

⁴⁶² See Athanasius of Alexandria, 'Life of Antony, 3', in *Early Christian Lives*, trans. Caroline White (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 10.

⁴⁶³ Neal Carlin, (Correspondence, January 2010). The response addressed the question, 'What, if any, is the primary charism of the Columba Community?'

⁴⁶⁴ Neal Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 10.

our society' – the addiction to drug and alcohol abuse.⁴⁶⁵ To that end it has developed the state of the art *White Oaks Rehabilitation Centre*, a 35 acre site set in the vicinity of Saint Anthony's in the Donegal hills. Established in 2001 it provides a thirty day residential programme for the treatment of alcohol and drug abuse for up to twenty clients.⁴⁶⁶ The Centre is proactively ecumenical in its structure and approach with representatives of the four main Christian Church's involved in a shared ecumenical chaplaincy. It has ten fulltime employees and many volunteers from the Columba Community and its auxiliaries. This call to healing is at the very heart of the Columba Community, and critical to its formation and identity. In that light, reflecting on their 'ministry of healing' as the work for which the Community is best known, and recognising the imperative nature of healing and reconciliation at this time, Bishop Hegarty concludes: 'I thank God for gifting Fr. Carlin with a special charism in this regard'.⁴⁶⁷

6.6.2.4 IOSAS Centre

Fr Carlin and the Columba Community, in addition to identifying strongly with the community lifestyle of the early Christians as a basis for their own ecclesiological paradigm (cf. Acts 2:46-47), are similarly convinced by the defining age of Celtic Spirituality (5th – 12th centuries) as an inspiration to the event of contemporary Irish Catholicism. Recognising this period as a 'golden age' of evangelisation, witnessed in the foundation of an array of small church communities, they see value in renewing interest in the characteristics of Celtic Spirituality as a model for the Irish Church today. As such, in a reading suffused in 40 Day and paschal imagery, they understand this 'golden age' as a renaissance in ecclesial life (within Ireland and on the European continent), one that brought the light of the living Lord and dispelled the Dark Ages that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire.⁴⁶⁸ This acts as the inspiration behind the development by the Community of the *Celtic Prayer Garden*, known as the IOSAS Centre, adjacent to both St Anthony's and White Oaks.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁵ Neal Carlin, (Correspondence, January 2010). The response addressed the question, 'An emphasis on a prisoner apostolate seemed to be the primary expression of the work of the Community at its inception: 1) *Is this an accurate assessment?* 2) *How, if at all, has this changed and/or evolved?*'

⁴⁶⁶ The optimum number for the community, given the intensity of the programme, is twelve.

⁴⁶⁷ Homily given by Bishop Seamus Hegarty, on the occasion of the Canonical Recognition of the Columba Community.

⁴⁶⁸ Neal Carlin, in *The Celtic Saints As Inspiration For Our Times*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2010), Preface.

⁴⁶⁹ IOSAS (Island of Saints and Scholars), covering a six acre site, is shaped like a map of Ireland. The focus at the centre of the garden is a Trinity Pathway, with different areas around the perimeter based on Croagh Patrick,

The Peace Garden acts as a place of pilgrimage. Drawing on the Celts reputation as a people of imagination it invites pilgrims, in the very act of walking round it, to ‘imagine’ being surrounded in the prayer of the great women and men of Ireland’s Celtic past – Columba, Brigid, Canice, Egney, Brendan, Adomnán, Patrick. The intention is to reconnect with the incarnational prayer of our Celtic forbearers in the recognition of ‘the Higher Power evident in everything’.⁴⁷⁰ It is to do this, moreover, not as an accolade to past generations, but to learn from their experience ‘so that we can life in a better, more inclusive way’.⁴⁷¹ IOSAS promotes in a particular way the spirituality of young people, recognising that they are ‘crying out for opportunities’ to explore their questioning spirit, and, in that, to find a pathway that will be ‘life affirming rather than soul destroying’.⁴⁷² Again, bringing synergy to the relational dynamic linking the 40 Day symbolism of the embryonic Church with the ‘new Pentecost’ ecclesiology of the Columba Community, is the placing as the central feature of the Peace Garden the figure of the risen Christ.

6.6.3 *Life and Spirit*

The foundation of these four apostolic Centres is, in the understanding of the Columba Community, a mark of blessing from God. Furthermore, they trace a connection between this Divine benevolence and their attempts to faithfully engage with the paschal dimension of the 40 Days named in the current circumstances of Irish Catholicism – that is, to claim the new life of the ‘new Pentecost’.⁴⁷³ Reflecting the ethos underpinning this call to mission,⁴⁷⁴ the

Brendan’s voyages, the Island of Columba, St Bridgid’s Cross, and the Oratory of Saint Canice. It includes a small lake, a bird and wildlife sanctuary. There is also a European section representing where Irish saints evangelised from the 5th to 12th Century.

⁴⁷⁰ Marguerite Hamilton (Community Member), *Celtic Garden Presentation*. It is said that that the Celts had prayers for such as lighting the fire and for milking the cow. The Celtic Garden is a place of such stillness that it is ‘what scholars call the “thin place” beloved of the Celts who believed that in such a place heaven and earth are closely connected (ibid). [accessed August 2010]

http://www.columbacomunity.com/CELTIC_GARDEN_PRESENTATION.htm [accessed March 2011]

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ For instance, in the evolution of the Apostolic centres, it became apparent to the Community that their vision of a Celtic Peace garden had to be foregone because priority of time and resources had to be given to the establishment of a rehabilitation centre for those suffering from alcohol and drug abuse. However, ‘almost as a reward for giving up the dream of building a Celtic Peace Garden and concentrating instead on helping people in a very practical way, it turned out that the land White Oaks is built on had an ideal space for just such a garden’ (Neil Carlin, *Freedom to Captives*, 2006 edition, Update)! Or, again, regarding the provision of land for the Celtic Peace garden ‘the place was so beautiful it was as if God was rewarding us with a place of great natural beauty because we had let go of the dream years before and got involved in the challenging and difficult work at White Oaks’ (Marguerite Hamilton *Celtic Garden Presentation*).

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51: The Pattern of Encounter: ‘The revelation is concluded by a form of missioning from Jesus’.

inscription in front of the altar in Columba House Oratory (the first of the Apostolic Centres) are the final words attributed to Saint Columba: 'Those who trust in the Lord will want for no manner of good thing' (Ps 84:12). Petitioning a renewed interest in the characteristics of Celtic Spirituality, so that the contemporary Church in Ireland might be renewed, Fr Carlin addresses the need to present 'the Treasures of the Faith in Christ Jesus in a way that will give life to our people, young and old'.⁴⁷⁵ Specific in that context, drawing from Isaian prophecy, he holds that 'the Lord is building new, authentic Christian communities'.⁴⁷⁶ The task is to be alert to the forms and presence of this Divine manifestation for they represent 'new wine skins to present the new wine of the Spirit of Love, Truth, and Joy'.⁴⁷⁷ So it is that the Columba Community recognise their presence as an example of a modern Christian community of prayer and reconciliation.⁴⁷⁸ This is a critical assessment in terms of the tensions relative to the reception of life and spirit in the Irish Church – that, regarding the task cognate of contemporary ecclesial life in Ireland, it seeks to claim the new spirit of the new life within which the Church is already suffused.⁴⁷⁹

Again, and critical in terms of evidencing this suffusion of life and spirit in contemporary Irish ecclesial life, it is in such communities that the spirit and teachings of Vatican II documents are being implemented in a very real way.⁴⁸⁰ As such, they represent a model of church which allows for lay participation, is open to respond to the needs of our age in apostolic ways, and, for those who have ears to hear (cf. Mt 13:9), 'requires the attention of anyone seeking to live a full Christian life'.⁴⁸¹ In that regard, and recalling the tensions relative to the 'already' and the 'not yet' in the contemporary Irish Church, Fr Carlin is unequivocal: 'The trouble is few Catholics, especially clerics and very especially bishops have listened to what the Vatican Council has said on many issues'.⁴⁸² In that light, and condemnatory of a juridical mindset dominant in the expression of Irish Catholicism, the need is for renewed structures 'to simply present the fullness of Christ and His message'.⁴⁸³ Definitively, if the Church is to regain a level of credibility, is to be seen to be accountable,

⁴⁷⁵ Neal Carlin, in *The Celtic Saints As Inspiration For Our Times*, Preface.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. Cf. Is 43:18-19: 'Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a *new thing*; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?'

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138.

⁴⁸⁰ Neal Carlin, in *The Celtic Saints As Inspiration For Our Times*, Preface.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Neal Carlin, (Correspondence, January 2010). The response addressed the question, 'In what way can you speak of *The Columba Community* as a 'Community'?

⁴⁸³ Neal Carlin, in *The Celtic Saints As Inspiration For Our Times*, Preface.

and to inspire confidence in those searching for the Way, it would seem ‘that alternative systems of governance, like the ones that Columba and his contemporaries had, are required’.⁴⁸⁴ Confident in that respect, Fr Carlin holds:

If the Church named in the Acts of Apostles, and the spirit of the Celtic Church was the same Spirit led Church, it certainly seems that God is doing a similar work among us in the church of the Columba Community.⁴⁸⁵

Collectively, this spirit of ecclesiology, and the understanding that ‘by your fruits you shall know them’, validate and demonstrate the basis for naming the Columba Community as a witness to the ‘New Pentecost’ in the contemporary event of Irish Catholicism, as the bearers of life *and* spirit.

6.7 NEW ECCLESIAL REALITIES IN IRELAND

The underlying dynamic driving this chapter has remained within its stated parameters – to specifically seek verification of New Ecclesial Movements and Lay Associations as witnesses to the event of Vatican Council II. In that light, we have referenced these movements as a witness to synthesis in the Church between new life that is given, and the embrace of the spirit of that new life. As such, we have defined the Movements as bearers of the spirit of the ‘New Pentecost’. Further, we have addressed specifically the formation of some of these new ecclesial realities, including their positioning in the Irish context. We conclude this chapter with reference to developments of these new Movements in the generic context of Irish ecclesial life.

The relationship of New Ecclesial realities within the broader context of the Irish Church is consistent with the co-essential dimension of the institutional and charismatic elements of Church life. Thus, reflecting the call to ‘ecclesial maturity’,⁴⁸⁶ marked by submission to ecclesiastical authority,⁴⁸⁷ the coordination of the Movements and Associations in Ireland

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Neal Carlin, (Correspondence, January 2010). The response addressed the question, ‘Any other relevant factors?’

⁴⁸⁶ John Paul II, Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 30 May 1998.

⁴⁸⁷ See John Paul II, ‘Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 30 May 1998. Also, Benedict XVI, ‘Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities’, 22nd May 2006.

come under the auspices of the *Department of Worship, Pastoral Renewal and Faith Development* of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. Specifically, within that, they are the responsibility of the *Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development* (PRAFD). This is seen as a recent development. The Council was formed in 2005, and as late as 2008 did not have the topic of New Ecclesial Movements on its radar, indicating a lack of visibility or influence of such Movements within the dioceses of Ireland.

It was at this time that PRAFD launched a series of pastoral initiatives in response to the positioning of these Movements and Associations in Ireland. They hosted a Pastoral Conference in September 2008, in Marino Conference Centre. In addition to those from Ecclesial Movements and Associations, participants included diocesan and parish pastoral workers, members of religious congregations, pastoral agencies, and education and training institutions. The two-day event, which was an exercise in dialogue and collaboration, invited participants to explore diverse interpretations of what it is to be Church.⁴⁸⁸ Again, in November 2008, at the International Pastoral Theology Conference held in the Milltown Institute in Dublin, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe highlighted the need for 'reanimation' of lay groups in the Church as a means of renewal of faith, life and mission.⁴⁸⁹ The conference aimed to encourage participants to name and claim their own lived theology and discover how this perspective mirrors the presence and action of God in their ministries.

In response to these gatherings, a one-day event was organised by PRAFD for representatives of Ecclesial Movements and Associations of Lay Faithful to come together and explore the common ground of Christian life. Held in March 2009, the meeting was attended by 16 groups who discussed the life and mission shared by everyone in the Church. Significantly, locating the appraisal of new ecclesial communities as a 'springtime' in the Church,⁴⁹⁰ the discussions focused on elements intrinsic to that dialogue. These elements included:⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁸ Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, *Annual Report 2009*, 6.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

⁴⁹⁰ See Pope John Paul II, 'You Express Church's Fruitful Vitality', 27th May 1998: New Ecclesial Communities act as 'one of the most significant fruits of that springtime in the Church which was foretold by the Second Vatican Council'

⁴⁹¹ Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, *Annual Report 2009*, 7-8.

- The call to Evangelisation
- The empowerment of Laity
- The interplay of structure and life, of Institution and Charism
- The co-essentiality of the charismatic and the institutional
- The need to find new ways of being Church
- A renewed Catholic identity, stemming from a renewed catechesis
- The challenge to live our baptism – the responsibility for evangelisation

The meeting was chaired by Bishop Francis Lagan, demonstrating official dialogue between the Irish Episcopal Commission and the New Ecclesial Movements and Lay Associations in Ireland.⁴⁹² The fact that the mission of the ecclesial movements takes its authority from the Ecclesial authority was acknowledged by those assembled, and the awareness of how the gifts and charisms of particular associations enrich not only members' lives but, also, the whole Church was discussed. Within the context of the need to reflect the co-essentiality of the Marian and the Petrine, the vibrancy of the movements and the evidence of the energising *pneuma* were acknowledged.⁴⁹³ The assembled groups were invited by the Council to avail of the office and the resources of the Council.

In May 2010 a second annual gathering was organised by the Council and was attended by over 20 groups. These included representatives from:⁴⁹⁴

Alliance of Holy Family International
Apostolate of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration
[Parish]Cell Movement
Associations and Movements in Elphin
Focolare
Knights of Columbanus
Neocatechumenate
Radharc Trust
St Joseph's Young Priests Society
St Vincent de Paul Society
Worldwide Marriage Encounter

Alpha Ireland
Ceili Community
Charismatic Renewal
Family of God [Dundalk]
John Paul II Centre
Legion of Mary
Pax Christi Ireland
Regnum Christi
Teresian Society
Youth 2000

⁴⁹² Ibid, 7.

⁴⁹³ Cf. Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, *Annual Report 2009*, 8.

⁴⁹⁴ Source: Julieann Moran (Research Assistant), Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development (correspondence, March 2011). Ms Moran acknowledged 'not all of them would be classed as 'New' or a 'Movement'.'

Such is the evolving strength and influence of the Movements that the newly assembled *Council for Catechetics* of the Irish Episcopal Conference has included representatives of the movements and associations on the Council, as also has the newly constituted Diocesan Pastoral Council of the Archdiocese of Armagh.⁴⁹⁵ Further, the Ecclesial Movements have also been signally identified in the 2011 National Directory for Catechesis, *Share The Good News*, as an implementation resource for the national catechesis policy as issued by the Bishops' Conference.⁴⁹⁶ Again, concluding an analysis on the potentiality of attraction and influence encountered in the phenomenon of the new ecclesial realities in the Irish context the *Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development* hold:

Associations and movements offer to their members the experience of belonging in a community, nurture for their spiritual life, and a focus for living their Christian mission and ministry. Anyone who has ever been engaged in the mainstream ministries of diocese or parish knows how challenging it is to offer this kind of experience within the community as a whole.⁴⁹⁷

This is the framework within which we reference the witness of New Ecclesial Movements, in the Irish context, and internationally. They offer evidence of being suffused in the encounter with the Lord, and, as such, bearers of the life *and* the spirit of the new Pentecost. In that respect, Benedict XVI is unequivocal: 'Anyone who has discovered Christ must lead others to him. A great joy cannot be kept to oneself. It has to be passed on'.⁴⁹⁸ Thus, in attaching to the Movements the elements of Mission – witness, vitality, faith, hope – Pope Benedict is acknowledging their capacity to recognise the Lord in the encounter.⁴⁹⁹ That is, he is acknowledging that they are marked by the universal manifestation of Easter faith – 'They were filled with Joy'!⁵⁰⁰ Drawing on this experience of paschal encounter, and aware that 'proclamation is the permanent priority of mission',⁵⁰¹ we move to consider the efficacy of this mandate in the Irish context, particularly the essence of Gospel proclamation – the telling of the Easter story.

⁴⁹⁵ <http://www.catholicbishops.ie> (Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development). Accessed March 2011.

⁴⁹⁶ Irish Episcopal Commission, *National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland: Share the Good News* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2010), 211-212 (cf. #153, 154: 'Ecclesial Movements, Groups and Organisations').

⁴⁹⁷ Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, Annual Report, May 2009, 35.

⁴⁹⁸ Benedict XVI, Homily at the concluding Mass of World Youth Day, 21 August 2005. Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi (homilies/2005)

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, to 'Bishops and Representatives of Ecclesial movements and new communities', 17 May 2008. Literally, 'the unexpected explosion of the new lay realities which in various and surprising forms have restored vitality, faith and hope to the whole Church'.

⁵⁰⁰ See, for example, Mt 28:8; Lk 24:32, 41, 52; Jn 20:20.

⁵⁰¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 44.

Chapter VII

40 Days – The Mandate to tell the Easter Story: A Concrete Proposal for the Church in Ireland

7.1 TELLING THE EASTER STORY

Building on our exploration of 40 Day Engagement in the Irish Church, named in the experience of New Ecclesial realities, this chapter seeks to consider approaches in the Irish Church relative to the mandate of the paschal dimension of the 40 Days – essentially, the directive to tell the Easter story (cf. Mt 28:19). In that regard, and cognisant of ‘new and serious challenges to the faith’ in Ireland,¹ it will, firstly, address particular ecclesiological and sociological difficulties in the fulfilling of this mandate. As such, it will focus on the area of sacramental initiation, especially that of the Sacrament of Confirmation. This focus will act as a context to the introduction of a particular initiative in the telling of the Easter narrative – namely, the assessment and re-formulation of the Confirmation Process in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York. Again, applying a reading of the 40 Day template against this initiative, and seeking potential for greater affiliation between sacramental preparation and the telling of the Easter story, the chapter will conclude by drawing perspective from the Rockville Centre process in the Irish context. It is necessary, in the first place, to establish parameters.

Benedict XVI recalls how the Church in its infancy, marked by an outpouring of the Spirit, was transformed from a bedraggled and disorganised group into disciples of the Lord impelled to speak of their encounter with him.² Thus, ‘empowered by the Spirit’, and driven by a feeling of ‘vigorous conviction’,³ they set out ‘bearing witness to the

¹ Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland, (4).

² Benedict XVI, Welcoming Celebration by the Young People, Barangaroo, Sydney Harbour, 17 July 2008 (on the occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day). Accessed March 2011 at [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/\(speeches/2008\)](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/(speeches/2008)).

³ Benedict XVI on the occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day, Randwick Racecourse, Sunday, 20 July 2008. Accessed March 2011 at [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/\(homilies/2008\)](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/(homilies/2008)).

greatest story ever told'.⁴ So it is, Benedict proclaims, that 'in every age [the Church] is impelled by the same Spirit' to continue to witness to the greatest story ever told.⁵ Therefore, today also, a new generation of Christians is being called upon to make known this story of God's 'gift of life'.⁶ Accordingly, the mandate conferred on the Catholic Church in Ireland, as it seeks to interpret the 'new Pentecost' in the contemporary event of Irish ecclesial life, is to 'set out to tell the same story'.⁷ In that light, a point of departure for the Church might be to recognise that, to a significant degree, it is 'fussily answering questions that are just not being asked'.⁸ This indicates a serious disconnectedness between the mandate of the Church (to tell the story) and its capacity to engage fruitfully with that story in terms of the task cognate of the 40 Days – to embrace the new spirit for the new life it is in fact already living.⁹

Contextualising this tension in terms of the Church Universal, yet in terms equally and entirely applicable to the positioning of contemporary Irish Catholicism, Rolheiser names what is a central and determining factor in the debate:

For those of us who remember another time ... the church as we knew it, parish life as we knew it, what it means to be Catholic as we knew it, and even family life as we knew it, are, in the face of contemporary forces, irrevocably different. We can like it or dislike it, but the fact is indisputable.¹⁰

It is this 'fact', Rolheiser insists, that demands a response. He is, moreover, unequivocal regarding the nature that this response should take. It is to return to the pattern of encounter with death and resurrection in Christ and allow that to positively and critically

⁴ 'That God has become one of us, that the divine has entered human history in order to transform it, and that we are called to immerse ourselves in Christ's saving love which triumphs over evil and death': Benedict XVI, Welcoming Celebration by the Young People, Barangaroo, Sydney Harbour, 17 July 2008.

⁵ Benedict XVI, Holy Mass at Nationals Park, Washington, 17 April 2008. Accessed March 2011 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2008.

⁶ Benedict XVI on the occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day, Randwick Racecourse, 20 July 2008

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Welcoming Celebration by the Young People, Barangaroo. Sydney Harbour, 17 July 2008

⁸ Bishop Richard Clarke, 'Church must provide an open door for ostracised', in *The Irish Times*, April 18, 2001. Published in Easter week this article addresses specifically the telling of the Easter story.

⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138.

¹⁰ Ronald Rolheiser, *Against an Infinite Horizon*, 152.

shape our destiny. Definitively, we are called to respond with a paschal imagination.¹¹ It is a reading echoed in the observations of Irish Church commentators.

7.1.1 The Point of Departure

In an important analysis of the current circumstances of Irish ecclesial life, theologian Michael Paul Gallagher establishes a context linking the Church to the contemporary expression of the society within which it lives out its mission. Thus, constructing parameters regarding the relational dynamic pertaining between the Church and Irish society, he names, in the first place, a failure on the part of the Church to recognise the signs of the times.¹² This failure, of complacency in the face of ‘the shifting sands of faith’,¹³ he sees as complicit in forging a view of Christianity as ‘the enemy of full humanity’ or, more seriously regarding the telling of the Easter story, as ‘a boring and empty legend’.¹⁴ Aligned to the widespread ‘cultural desolation’ impelled by the forces of postmodernism in Ireland,¹⁵ it makes the story of Christian faith ‘not so much incredible as unreal and unreachable’.¹⁶ Gallagher is specific – these *are* the parameters:

All the vocabulary applied to postmodern culture elsewhere became suddenly true of Ireland as well: fragmentation, diversity, fluidity, fragility, mobility, narcissism, relativism and incapacity for permanent commitment. The list is long but the new context is real and seemingly here to stay. It presents an enormous pastoral challenge to a Church already weakened in many ways, yet there is no turning back the clock. This is the harvest field for any ‘new evangelisation’ today.¹⁷

Giving substance to this reading Eugene O’Brien, in a valuable (and humorous) analysis, echoes Gallagher’s thesis. Locating the position of contemporary Irish Catholicism

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹² Michael Paul Gallagher, *The Disturbing Freshness of Christ* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2008), 6. These signs include the experience of the collapse previously of other seemingly impregnable bastions of Catholicism (Quebec, Holland, Belgium, Spain); the impact on lifestyles brought about by the Celtic Tiger; the fallout from the litany of Church related scandals.

¹³ *Ibid.* In the context of reading the signs of the times, this description was applied previously and specifically to the Church in Ireland: cf. Peadar M. Kirby, ‘The Irish Church: the Shifting Sands’, *Doctrine and Life* 28/10 (1977), 28-37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘Post-modernity, Friend or Foe’, 80.

¹⁶ Michael Paul Gallagher, *The Disturbing Freshness of Christ*, 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

against a reading of postmodernity and deconstruction in contemporary Irish culture, he bases it on the cult television programme of the 1990s *Father Ted*.¹⁸ He holds that the content, popularity, and subliminal message underpinning the series exemplifies the extent to which attitudes towards the Church in Ireland, and the place of the Church within contemporary Irish culture, has been deconstructed.¹⁹ Pursuing this in terms of naming the Easter story (of claiming the ‘new Pentecost’) in the Ireland of today, O’Brien concludes that ‘the alteration in the grand narrative of the Catholic Church in Ireland has been mapped out’.²⁰ Further, not unrelated, we are reminded that it is not so much that the grand narrative has dropped from view as that religion is no longer a place where it is being sought.²¹ This is corroborated by ecclesial observers:

- Christian religion is peripheral in the lives of ‘most people’ in Ireland;²²
- Many people have lost their sense of identity with the Church;²³
- The role of the institutional Church in Ireland is now marginalised;²⁴
- This age is witness to the first generation of the unchurched in Ireland;²⁵

¹⁸ Eugene O’Brien, ‘Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse: Catholicism, Deconstruction and Postmodernity in Contemporary Irish Culture’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards and understanding of identity*, 47-67.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 57. This, O’Brien holds, is demonstrated *par excellence* by one particular episode – that of ‘kicking Bishop Brennan up the arse!’ The plot of the episode dictates that Father Ted (the ‘wheeler-dealer priest’), having lost a bet with his nemesis Father Dick Roche, is required to kick his obstinate and intimidating bishop ‘up the arse’. This he finally achieves while being photographed in the act by ‘the idiot priest’, Father Dougal. This image O’Brien interprets as an ‘iconic metaphor’ of the change in attitude of people to the Church.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 66. In that regard O’Brien establishes a juxtaposition between this fictional image of Fr Ted and Bishop Brennan and that of Bishop Eamonn Casey and Fr Michael Cleary as the ‘warm-up’ act at the Papal Mass in Galway in 1979. Agreeing that the visit of John Paul II acted as ‘part of a great funeral liturgy’ for an expression of Irish Catholicism that was dying (Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 24), the subsequent public demise of the two clerics present as symptomatic of the deconstruction of the Irish Church. Thus, the popular representation of the Church in the figure of the *Father Ted* series acts as a metaphor for the gradual movement towards disrespect, and gradual lack of importance, of the hierarchical structure of the church in the everyday lives of people (O’Brien, 60).

²¹ James Corkery SJ, ‘Cultural Change and Theology in Ireland’, in *Studies*, 88/352 (1999), 371-380 at 372.

²² Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind* (Dublin: Banley House, 2007), 30.

²³ John Littleton, ‘Catholic Identity in the Irish Context’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards and understanding of identity*, 12-30 at 30.

²⁴ Louise Fuller, ‘New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards and understanding of identity*, 68-89 at 68.

²⁵ Timothy J. White, ‘Decoupling Catholic and National Identity: Secularisation Theories in the Irish Context’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards and understanding of identity*, 238-256 at 252.

- Against the realigned value system in Ireland religion is seen as ‘old-fashioned, boring and alien in the eyes of many – like a dying language’;²⁶
- Ireland has emerged as ‘perhaps the most secular society in Europe’.²⁷

Against that, the capacity of the Irish Church to engage constructively with the abrupt and radical nature of such upheaval is seen to be limited.²⁸ Its tendency has been to resist proactive encounter with the changed milieu of modern Ireland, and only reluctantly accept changes, ‘when there was no alternative’.²⁹ It is an approach rooted in the mindset of another time, an era when ‘the story told itself because it was carried along on a current of political and social action’.³⁰ At this time, however, consistent with the mandate accorded the Church by the risen Christ, it is imperative that it finds new ways to tell its story.³¹ Commentators offer a broad consensus on the way forward. Michael Drumm establishes a framework: ‘The only way forward is to tell the story in such a way that people will grow in appreciation of its significance’.³² Drawing on the theology of story William Bausch places emphasis on the affective dimension of the Easter narrative:

The pivotal ‘fact’ of the resurrection is fundamentally less important in its description and verification as a statement of Jesus of Nazareth rising from the dead than as a central proposition of hope. What counts are the implications the resurrection story has for us in our living and in sustaining our outlook on life and death. Otherwise you have reportage, not Gospel.³³

Echoing this, theologian Thomas Driver, reflecting on how theology has become too disconnected from its roots in narrative, counsels the use of ‘the dramatic imagination’ as the means whereby ‘we get started in any knowledge whatever’.³⁴ Similarly, Amos Wilder concludes that ‘it is at the level of imagination that any full engagement with life

²⁶ Michael Paul Gallagher, *The Disturbing Freshness of Christ*, 16.

²⁷ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 19

²⁸ Cf. Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 72.

²⁹ Louise Fuller, ‘New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy’, 89.

³⁰ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 130.

³¹ Cf. Louise Fuller, ‘New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy’, 89.

³² Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 21.

³³ William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991 Edition), 196.

³⁴ Thomas Driver, *Patterns of Grace: Human Experience as Word of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), xxiii.

takes place'.³⁵ Equally, addressing specifically the Irish context, Michael Paul Gallagher remembers that 'the heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination'.³⁶ Again, Michael Drumm, addressing the 'complex reality of Irish Catholicism', speaks of the need to 're-awaken our theological imagination so as to mediate the divine in ways that are ever ancient and ever new'.³⁷ Brendan Hoban too, speaking from his experience of Irish Church life, suggests that 'we need to employ some imaginative response', in order to name the story of Easter faith in the Ireland of today.³⁸ This, cumulatively, attests to a fundamental and pivotal element in the formation of identity and mission named by the 40 Day template:

The appearances were effective because they adapted to the imagination, understanding, and sense experience of the disciples in a manner that facilitated the revelation of the risen Christ.³⁹

Colloquially, this recalls the fable of the lost tourist informed by the local that, were she going to the tourist's destination, then she 'wouldn't start from here'. Theologically, it recalls the experience of the lost disciples and, consistent with the pattern of Easter encounter, the entry point of divine initiative into paschal darkness:⁴⁰

- ❖ *What are all these things you are discussing as you walk along? (Lk 24:17)*
- ❖ *Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for? (Jn 20:15)*
- ❖ *Haven't you caught anything, friends? (Jn 21:5)*
- ❖ *Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts stirring in your hearts? (Lk 24:38)*

³⁵ Amos Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 2.

³⁶ Michael Paul Gallagher, *The Disturbing Freshness of Christ*, 24. He is quoting from *The Grammar of Assent* by John Henry Newman.

³⁷ Michael Drumm, *Passage To Pasch*, 65.

³⁸ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 90.

³⁹ Cf. Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 92. Consistent with that initial experience of encounter, we established this axiom as one of two pillars within a contemporary framework of encounter. The other pillar acknowledged that the initiative for the encounter comes from Jesus, and that for those to whom he appeared a new revelatory experience of Jesus issued.

⁴⁰ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

On that basis, rationale indicates that the beginning point in the contemporary telling of the Easter story in Ireland is to accurately assess the point of departure. Definitively, ‘Here is where we are’! This assessment is benchmarked against what is established as a critical factor in the lived experience of Catholicism in Ireland – that people ‘don’t and won’t know the story’, because they have become disconnected from ‘the tribal memory of their religion’.⁴¹ In biblical narrative it is not without precedence.

7.1.1.1 **Shibboleth**

Rooted scripturally in the Book of Judges (12:1-15), the term ‘shibboleth’ is defined as ‘a long standing belief or principle that many people regard as outdated or no longer important’.⁴² Applied to the *zeitgeist* of the contemporary Irish Church, evidence suggests that, regarding the narrative of their founding story, to a significant degree many who would nominate themselves objectively as ‘Catholics’ do not have the capacity to pronounce *shibboleth*! Essentially, the assimilation of the Easter Story within the life experience of many of those ‘incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission’⁴³ appears, at best, limited, and, ostensibly, unknown. Commentators observe that a common experience at the celebration of sacramental encounter in the Irish context is a serious and widespread deficiency among those attending the celebration. Universally, this manifests itself in an almost total lacking of rubrical awareness, or of any indication of familiarity with even basic tenets of Catholic liturgy.⁴⁴ This peculiarity is evidenced particularly at the celebration of Eucharist, predominantly so during requiem

⁴¹ William J. Bausch, *Brave New Church*, 46. See Section 3.4.1, ‘Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story’, 139.

⁴² Catherine Soanes (ed), *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). The word traces its prominence to a battle between two Semitic tribes, the Ephraimites and the Gileadites. The Gileadites prove victorious, and, in order to catch the fleeing Ephraimites, set up a security blockade. The sentries asked each person to say the word ‘shibboleth’. The Ephraimites, who had no *sh* sound in their language, pronounced the word with an *s* and were thereby unmasked as the enemy and killed. In contemporary usage, a person whose way of speaking is consistent with shibboleth is identified as an insider and therefore included in the group, and, correlatively, a form of speaking inconsistent with shibboleth, exposes the speaker as alien to the group.

⁴³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 1213: ‘Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission.’

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, 47: ‘The gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus.’

or nuptial Mass, ‘when it becomes immediately obvious that many people in the congregation are simply “out of practice” regarding the language and routine gestures used’.⁴⁵

I’m sure I’m not the only priest in the land whose heart is close to breaking at the sight of people taking the Sacred Host and seeming barely to know what to do with it. ‘I’ve just said, it’s the Body of Christ!!!’ There have been times when I’ve wanted to scream those words to folks for whom the Sacred Host is invested with all the significance of a digestive biscuit.⁴⁶

Or again,

I find it dispiriting to baptise a child where no one in the congregation seems the least bit interested in the religious dimension. It is equally dispiriting to officiate at a wedding which would have been in a civil registry office if social parental expectations and the possibility of better photographs for the wedding album hadn’t won the argument for the church.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Brendan Hoban posits that even among those who want to be at Mass, their level of engagement is ambiguous.⁴⁸ As such, the Mass, ‘the true center of the whole Christian faith’,⁴⁹ is regularly encountered as routine in practice and uninspiring in content.⁵⁰ In a similar vein, addressing the practice of ‘a terrible minimalism’ common in the naming of Catholic ritual, Michael Drumm points to a favourite Irish idiosyncrasy in the celebration of Eucharist – the faster the better!⁵¹

Beyond any sense of inability or limitation in the capacity of Irish Catholics to identify with the story of Easter faith as it is being spoken to them, there is a deeper and potentially more significant crisis facing the Church at this time, namely a seeming disconnect from that story entirely:

⁴⁵ John Littleton, ‘Being a Catholic in Ireland Today’, in John Littleton and Eamon Maher (eds), *Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland*, (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2008), 12-24 at 17.

⁴⁶ Fr Chris Hayden, ‘The Wedding Season’, in *The Irish Catholic*, 15th March 2007.

⁴⁷ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 47.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 42.

⁴⁹ Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 6.

⁵⁰ Cf. Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 42-43.

⁵¹ Cf. Michael Drumm, *Passage To Pasch*, 80-81. See, for instance, Tom Gilmore, ‘Ready, steady, pray . . . Parishioners pack church for priest’s quickie Lenten Mass’ in the *Irish Independent*, 25th February 2010. The article elaborates on how ‘A priest’s congregation has increased tenfold in a week – thanks to a quickie Mass.’

Many of those who were baptised as Christians no longer really know Jesus and their way of living demonstrates that the message of Jesus touches their lives only in a marginal way.⁵²

Commentators prioritise in that regard ‘the younger generation’.⁵³ Thus, we are advised that ‘Christian memory has been almost completely deforested and has disappeared’ and that for Christians of the younger generation ‘knowledge of the Christian mother tongue is gone’.⁵⁴ Again, Colum Kenny presents as a misreading attempts to link the contagion of media events such as the burial of Pope John Paul II with the sudden reawakening of ‘Irish young people’ to the value of Irish Catholicism.⁵⁵ Journalist Mary Kenny holds that younger people ‘no longer see Catholicity as part of their identity’.⁵⁶ Brendan Hoban too, reflecting on the ‘thirtysomethings’, holds that the Church ‘speaks a language they no longer understand’. Accordingly, ‘they leave the Church behind, airbrushing it out of their lives, apart from the inconvenience and awkwardness of First Communion or Confirmations’.⁵⁷

Church commentator Peadar Kirby reflects on this absence of young people from the churches:

It points to a fundamental failure to evangelise a new generation, to relate the message of the Gospel in a liberating and penetrating way to the values, lifestyles, concerns and life horizons that predominate among them.⁵⁸

Kirby is specific. Allowing that the quality of those charged with catechetical formation (the telling of the story) is consistent in each generation, the logic points to a distinctive element attaching to the contemporary Irish church rendering it much less pastorally effective than previously. This element Kirby defines as the role adopted by the Church regarding Irish life, and the strategies it employed to give effect to that role.⁵⁹ Essentially,

⁵² Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Chrism Mass, Holy Thursday, 20th March 2008.

⁵³ See John Littleton, ‘Catholic Identity in the Irish Context’, 28.

⁵⁴ Godfried Cardinal Danneels, ‘Address to the Jubilee Convention of Priests of the Archdiocese of Dublin’, 3rd May 2000, in *Link-Up*, Summer 2000.

⁵⁵ Colum Kenny, ‘God Help Us!: The Media and Irish Catholicism’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards and understanding of identity*, 90-102 at 99:

⁵⁶ Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 387.

⁵⁷ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 42.

⁵⁸ Peadar Kirby, ‘The Catholic Church in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland’, 25.

he confirms that the symbiosis fusing the cultural, ecclesial, traditional, and historical, while perceived as successful and fruitful when previously applied to the incumbent expression of Church, is a model redundant against the current circumstances of Irish Catholicism. Thus, concisely, the challenge facing the Church in Ireland now is, ‘how do we tell and re-tell the Christian story in an age when it is slipping from memory?’⁶⁰

7.1.1.2 Initiation into the Christian Story

The method of incorporating new members into a community is universally a process of initiation.⁶¹ It is the conduit through which tribes, faiths and cultures pass on the wisdom, knowledge and beliefs essential to their identity and integral to their survival. In terms of the Christian tradition this initiation is, in essence, the telling of the Easter story and the assimilation of individuals into the human manifestation of that story, the Christian community. It is fundamentally the entry into the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁶² The variable nature of this form of storytelling is demonstrated in the fact that ‘the Church is full of validly initiated members but many of them no longer identify with its teachings nor attend the rites of the community’.⁶³

Drawing on the understanding of French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957), and his concept of ‘rites of passage’ rituals that move individuals from one social status to another, Michael Drumm locates this disconnect with the Easter story against an impoverished and ineffectual marking of the rite of passage.⁶⁴ Particularly in the Irish context, and specifically in terms of its approach to sacramental initiation, he locates this disconnect with the loss of the meaning of the story which underpins the sacrament.⁶⁵ In that regard, naming as the paradigm of Christian initiation the event at Pentecost, where

⁵⁹ Ibid, 27.

⁶⁰ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind* (Dublin:Banley House, 2007), 130.

⁶¹ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 30.

⁶² Michael Drumm, *Passage To Pasch*, 115.

⁶³ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 44.

⁶⁴ Michael Drumm, *Passage To Pasch*, 20, 83.

⁶⁵ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 22.

the Upper Room acts as the place of separation from the ordinary,⁶⁶ he indicates serious misgivings regarding the efficacy of the ritual of initiation as it is conventionally applied in the Irish context:

When it comes to first communion and confirmation, is there any sense of changing, of an ordeal of letting go to selfishness in order to be committed to the generosity of Christian living? Where is the ache and the symbols of death that are so integral to initiation? Where is there a real and challenging experience of the sacred, of the spiritual? Where is the encounter with the transcendent, with the sense that we are being initiated into a reality greater than ourselves?⁶⁷

Giving substance to this reading, John O'Brien, drawing on the Rahnerian call to a 'Copernican revolution' in the Church's understanding of sacrament,⁶⁸ posits the need for the Church in Ireland to undergo a 'defamiliarisation' with the symbols of religion in order to 'discover God in Christ anew'.⁶⁹ In that light, he holds that the whole method of catechesis should be 'rethought' so as to avoid reducing the Christian story to a theoretical *apologia* for its sacramental life.⁷⁰ Again, importantly, it is a viewpoint that finds resonance among those directly involved in sacramental catechesis in Ireland. Maeve Mahon reflects that a key learning in recent years regarding catechetical formation in the Irish Church has been the need to formulate a parish-based approach to sacramental initiation. This is vital in order that the children preparing for sacramental encounter are exposed to religion in a setting other than the classroom, where it becomes associated as simply another school subject.⁷¹ Moreover, it affords significant and creative

⁶⁶ Cf. Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 20: Drumm references here the thinking of Arnold van Gennep who outlines a typical pattern related to the rite of passage. This pattern dictates a three-fold order in the process of transformation being undertaken – namely, separation, transition, and incorporation. As such, Drumm continues, 'the subject of the ritual is in some way ritually separated from his peers, undergoes rites which bring about a major transition in his life and then, through rites of incorporation, re-enters his society with a new social status'. So it is, that in terms of the assimilation of the Easter story, he points to the transformational experience of Pentecost as the template of Christian initiation.

⁶⁷ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 48.

⁶⁸ John O'Brien, *Seeds of a New Church*, 141. Addressing particularly on the circumstances of contemporary Irish ecclesiology, O'Brien reflects this 'revolution' accordingly: 'Life itself with its struggles, ambiguities, joys and failures, and not the sacraments of the church, is the primary locus of the sacred and it is there that the common human vocation to holiness is lived out'. Cf. also Karl Rahner, 'A Copernican Revolution: Secular Life and the Sacraments', in *The Tablet*, 6th March 1971.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 145. He continues, 'and know God, as it were, for the first time'.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Maeve Mahon, *You Shall Be My Witnesses* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2009), 4.

opportunities for evangelisation – that is, to allow the Easter story to be spoken anew to the children, to their parents, and to the Easter people gathered.

Addressing these evolving circumstances of sacramental preparation in the Irish Church, Tony Flannery, speaking of the inevitability of the removal of such preparation from the schools system, reflects on it as a positive development:

This would solve one problem that is becoming increasingly obvious. In a school context there is pressure from all sides to ensure that every Catholic in the class receives the sacrament, irrespective of whether they or their parents have any interest in faith or church. Making the preparations in the parish context, independent of the school, and done outside of school hours, would mean that only those who are committed would get involved, and the others would naturally fall away, without creating any of the sort of embarrassment that this issue is causing today.⁷²

The imperative need for the Irish Church to be proactive in this regard is demonstrated by developments in the broader Irish context. For instance, in its coverage of the Irish National Teachers Organisation annual conference in 2003, *The Irish Times* quoted a teacher as saying that in her experience ‘preparing children for the sacraments is a sham’.⁷³ In 2004 the Irish National Teachers Organisation indicated that in the future many of its members would be unwilling to prepare their pupils for the sacraments.⁷⁴ By 2007 they were calling for a complete overhaul of the religious education system.⁷⁵ In 2010 a large majority of primary teachers supported the relinquishment of control by the Catholic Church of some or all of its schools.⁷⁶ Not unrelated, observers point to a

⁷² Tony Flannery, ‘Let the local parish prepare children for the sacraments’, in *Reality* 71/5 (2006), 20-21 at 21.

⁷³ Kathryn Holmquist, ‘Religious education to reflect pluralism demanded’ in *The Irish Times*, April 25th 2003.

⁷⁴ Niall Coll, ‘Catechesis’, 133. Reflecting on a hardening in the position adopted by the Irish National Teachers Organisation Coll cautions that ‘It would be foolish to ignore such signals’.

⁷⁵ ‘Is the flame about to die?’ in *The Irish Times*, April 14th 2007. This article further reported on tensions amongst teachers regarding the content of the catechetical curriculum, ironically amongst those committed to the teaching of religion in the primary school context. These tensions revolved around the content of the *Alive-O* programme. Thus, some argued that ‘the series doesn’t teach the Catholic faith’, in that it ‘overlooks hard concepts such as original sin and the meaning of the Catholic Mass in favour of softer subject material’. Brendan O’Reilly, however, the National Director of Catechetics, and central to the creation of the *Alive-O* series, posited that ‘there is a great deal more to the communication of the faith than simply passing on knowledge’.

⁷⁶ Seán Flynn, ‘Teachers urge cut in schools run by church’, in *The Irish Times*, April 5, 2010. Named at 80%.

commonplace dysfunctional relationship in the Home-Parish-School triadic.⁷⁷ Often the only positive religious experience children have is in the classroom. In that context, the typically generous approach of dedicated and faithful teachers, conscious of their role in handing on the faith, is to be welcomed, and commended. Evidentially, however, there are also teachers, professionally contracted to this role, who neither share in nor identify with the Easter story they are asked to tell. When aligned to ‘quite the most incredible contradiction’, of parents ‘who do not practice the faith themselves’ presenting their children for sacramental initiation,⁷⁸ the corollary is inevitably the undermining of the very story that is being told.⁷⁹ In that context, an unwillingness, or an inability, on the part of the Church to proactively address the situation is not without consequence: ‘The institutional church is in danger of promoting the dead faith of the living as distinct from the living faith of the dead’.⁸⁰

7.2 A WAY FORWARD

7.2.1 Re-Image the Easter Story

Drawing on the initial experience of Easter encounter, Pope John Paul II restates the mandate accorded the Church by the risen Christ. It is, essentially, fidelity to the telling of the Easter story: ‘Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations’ (Mt 28:19).⁸¹ He recalls, further, the foundation on which this continuation of the messianic mission is constructed:

⁷⁷ See Maura Hyland, ‘Religious Education since Vatican II’, in Dermot A. Lane and Brendan Leahy, *Vatican II, Facing the 21st Century*, 146-186 at 161, 182. See especially Martin Kennedy, *Islands Apart* (Dublin: Veritas, 2000). Kennedy holds that ‘The classroom is a space of positive religious discourse and experience; The home is a space where there is little or no religious discourse and experience; The parish is a space of diminishing religious discourse and experience’ (cited in Hyland, 183). See also Michael Paul Gallagher, *The Disturbing Freshness of Christ*, 17: ‘It is increasingly clear that the traditional interaction of family-school-parish cannot be depended upon as in the past.’

⁷⁸ Cf. Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 64-65.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸⁰ Cf. Dermot A Lane, (ed.), ‘Faith’, 160.

⁸¹ John Paul II, *Jesus, Founder of the Sacramental Structure in the Life of the Church*, General Audience, July 13, 1988.

It is Christ's promise not only to be with the apostles, that is, with the church, until the end of the world, but to be himself *in* the church, as the source and principle of divine life.⁸²

Moreover, in that context, and focusing on 'the essential union of the sacraments with Christ's mission',⁸³ he outlines the *sine qua non* attaching to the efficacy of the mission: 'He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing' (Jn 15:5).⁸⁴ As such, the sacraments act as visible signs of the Church's capacity to transmit the new life of the risen Christ. That is, just as the public ministry of Jesus brought about 'the transformation and renewal of man in the Holy Spirit', so the sacramental signs, given by Christ to his church, must serve the same purpose: 'That is clearly evident from the Gospel'.⁸⁵ Accordingly, the communion of life shared with Christ is the condition of the Christian life bearing fruit.⁸⁶ It is a reading suffused in the experience and symbolism of the encounter marked by the 40 Day template.

Thus, it intimates fundamentally the directive given to Mary Magdalene not to cling to a redundant manifestation of Divine initiative (cf. Jn 20:17), for 'by clinging to what once was we cannot recognise God's presence within a new reality'.⁸⁷ In that light, the task, in fidelity to the paschal dimension of the journey to Ascension, and the new life of Pentecost, is to recognise new life present in the Church, and categorically, to embrace the Spirit for the new life the Church is in fact already living. Therefore, to the extent that the Church in Ireland can ardently seek to 'claim its births' so it will move to receive the Spirit of the expression of ecclesial life it is in fact already living.⁸⁸ Correlatively, to the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bruce Vawter, 'The Gospel According to John', in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary II*, 454. Correlatively, where this unity is broken, it is like a dead branch, fit only to be cast in the fire (Mt: 13:40).

⁸⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 152.

⁸⁸ See Section 5.1.1, *New Life – A 'New Pentecost' in the Church*, at 165-171. Evoking Rolheiser's counsel regarding a constructive encounter with the cycle of the paschal mystery – that fidelity to the journey is the singular means by which Ascension, and, therefore, Pentecost can occur – syllogistically, the singular means by which the Irish Church can find resolution concerning tensions relative to possessing 'life' and possessing 'spirit' (the 'already' and the 'not yet'), is to engage faithfully in the task of embracing the new life present to it.

extent that the Church exhibits an inability, or a refusal, to re-image the Easter story, so it will be living out of a false premise.

This is a covenantal understanding that finds precedence in the initial encounter symbolised by the 40 Days.⁸⁹ It is in this context that we apply, and concur with, the analysis of ecclesiologist John Littleton, who, drawing on this same text of Easter Encounter named by John Paul II, interprets the divine assurance within it as ‘unambiguous’: ‘I am with you always; yes to the end of time’ (Mt 28:20).⁹⁰ Definitively then, ‘If Jesus is a prisoner within the cage of Irish Catholic identity then let us destroy that cage’.⁹¹ This counsel resonates symbiotically with the initial experience of the Easter story, and quintessentially with that of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. That is, we recall that the disciples were compelled to re-image their redundant understanding of the promise of God – indeed, in the exegesis of Joseph Ratzinger, they were compelled to have that image ‘destroyed’.⁹²

⁸⁹ We recall, for instance, the annunciation of the Easter message to the women at the tomb, and how, because of fear and paralysis, they were impeded in their vocation as Christian witnesses (cf. Mk 16:7). Also, the experience of the disciples at the Lake of Tiberias, where they laboured fruitlessly because the Lord was not present (Jn 21:3), and, reciprocally, the disciples on the Emmaus journey, whose discourse about ‘all that had happened’ (Lk 24:14) was fruitless because they excluded from it the experience of the resurrection event. Again, the experience of Mary Magdalene shows that attempts to cling to a redundant relationship with the manifestation of the Spirit succeeds only in frustrating the journey from the darkness of grief to the joy of Easter.

⁹⁰ John Littleton ‘Catholic Identity in the Irish Context’, 29. These are the opening words of Pope John Paul at the General Audience, July 13, 1988 (cf. John Paul II *Jesus, Founder of the Sacramental Structure in the Life of the Church*).

⁹¹ Colum Kenny, ‘God Help Us!: The Media and Irish Catholicism’, in Louise Fuller, John Littleton, and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic – Towards and understanding of identity*, 90-102 at 102.

⁹² Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225. Comparing the prevailing image of the disciples (which essentially sought to compress God) as analogous to the ruins of a demolished house, Ratzinger holds that this image too had to be ‘destroyed’ in order that ‘they could see the sky again and him who remains the infinitely greater.’

This pathway to *libertas* is named recurrently.⁹³ It demands in the first place the capacity to ‘liberate’ the desire *for* faith.⁹⁴ Thus, Michael Paul Gallagher, pointing to the collapse in Ireland of ‘our older languages of faith’,⁹⁵ petitions the need for a pre-evangelisation in order to ‘awaken ways of prayer and of listening to the Word’.⁹⁶ His thesis is that this will then allow the richness of the sacramental encounter to find freedom and reason.⁹⁷ Reflecting this, and intimating a way forward for the Church in Ireland, Michael Drumm holds that, ever before people celebrate a ritual, they need to be immersed in the story which underpins it.⁹⁸ Therefore, where this story is manifest in ‘fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope’,⁹⁹ it presents as anathema to the principles of initiation established in the 40 Day template.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, when these elements present in the Irish Church as symptoms related to an ‘impoverished and ineffectual’ approach to sacramental initiation, the pathway forward is outlined – succinctly, it cannot be just more of the same.

Against that, in relation to sacramental initiation, where the ‘cage of Irish Catholic identity’ is sustained in part by a ‘grotesque’ sense of minimalism in the telling of the Easter story,¹⁰¹ it is imperative that the Church reclaim the capacity of naming the ‘joy

⁹³ Cf. JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 357. *Libertas*: an Augustinian concept regarding the efficacious nature of true freedom. For Augustine, *libertas* is what St Paul calls Christian freedom, the freedom of the children of God who have received ‘the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out “Abba Father!”’ (Rom 8:15). This call to *libertas* is widely referenced in our analysis of resistance within the Irish Church to the spirit and vision of Vatican Council II: Bishop Leo O’Reilly speaks of the ‘New Evangelisation’ as a bringing to awareness that all baptised are called by God to follow Christ and personally to collaborate in the Church’s mission (Bishop Leo O’Reilly, *Becoming Priests for the First Time*, 475); Donal Harrington petitions a refocusing of the Church in Ireland from traditional areas of activity to the area of ‘evangelisation, re-evangelisation and pre-evangelisation’, (Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 76).

⁹⁴ Michael Paul Gallagher, *The Disturbing Freshness of Christ*, 20.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibid*, 20. As such it draws comparison with the teaching of Pope Paul VI on the role of evangelisation: that people may ‘live the sacraments as true sacraments of faith - and not to receive them passively or reluctantly’ (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 47). It further recalls the polemic of John Paul II: addressing circumstances ‘where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith ... what is needed is ‘a new evangelization or a re-evangelization’ (*Redemptoris missio*, 33).

⁹⁸ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 19. The context is the experience of a deficit of religious knowledge and understanding in those approaching the sacraments of initiation (*ibid*).

⁹⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 36, (Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80).

¹⁰⁰ And named by the pattern of encounter. Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Michael Drumm, *Passage To Pasch*, 82. And defined by ‘an interaction with symbol that borders on the ridiculous’.

for which otherwise we wait in vain'.¹⁰² The alternative is a continuing trivialisation and cheapening of the sacramental life of the Church.¹⁰³ Furthermore, a narrowing of the parameters of Easter narrative exclusively to the seven sacraments of the Church acts as an unnecessary restriction in the deepening of Christian identity, and as a misinterpretation of the principle of *ex opere operato*.¹⁰⁴ Thus, to unquestionably prioritise the theological over the anthropological is to limit the potential attached to the journey of pre-evangelisation, and the capacity for sacramental renewal in the Church. Moreover,

Inattention to these truths has, in an era of waning devotion and belief, produced an almost slot-machine sacramental practice too often characterised by minimalism and near-empty ritualism.¹⁰⁵

Critically, it is a practice not without consequence.

7.2.1.1 Objective and Subjective Encounter

In conventional method and understanding, the benchmark of preparedness for the Sacramental encounter of Confirmation in Irish Church practice becomes, not the capacity to engage with the Easter story (and to appropriately relate that story), but rather the capacity to engage in an exercise of administrative and logistical precision. Thus, the proffering of legally recognised documentation in the form of baptismal certificates and State birth certificates is routinely acknowledged as a sufficient mark of readiness to be confirmed in one's faith. Beyond that, the level of connection with the Easter story, exemplified for instance by having had some reference to a worshipping community since the celebration of first Eucharist, is effectively regarded as not essential. In that light, 'the very act of physically coming to the sacrament is taken as evidence of the minimum faith required'.¹⁰⁶ In broader analysis, the factors to be addressed in this context represent a multifaceted alignment of sociological, cultural and ecclesial complexity, yet the premise

¹⁰² Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Sacramental Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 121.

¹⁰³ Cf. John O'Brien, *Seeds of a New Church*, 210.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Michael Drumm, *Passage To Pasch*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ John O'Brien, *Seeds of a New Church*, 211.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 15.

still holds: that such is the assumption in Ireland of admission to the Church and the sacraments, that questions regarding ‘disposition and commitment’ are essentially set aside to accommodate the ‘indifference and unresponsiveness’ of such cultural expectation.¹⁰⁷

That this situation exists names tensions pertaining between the principles of objectivity and subjectivity. It, further, opens itself to claims of an heretical preferencing of the esoteric theology of Gnosticism, or the egoist theology of Pelagianism, and against the established Catholic practice of the claims of *ex opere operato* relative to *ex opere operantis*. Within the parameters of that debate, however, and against the changed circumstances of the Irish context, Michael Drumm points to the ‘reasonableness’ of calls for a realignment of emphasis in the customary practice regarding sacramental initiation – that is, to allow for a greater stress to be placed on the subjective fruitfulness of the encounter, and less on its objective validity.¹⁰⁸ In that regard he is unequivocal: ‘the manner and context in which we actually perform the sacrament has a crucial bearing on its likely fruitfulness’.¹⁰⁹ This premise invites linkage to the initial experience in the telling of the Easter story, particularly in the context of naming the symbolic import of the 40 Days as paradigmatic of the manifestation of Easter encounter.

Thus, concisely, we recall that ‘the appearances prepare us for the sacramental presence of Christ’.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the recurrence of *ōphthē* in the context of the appearance narratives establishes core archetypal principles fundamental to the encounter in its sacramental form:¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Niall Coll ‘Catechesis’, 128.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Drumm, *Passage to Pasch*, 85. Those supporting a call to realignment include: Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, ‘Event In Honour Of Archbishop Desmond Tutu’, Trinity College, Dublin, 17th February 2009; Niall Coll ‘Catechesis’, 128; Joe Egan, ‘The Impact on Ministry of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture’, 18, 19; Owen O’Sullivan, ‘Is Ireland Heading for Islam?’, 605; Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 161.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 14.

¹¹⁰ Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 49.

¹¹¹ The most faithful translation from the Greek account that ‘he appeared’ (*ōphthē*) is to say that ‘he was made manifest’ (See, for example 1 Cor 15:5-8). Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 48. See further Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 218: Von Balthasar interprets it as an action of Divine initiative whereby ‘the bridge of knowledge has been thrown across the subject-object divide’.

- Central to the encounter with the Easter story is the experience that the presence of the Risen Lord is not to validate the (redundant) expectation of the other;¹¹²
- The celebration of sacramental ritual must clearly reflect that the Lordship of Jesus is not constructed from a recollection but experienced in the encounter;¹¹³
- The experience of sacramental ritual should not be entered upon on the basis that the presence of the risen Christ automatically bestows an *imprimatur* on the Church's approach to the encounter;¹¹⁴
- The practice of sacramental ritual should have at its core the importance of seeing in faith. Indeed, 'Christian initiation is meaningless without faith'.¹¹⁵

Pursuing the way forward, mandated by the pattern of encounter represented by the 40 Days,¹¹⁶ and interconnected with that experience by the 'axis of Christian faith', certain pathways of response are evident:

- The journey facing the Church in Ireland is, definitively, 'to manage an ascension'.¹¹⁷
- The task is to resist the temptation to cling to what once was.¹¹⁸
- The need is to receive the Spirit of the expression of Church we are in fact already living.¹¹⁹
- The mission is to embrace elements intrinsic of the call to ascension – transformation, adjustment, conversion, formation, choice.¹²⁰

¹¹² See Rowan Williams, *Resurrection*, 75: Cf. Section 4.4.1.1, *Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story* ('Redundant Expectation'), at 158. See also Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 34: Initiation must take place within the context of faith, 'otherwise the ritual becomes redundant'.

¹¹³ Cf. Section 4.4.1.2 *Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story* ('Call to Awareness'), at 159.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Section 4.4.1.3 *Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story* ('Encounter with a "Stranger"'), at 160.

¹¹⁵ Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 62. Cf. Section 4.4.1.4, *Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story* ('Oculata Fide'), at 161.

¹¹⁶ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

¹¹⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 143.

¹¹⁸ Referencing the experience of Mary of Magdala: Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father'.

¹¹⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 143.

¹²⁰ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 21; Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138; Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52, 53.

- The pathway is the embrace of the ‘new Pentecost’, which in the event of the Second Vatican Council, marks ‘a sure compass by which to take our bearings’.¹²¹

It is in that light that we move to consider one particular response to perceived difficulties in the telling of the Easter story.

7.3 **DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE** **Assessment and Formulation of the Confirmation Process**

7.3.1. **A Journey of Encounter**

In 2003 the Catholic Diocese of Rockville Centre in New York initiated an audit of its approach to the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The genesis of this assessment stemmed from concerns named throughout the diocese by those directly involved in the preparation of candidates for the Sacrament. Further, named against the paschal journey of 40 Day symbolism, the process undertaken by Rockville Centre offers perspective on the journey of Easter encounter, and as such, perspective on the re-telling of the Christian story ‘in an age when it is slipping from memory’.¹²² In that light, drawing from personal accounts and diocesan publications, we outline the evolution of the confirmation process in the Diocese against a reading of the pattern of encounter integral to the Easter story. Contextually, it will relate the development of this process in reference to the encounter named by an initial telling of the story – the journey to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). Drawing from that, we recall, in the first place, that *the prevailing mood of those Jesus appears to is one of despondency and disappointment*.¹²³

7.3.1.1 **Darkness**

‘They stopped, their faces downcast’ (v 17)

This sense of ‘despondency’ is named within the diocese in various experiences. It is named recurrently by a general feeling of unrest in presenting candidates for the

¹²¹ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57.

¹²² Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, (Dublin:Banley House, 2007), 130.

¹²³ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, (Pattern of Encounter) 51.

sacrament of confirmation – an unrest experienced and expressed by many involved in the formation process of the young people.¹²⁴ This experience was driven by a number of factors. Primary among these was a concern regarding the comprehension of catechetical content. Consistently, the consensus among Directors of Religious Education (DREs), present in each parish of the diocese, was of disconnection between the catechetical preparation undertaken by confirmation candidates and their capacity to assimilate this preparation in terms of faith formation and the telling of the Easter story.¹²⁵ A major catalyst driving this sense of disconnection was a disparity of mindset separating the vision of the DREs and that practiced by parents (and, by association, the candidates). The practice colloquially known as ‘parish shopping’ was widespread. This reflected the difficulties created by a mindset of convenience whereby parents, in choosing the place of Confirmation, are motivated more by the commitment of time and effort involved in sacramental preparation, and less by a commitment to ecclesial identity and belonging to a parish community. In that regard, the primary motivating factor for many parents was focused on the pathway of least restriction (‘the easiest way to get the sacrament’),¹²⁶ and the primary model of Church accentuating this approach was of confirmation as the graduation point from the Church.¹²⁷

Moreover, not infrequently the parents had no immediate contact with the ecclesial expression of faith. They did not attend Mass and did not facilitate a meaningful connection linking the catechetical preparation of their children with its presence in the home and family.¹²⁸ Not unrelated, candidates themselves, reflecting a disengagement from their baptismal journey, often demonstrated an irreverence regarding prayer liturgical experiences, and a misunderstanding regarding the value and meaning of service projects.¹²⁹ Essentially, they had no understanding of what encountering the

¹²⁴ Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, Diocese of Rockville Centre (DRVC).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Carol Tannehill, Director: Religious Education, Maria Regina Parish, Seaford, DRVC.

¹²⁷ Lee Hlavecek, Director of Religious Education, Curé of Ars Parish, Merrick, DRVC.

¹²⁸ Carol Tannehill, Director: Religious Education, Maria Regina Parish, Seaford, DRVC.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

sacrament of confirmation would expect of them.¹³⁰ This feeling of unrest among those proactively engaged with the confirmation process was collectively given expression in the darkness of frustration and powerlessness. As such, the experience was named by Directors of Religious Education in various ways.

Central to their deliberations was a frustration at what they perceived as the lack of accountability asked of parents regarding the preparedness and formation of their children as they presented them for confirmation. This was manifest in the fact that candidates who, in the DREs experience, were lacking in a readiness for confirmation proceeded unchallenged, as did their parents.¹³¹ Moreover, in such a case, where in the judgement of those involved in catechetical preparation a candidate was fundamentally unready to progress sacramentally in initiation, the option of appeal to a benchmark of diocesan standardisation of practice was not possible, for no such benchmarking existed.¹³² Further, the option of appeal even within the parish structure was undermined by the fact that the power of veto rested exclusively with the pastor (parish priest). This power, in the experience of the non-ordained involved in the preparation of candidates for confirmation, while primarily used in a pastoral context, at times reflected an egoistic approach whereby the pastor proceeded unilaterally and regardless of the position of others involved in catechetical preparation.¹³³

Against this background, the darkness aspect of the Easter journey regarding the encounter with the Sacrament of Confirmation in Rockville Centre Diocese was named accordingly: there was a sense of alienation for many within the diocese concerned with the catechetical and pastoral communication of the Easter story in the lives of the young people preparing for that encounter. Generically, it marked a sense of *despondency and disappointment* prompted by the prevailing model of sacramental initiation in the diocese – namely, a lack of a cohesive vision whereby each of the 133 parishes acted

¹³⁰ Fr Jim Mannion, Co-Author of the ‘pilot programme’ of Confirmation renewal in Rockville Centre Diocese.

¹³¹ Carol Tannehill, Director: Religious Education, Maria Regina Parish, Seaford, DRVC.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

independently and without reference to one another.¹³⁴ The upshot was that people were looking for clear direction and guidance from the Diocese on how to proceed regarding preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Consistent with the pattern of Easter encounter, it was out of this ‘darkness’ that *‘the initiative for the appearances comes from Jesus’*.¹³⁵

7.3.1.2 **Initiative** *Jesus himself came up and walked by their side (v 16)*

The concerns expressed were brought to the attention of the recently restructured Diocesan Office of Faith Formation.¹³⁶ In consultation with them, the sense of ‘darkness’ was ultimately named by the Bishop of the Diocese, William Murphy. It was his assessment that candidates presenting themselves for confirmation were often severely deficient in terms of the age appropriate knowledge required, to a significant degree did not practice their faith in terms of celebrating Eucharist, and were largely influenced by a cultural interpretation of confirmation which emphasised the ‘graduation’ model of sacramental initiation.¹³⁷ Stemming from this it was agreed to institute a ‘Confirmation Process’ in the diocese. A ‘Think Tank on the Challenges of Adolescent Catechesis in the Diocese of Rockville Centre’ was established.¹³⁸ The parameters of this forum sought to address the option of a comprehensive and pan-diocesan youth ministry programme.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52.

¹³⁶ This ‘re-structuring’ of the Office of Faith Formation, which occurred due to general dissatisfaction with the formation of children and youth, was itself identified as indicative of a Divine initiative. Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC.

¹³⁷ Mary Alice Piil, CSJ, Director of Faith Formation, Diocese of Rockville Centre.

¹³⁸ The Think Tank met over the period of ten months between February and November 2003. In addition to reflecting on the theology and rationale underpinning approaches to the sacrament of confirmation, members also addressed practical aspects issuing from any recommendation for a change in diocesan practice in the administration of the sacrament, including staffing and finance issues. Over the course of its deliberations members made use of some of the classic and more recently updated statements of the Vatican, and of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in addition to other organisations on the topics of adolescent catechesis and youth ministry. See ‘Final Report, Think Tank on “The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, March 2005”’. Cf. ‘Overall Task of the Think Tank’.

¹³⁹ Primarily it was mandated to explore a formal catechetical program for young people in grades 9-12 (age 14-17) to be instituted in a consistently equal manner in every parish in the diocese. This was to include the possibility of Confirmation at 9th grade at the earliest. See ‘Final Report, Think Tank on “The

From this the Bishop initiated a series of parochial, deanery and diocesan level meetings involving a wide cross-section of ministries and locations throughout the diocese. These ministries included catechists, presbyters, Catholic school principals, Confirmation coordinators, youth workers, and parents.¹⁴⁰

In terms of the pattern of Easter encounter, this development is itself identified as a sign of encounter with Divine initiative:

- Meetings were held where people began talking to one another in a new way, many seemed very open to further discussion regarding the issue of ‘readiness’ for the Sacrament of Confirmation.¹⁴¹
- Another indication that this initiative came from God is the fact that everyone involved with adolescent catechesis kept re-visiting the issue of Confirmation. [Again], other evidence that the initiative was from God is that this ‘stirring’ was not contained or restricted to one area or location on Long Island.¹⁴²

These meetings gave voice to the extent and level of frustration borne out of the concerns and needs expressed. They, further, facilitated the gathering, prioritising and exploration of options going forward. In this way elements began to emerge and coalesce into a viable and creative pastoral vision in terms of faith formation and sacramental initiation. These were configured accordingly:¹⁴³

Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis in the Diocese of Rockville Centre”’. Cf. ‘Overall Task of the Think Tank’.

¹⁴⁰ See ‘Final Report, Think Tank on “The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis in the Diocese of Rockville Centre”’, cf. ‘Members of the Think Tank’. Also serving as Think Tank members included the Vicar General for the diocese as well as staff members of the Offices of Catechesis, Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Worship, RCIA, Catholics of African Ancestry, Haitian-American Apostolate, Spanish Apostolate, faculty of the Diocesan Seminary, and a Consultant in Adolescent Catechesis from the Archdiocese of New York.

¹⁴¹ Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ From the Office of Faith Formation, Rockville Centre Diocese: *A Study of the Renewal of the Confirmation Process*, May 7, 2007. Cf. ‘A Vision of Faith Formation of Children/Youth’.

- Any discussion of Confirmation must be viewed within the broader context of a comprehensive ministry aimed at the development of the young Catholic in the faith;
- Formation of young people for Confirmation should include religious education, liturgical formation, and a component of community development (service module);
- Formation must include parents at all stages;
- Formation must be seen from the perspective of development. Ministers involved in the formation of children must have skills in childhood pedagogy, while those working with adolescents must be trained appropriately.

Drawing on these criteria Bishop Murphy progressed the discussion in terms of a candidates readiness to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. On that basis, further consultation focused initially on the area of catechetical knowledge and the desire for assessment in that regard.¹⁴⁴ However, aware that ‘the fully initiated Christian is not necessarily the fully mature Christian’,¹⁴⁵ the Office of Faith Formation looked rather to the RCIA model as a more developed and comprehensive measurement in terms of discerning the readiness of a candidate for initiation.¹⁴⁶ In that light, and from the reading of Church documents, the focus moved towards the necessity of a four-fold approach to formation: intellectual, spiritual, pastoral and human.¹⁴⁷ This in turn convinced the diocese to reference its assessment of faith formation through the lens of process.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ This consultation was with the Presbyteral Council, the Catechetical Leadership Board, and then a meeting of all pastors and catechetical leaders: Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC. Addressing the ‘Road to Emmaus’ template as indicative of the pattern of Easter encounter, the response addressed the question, ‘What are the elements of this journey?’

¹⁴⁵ See ‘Final Report, Think Tank on “The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis in the Diocese of Rockville Centre”’. Cf. ‘A New Model’. (*A Clear Theology and Rationale*).

¹⁴⁶ Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC. The RCIA model of initiation outlines that Candidates ‘after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as he Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God’s help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully: *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Again, this draws analogy with the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: it is Jesus who takes the initiative and enters into their world of darkness.

Appropriating the journey of the diocese against the pattern of Easter encounter, it has moved from the experience of darkness to the potential of initiative: As such, it looks forward to engagement with the third element in the pattern of encounter: *'There is some form of greeting from Jesus'*.¹⁴⁹

7.3.1.3

Shalom

What are all these things you are discussing? (v 17)

Through all the resurrection stories there runs the idea that those who saw Jesus did not recognise him (Lk 24:16, 37; Jn 20:25; Mk 16:11, 13, 14). This is exemplified *par excellence* in the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Interpreting this 'form of greeting' in that context – namely that Jesus is present, but unrecognised – and applying it to the confirmation restructuring journey in Rockville Centre Diocese, linkage to the initial experience of encounter is indicated:

- Failure to recognise Christ's presence manifests itself among candidates, families and, at times, even catechists. Our young people are unable to verbalise their faith or put their faith into practice.¹⁵⁰
- I think the main reason we don't recognise Christ's presence is that we don't teach from the vantage point of 'expectant faith'. Since no one expects anything to change or happen, we very often don't speak or teach as if God is in our midst.¹⁵¹

Again, reflecting the 'slowness to believe' of the two disciples (cf. Lk 24:25), and indeed that of Thomas (Jn 20:25), and the hesitant disciples (Mt 28:17), a degree of hesitancy regarding a new pathway became apparent among those participating in the confirmation preparation programme.¹⁵² This was generically expounded in the understanding that 'We've always done it this way'.¹⁵³ In that light, in line with the experience of the initial

¹⁴⁹ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52.

¹⁵⁰ Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Carol Tannehill, Director: Religious Education, Maria Regina Parish, Seaford, DRVC.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

40 Day encounter, the diocese entered upon the journey of formation in ‘identity and in mission’.¹⁵⁴ The context, recalling the Augustinian maxim regarding the search for the sacred,¹⁵⁵ confirmed that the Divine initiative was present already among them .

The template on which the diocese of Rockville Centre re-imagined its programme of Confirmation preparation had its origins in a parish of the diocese, St Frances de Chantel, Wantagh. It was there that the programme was developed initially as a parochial model of what was to evolve into a diocesan wide model. In that respect, Fr Jim Mannion, one of the authors of the original programme, unequivocally points to a pervasive inability to recognise the Risen Lord present within the journey to Confirmation as the fundamental reason behind both the creation and the structure of the process.¹⁵⁶ The initiative in the parish of St Frances stemmed from the cumulative effect of a number of factors. Primary among these was the fortuitous amalgam of personnel called to ministry within the parish. They collectively had a background in sacramental, catechetical and liturgical knowledge. The motivation for a refocused approach to confirmation preparation among this team, as well in the broader vocational community, was grounded in a deeply felt level of frustration at the incumbent practice of confirmation preparation. This model was seen as weak, juvenile, and disconnected from the broader context of ecclesial life – save the need of confirmation in order to be married.¹⁵⁷ From that the parish team realised the need for an alternative vision. Thus, identifying elements integral to this vision, new components were introduced into the journey of formation. These were prioritised by various needs:

- To bring to awareness the integral relationship linking the sacrament of confirmation with those of baptism and Eucharist.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, 12.

¹⁵⁵ *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* trans. Henry Chadwick, Book Ten, xxvii, ‘you were within and I was in the external world’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 201.

¹⁵⁶ Fr Jim Mannion, co-author of the ‘pilot programme’ of Confirmation renewal in Rockville Centre Diocese.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Further, in terms of the sociological and demographic context on Long Island, the celebration of confirmation was seen as the equivalence of (and ‘in competition with’) the celebration of Bar Mitzvah (*ibid.*).

- To formulate an integrative and cohesive model of preparation with reference to the full spectrum of sacramental initiation.
- To incorporate within the confirmation process a dimension of narrative theology to help represent to candidates that ‘this is why we believe what we believe’.¹⁵⁸

From that mandate they developed a parish based Confirmation preparation process.¹⁵⁹ Entitled *Living the Sacramental Commitment* it was envisioned as a two-year ‘journey’, and was designed to compliment a candidate’s classroom instruction. Each of the two years had a particular focus.¹⁶⁰ The first stage, named ‘Called to Witness’ addressed the wider schematic of Christian initiation. Thus, it reflected on the call of Baptism,¹⁶¹ the experience of Reconciliation,¹⁶² the sign of Eucharist.¹⁶³ It also encouraged awareness among candidates linking the Christian life with active participation in a service project.¹⁶⁴ It promoted the need for candidates to deepen their personal prayer life, and participation in the communal prayer services of the parish community.¹⁶⁵ It, further, introduced the role and the choice of a confirmation sponsor.¹⁶⁶ This stage also, prioritising the sacrament of Confirmation as not a private devotion but an event of the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ All (following) references to the content of this process are taken from *Living the Sacramental Commitment: Confirmation Preparation Process*, Unpublished Work 2004, Curé of Ars Parish, Merrick, New York (adapted with Permission from Unpublished Work 2000, St Frances de Chantel Parish, Wantagh, New York).

¹⁶⁰ It is a two year (stage) preparation process. The first stage is entitled ‘Called to Witness’ (CW); the second stage is entitled ‘Alive in our Faith’ (AF).

¹⁶¹ Cf. Project #1, #2 (CW). Candidates were required to write their own baptismal history, proactively engaging their parents and godparents in this. They also had to attend and reflect on a celebration of baptism.

¹⁶² Cf. Project #5 (CW). This included a scheduled night of prayer and reflection with candidates on the gift and responsibility of forgiveness, incorporating the opportunity to encounter the sacrament. It involved also a follow-up reflection on thoughts, impressions and comments about the evening.

¹⁶³ Cf. Project #7 (CW). Candidates, with the help of their parents, were required to write a personal reflection on the Gospel and homily for four Sunday Masses during the year – these being Mass during Advent, Christmas Mass, Mass during Lent, Easter Mass.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Project #6 (CW). This could be in the parish community (for example as an altar server, or in the children’s choir); it could be based in the local community (for example as a member of the Scouts, or School clubs); it could come from personal experience (for example helping an elderly neighbour with simple shopping needs).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Project #4 (CW). Candidates were required to attend and write a reflection on one of the following: Advent or Lent Evening Prayer, Holy Hour with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Stations of the Cross, Living Stations of the Cross.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Project #8 (CW). It named the requirements that must be met by a sponsor, and suggested characteristics important in the choosing of a sponsor – including local residency, and a willingness and capacity for the sponsor to enhance their own growth as a Catholic Christian adult.

wider parish community, facilitated the interview by candidates of a member of the parish pastoral team.¹⁶⁷

Upon completion of stage one of the Confirmation process candidates are offered admission to the second stage (year two). This stage, entitled 'Alive in our Faith', is grounded scripturally in the Gospel of John: 'God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).¹⁶⁸ The focus at this stage is more particularly the encounter with the Sacrament of Confirmation. It first addresses and finalises the choosing of a Confirmation sponsor. Candidates are asked to interview and submit for reflection their nomination as sponsor.¹⁶⁹ The process asks that 'a certificate of eligibility for Catholic Sponsors' be obtained from the Sponsor's parish. Also, the Sponsor is asked to write a personal 'letter of promise', accepting the responsibility of accompanying the candidate on their journey of faith. Moving to the choice of a Confirmation name the process offers some guidelines.¹⁷⁰ Again, drawing on the scriptural basis for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (Jn 5:13-16), and that of the separation of 'sheep from goats' (Mt 25:31-40), the parish reflects to candidates its mandate for the care of the sick.¹⁷¹ In that regard, the candidates are required to participate in, and write a reflection on, a public expression of the Church's care for the sick.¹⁷² Further, participation in the Confirmation retreat experience is seen as integral to the journey to encounter, as is a

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Project #9 (CW). The candidate could choose from a list of team members. Suggestions for the interview were provided (in addition to at least four questions thought up by the candidates independently): Ask how they became involved in their ministry; Ask what their ministry is all about; Find out what is exciting about their ministry; ask them about how they feel their ministry is a sign of their Confirmation. Furthermore, 'The pastoral team member may have a few questions to ask you during this time, so don't be surprised if they ask you a question or two!'

¹⁶⁸ From *Living the Sacramental Commitment*, Stage 2, 'Alive in our Faith' (AL).

¹⁶⁹ Cf. 'Project #2' (AL). Guidelines for the interview are suggested: How did you Sponsor feel when you asked him/her to be your Sponsor?; Was he/she aware of the reasons why you selected him/her to be your sponsor?; According to your Sponsor, what does he/she think is the most important part of being a Sponsor for Confirmation?; How does he/she see himself/herself fulfilling this role?; According to you Sponsor, what does it mean to live a good Catholic life?

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Project #3 (AL). The candidate may want to choose the name of a saint who reflects the type of Christian they wish to be; alternatively, having reflected on the meaning and witness of others who shared the name, they may want to recommit themselves to their baptismal name (emphasising in Confirmation the completion of the baptismal experience).

¹⁷¹ Cf. Project #4 (AL).

¹⁷² Cf. Project #4 (AL). Either at a celebration of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, or by visiting someone who is sick and praying with and for them.

reflection on that experience.¹⁷³ It is required of all confirmation candidates in Stage 2 to experience the Stations of the Cross. In that regard, they are asked to consider the experience in terms of its affective and catechetical capacity.¹⁷⁴

Naming as ‘the grace of the Holy Spirit manifested to us in the Sacrament of Confirmation’, the parish journey to that encounter addresses the giving of gifts and talents in that encounter.¹⁷⁵ Asking candidates to list, with the help of their parents and Sponsor, gifts and skills in their possession, the catechesis outlines that these gifts are given for the building up of the Church.¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, candidates are required to identify and proactively engage in the use of their gifts for that purpose, and, on completion of the related project, present a written reflection on it.¹⁷⁷ Again, putting emphasis on the *Koinōnia* of Eucharist, candidates are (as in Stage 1) required to reflect very particularly on the celebration of Sunday Mass.¹⁷⁸ Finally, on completion of the required journey in preparation for Confirmation, each candidate is to write to their pastor:

Write your reasons for requesting the Sacrament. Talk about your service project and indicate to the Pastor why you believe that prayer, attending Mass each Sunday and Christian service is a necessary and vital part of being a confirmed Catholic. Write about your Confirmation name and why you chose it.¹⁷⁹

Witnessed (with their signatures) by the candidates parents and sponsor, the letter of request is presented to the ‘Pastor and the parish community’ during a weekend celebration of Eucharist.

¹⁷³ Cf. Project #5 (AL). The parish asks of the candidate to consider, as a result of the retreat, what they discovered about Jesus, the Catholic faith and about themselves

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Project #6 (AL).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Project #7 (AL).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Project #7 (AL). It, further, offers guidance on the naming of these gifts and how they might be fruitfully used.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Project #7 (AL). Naming in that regard the skills and talents they used and shared, and how the project brought them closer to God.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Project #8 (AL). Candidates, with the help of their parents, are required to write a personal reflection on the Gospel and homily for three Sunday Masses during the year – these being a Mass of Ordinary Time, Mass for Ash Wednesday, and one of the celebrations of the Easter Triduum.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Project #8 (AL). Outline of the letter to the Pastor requesting the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Within the parameters of the journey to Easter encounter, named by the assessment of its Confirmation process, we benchmark this development of sacramental initiative at parochial level against its interpretation in the diocesan context. Consistent with the pattern of encounter symbolised by the 40 Day template, it measures this interpretation accordingly: *'A moment of recognition follows'*,¹⁸⁰

7.3.1.4 **Recognition**

Their eyes were opened (v 31)

Fr Jim Mannion, co-author of the process *Living the Sacramental Commitment*, assesses the chronology of its implementation. Reflecting that the process met substantial resistance when first introduced,¹⁸¹ he applies a paschal dimension to its evolution in the mindset and understanding among all involved in its development.¹⁸² The process led generically to an awakening and a new way of sharing the Easter story – a sharing infused with the ‘richness’ of knowing the story, and underpinned by an ‘excitement’ and an ‘empowerment’ in the telling of the story.¹⁸³ As such, representing an epiphanal awakening consistent with the pattern of encounter, it recalls that the *shalom* of Jesus acts both to confirm his identity and facilitate the moment of recognition.¹⁸⁴ Accordingly, responding to the mandate to establish a common diocesan standard of formation of young people preparing for the celebration of Confirmation in Rockville Centre, the

¹⁸⁰ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52.

¹⁸¹ The initial approach of candidates was ‘they had to do it for confirmation’, which was itself unfair because ‘no one else is doing it’. The new process conflicted often with parental understanding around the marking of Confirmation. They especially ‘hated’ the expectation around Mass attendance. Catechists too were wary of the process, sometimes influenced by the presence of new elements in the programme, and a felt lack of qualification regarding the teaching of aspects of subject content. This was a factor in the development and training of the ‘Master Catechist’ (Fr Jim Mannion, Co-Author of the ‘pilot programme’ of Confirmation renewal in DRVC). See also Office of Faith Formation (DRVC), correspondence to Confirmation Coordinators, April 2008: The role of the ‘Master Catechist’ is to oversee the presentation of particular challenging topics – including Social Justice; Christology; Catholic Morality (specifically sexuality, chastity, medical ethics, life issues).

¹⁸² By the end of the process catechists and parents experienced the journey as ‘a faith formation for them’. Sometimes both were surprised by the insights and questions of the candidates. A new ‘sense’ of understanding became apparent, demonstrated colloquially in such things as being more respectful in Church. (Fr Jim Mannion, Co-Author of the ‘pilot programme’ of Confirmation renewal in DRVC).

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 531.

initiative in St Frances Parish (and later in the Curé of Ars Parish, Merrick),¹⁸⁵ were ‘recognised’ as a *de facto* pilot programme for the diocese.¹⁸⁶ In that light, interpreted as a viable and effective programme, it was adopted throughout the diocese as the template driving the assessment and renewal of its Confirmation Process.

Further consultation at parochial, deanery and administrative level across Rockville Centre established a substantial degree of consensus on the pathway forward.¹⁸⁷ This facilitated the emergence and envisioning of various aspects relative to a new approach to the Confirmation process, and ultimately their incorporation within a reconfigured methodology in that regard. Accordingly, drawing on the originating template, and in conference with those directly involved with that initiative in the broader context, the diocese was in a position to implement its renewed Confirmation process in the Autumn of 2008. Elements integral to this renewed pathway to sacramental initiation are established.

Central to the initiative is the structuring of an integrated diocesan approach in the preparation for the sacramental encounter of Confirmation. Again, critically, within this is fixed the flexibility for each parish to prioritise its needs. In that context, the process names areas of commonality intrinsic to the Confirmation journey. These include:

- A basic standard for entry into the Confirmation Process. It necessitates an assessment on the preparedness of the young person to enter the process. Where this is considered as weak ‘some type of remediation should be offered by the parish’.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Following the transfer of critical personnel from St Frances Parish to the Curé of Ars Parish, the process was established, with adaptations, in the latter (Fr Jim Mannion, Co-Author of the ‘pilot programme’ of Confirmation renewal in DRVC).

¹⁸⁶ Mary Alice Piil, CSJ, Director of Faith Formation, DRVC.

¹⁸⁷ From the Office of Faith Formation, Rockville Centre Diocese: *A Study of the Renewal of the Confirmation Process*, May 7, 2007. Cf. ‘Proposed Confirmation Program’.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Basics for Entry into the Confirmation Process’, issued by Office of Faith Formation (Rockville Centre Diocese) to Confirmation Coordinators, April 2008. The ‘Basics’ that are expected of prospective candidates include: How to make the sign of the cross; the Our Father; the Hail Mary; the Act of Contrition; What does it mean to ‘pray’?; the Seven Sacraments; Who is Jesus?; What do Catholics believe regarding Eucharist?; Why do we believe as Catholics, that weekly Mass attendance is important? The

- Preparation as a parish-based process normally proceeding over a two-year period.¹⁸⁹ Identifying ‘Essential Components of Catechetical Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation’, the process will include modules on Catechesis, Formation in the Life of the Community, Discipleship and Service.¹⁹⁰ Over the two years the young person will engage in a course of academic study, spiritual formation, and moral formation appropriate to a Catholic adolescent. This will involve the practice of small and large group learning, and will include liturgical experiences and retreats. The process will also include a service and stewardship component.¹⁹¹
- Parental involvement is central to the process. This confirms the belief that parents are the first to form their children in the faith, in addition to supporting the faith development of the ‘domestic church’ in the family home. In that light, at various times over the two years parents are encouraged to share in the experiences of the young person. They initially, at a parish ritual, present the young person into the Confirmation process.¹⁹² Parents are invited to join with their child for aspects of the module on Catholic morality (this increases awareness and allows for discussion at home). Parents, and family, are invited to structured prayer services such as the sacramental encounter with reconciliation (this acts as a means of evangelisation and grace for all involved).

assessment will also address the area of Mass attendance and the understanding of social concerns, (‘Model Confirmation Process’, *ibid*).

¹⁸⁹ See Diocese of Rockville Centre, ‘Catechetical Guidelines for Confirmation Preparation’, February 9, 2005.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*. The process outlines the content of each module. On Catechesis: *Evangelisation, Faith and Morals, The Sacraments, Christian Sexuality, Lifelong Learning*; On Formation in the Life of the Community: *Liturgy and Prayer, Spiritual Formation, Family and Sponsors*; On Discipleship and Service: *Discipleship, Christian Service, Vocations, Social Justice, Respect Life, Stewardship*.

¹⁹¹ ‘Model Confirmation Process’, issued by Office of Faith Formation (Rockville Centre Diocese) to Confirmation Coordinators, April 2008.

¹⁹² This ritual also acts as an informational evening for parents. At this time the parish elucidates for parents what the Confirmation Process would entail if a child is ‘not ready’ to be confirmed. In that context it outlines an alternate process, established to assure parents that the parish is committed to journeying with these young people if there is a need to ‘delay’. Cf. ‘Parent Involvement During the Confirmation Process’. See also ‘Alternate Models for Confirmation Preparation’, issued by Office of Faith Formation (Rockville Centre Diocese) to Confirmation Coordinators, April 2008.

- Emphasising the role and involvement of the sponsor. This includes recognising the Sponsor at a specially commissioned prayer service (which, again, acts as a means of evangelisation, and as an informational exercise for the Sponsor).
- A Confirmation Readiness Interview. This second assessment will take place several months prior to Confirmation to determine if candidates are sufficiently prepared. Testing would consist of formal interviews by lay people prepared for such. The content of the interview, based on ‘Essential Components of Catechetical Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation’,¹⁹³ will come from the ‘Confirmation Readiness Interview’ issued by the Diocese.¹⁹⁴

The renewed Confirmation process involves, further, training for catechetical leaders and ‘Master Catechists’, in addition to the distribution to parents and Candidates of a DVD from the Diocesan Bishop (William Murphy).¹⁹⁵ This DVD seeks to outline the rationale underpinning the new approach to sacramental initiation, as well as an exposition of the methodology employed in its implementation. It is in the light of this restructuring of its approach to sacramental encounter that the objectives of the Confirmation process are benchmarked:

¹⁹³ See Diocese of Rockville Centre, ‘Catechetical Guidelines for Confirmation Preparation’, February 9, 2005.

¹⁹⁴ See Diocese of Rockville Centre, ‘Confirmation Readiness Interview’, sample readiness interview #3, February 15, 2008. It addresses the three primary components of the Confirmation Process: 1. Catechesis (*Evangelisation, Faith & Morals, The Sacraments, Christian Sexuality, Lifelong Learning*); 2. Formation in the Life of the Community (*Liturgy & Prayer, Spiritual Formation*); 3. Discipleship and Service (*Stewardship, Discipleship, Christian Service, Vocations, Social Justice, Respect Life*). In the context of the prioritising of these three components see also Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 25: ‘The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable’.

¹⁹⁵ This DVD outlines the reasons behind the Confirmation Process, as well as the expectations attached to it. It also, in a sense, ‘validated’, the renewal undertaken by the diocese: ‘our Bishop’s creation of a DVD explaining and inviting parents into understanding the Confirmation Process, gave our approach more solid ground upon which to stand’ (Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC). Available also to view at <http://www.drvc-faith.org/confPrepGuidelines.html> [accessed March 2011].

The goals of the Confirmation process are that all *Confirmandi* be able to understand, appreciate and articulate the basic doctrines of the Catholic faith and the principles of personal and social morality, and ultimately to make a commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church and a Catholic Christian way of life.¹⁹⁶

Again, drawing analogy with the 40 Days template as a time of formation, the diocese recognises that if change of the magnitude named by the renewed Confirmation journey is to bear fruit, a significant and long-term orientation and education (or re-education) process would need to be initiated.¹⁹⁷ Participation in this is mandatory for ‘all pastoral, catechetical and educational leaders of the diocese, without exception, as well as parents’.¹⁹⁸ In that context, influenced by the pattern of Easter encounter, the assessment by Rockville Centre Diocese of its method of Confirmation initiation anticipates engagement with that pattern. Consistent with the concluding ‘word of command from Jesus’ (Mt 28:10; Jn 20:21; Jn 21:15-19; Mt 28:19),¹⁹⁹ the final element of resurrection encounter revelation is seen as *a form of missioning from Jesus*.²⁰⁰

7.3.1.5

Mission

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem (v 33)

The apologetic and affective reflection on recognising the encounter with the Risen Lord – ‘did not our hearts burn within us’ (Lk 24:32) – encapsulates the foundational paradox of Christian experience: the transformation of perceived failure into the freedom of certain victory. Moreover, grounded in an awareness of that victory, the Christian is empowered (like the two disciples) to continually recommit to the journey of Christian faith, to set out and return to Jerusalem (cf. Lk 24:35). Accordingly, consistent with that call to mission, and applying it to the experience of sacramental renewal in Rockville Centre Diocese, the rationale of precedence points to an expectation of this call being indicated in some form. The evidence suggests a positive engagement with that premise.

¹⁹⁶ See Diocese of Rockville Centre, ‘Catechetical Guidelines for Confirmation Preparation’, February 9, 2005.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. ‘Final Report, Think Tank on “The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis in the Diocese of Rockville Centre”’. Cf. ‘Structures of Participation’. (*Education and Formation*).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 52.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

At the very least the renewal was understood in terms of the seed that fell on receptive soil (cf. Mt 13:4-9). Accordingly, the harvest may not be immediate but those involved with the process will remember the Church in a very positive light.²⁰¹ On a more practical level some of the young people became involved in social outreach groups such as the ‘Young Vincentians’. Moreover, the *modus operandi* of the Confirmation process, essentially viewing candidates as ‘apprentices’ in Christian faith, allowing them the opportunity ‘to learn, to live, and to listen as disciples’, acted indirectly as a form of mission – that of facilitating the opportunity for parents to re-visit their faith journey.²⁰² Experienced essentially as a form of evangelisation this bore fruit in the witness of parents coming to encounter the sacrament of reconciliation after many years away from it.²⁰³

Again, a corollary of the renewal of the confirmation process was the assessment and reconstitution of the whole spectrum of youth ministry and Christian formation in the diocese. This evolved into a more holistic vision of catechetical development such that the journey of Christian initiation, including sacramental initiation, is presented uniformly in terms of ‘a seamless garment’.²⁰⁴ It is envisaged that this will facilitate the formation of disciples ‘from this new generation of young people that we are called to serve and to invite into the mission of the Church’.²⁰⁵

The reassessment of its Confirmation process also raised the profile of the concept of ‘mission’ in the diocese, to the extent that the emphasis on mission is ‘first and foremost one that the leadership is addressing’.²⁰⁶ In that context, the diocese is exploring new questions that have been raised by the journey of renewal. These include the substance and relevancy of the preparation undertaken by catechists, the curriculum being followed by Candidates, and the nature of the engagement with parents. Concisely, ‘before we even look to the notion of mission as sending forth the *Confirmandi*, this process is

²⁰¹ Fr Jim Mannion, Co-Author of the ‘pilot programme’ of Confirmation renewal in DRVC.

²⁰² Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC.

²⁰³ Fr Jim Mannion, Co-Author of the ‘pilot programme’ of Confirmation renewal in DRVC.

²⁰⁴ Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

raising new awareness to the way we perform the Catechetical ministry at all age levels'.²⁰⁷

Furthermore, the vision driving the process of renewal in terms of the sacramental encounter of Confirmation is underscored by reference to the teaching of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, as enunciated particularly in *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (1997).²⁰⁸ This document, outlining a comprehensive framework for the pastoral engagement with Catholic adolescents, establishes three interdependent goals as the mark of that ministry:

1. To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today;
2. To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and the work of the Catholic faith community;
3. To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

Significantly, these 'goals' are central to the 'mission of the Church' envisioned in the renewal process initiated by Rockville Centre Diocese.²⁰⁹ This is an essential factor in the triadic structuring of the renewed process in terms of catechesis, liturgy, and service. In that light, the grounding hope is that candidates will be empowered to live the journey of faith in an ever-deepening way. That is, critical in terms of the originating commission (to give witness to the Christian Narrative),²¹⁰ the hope is,

They will be well-formed disciples that can articulate the mission of the Church in our diocese and in the global community, and live in such a way that will give witness to the Easter story for a world in need of transformation.²¹¹

In this it draws inspiration from the counsel of Pope John Paul II – namely that it is not 'a matter of inventing a new programme'.²¹² Thus, in the context of suffusing the Emmaus

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ See especially <http://www.usccb.org/laity/youth/renewingpart2.shtml> [accessed March 2011].

²⁰⁹ Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC.

²¹⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, Mass at Nationals Park, Washington, 17 April 2008. Benedict holds that the Church, 'in every age', is impelled by the Spirit of Pentecost 'to continue to witness to the greatest story ever told'.

²¹¹ Marguerite Goglia, Associate Director, Children and Youth Formation, DRVC.

²¹² *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29: 'Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity ... This is a programme which does not

encounter (Lk 24:13-35) with the encounter of renewal undertaken by Rockville Centre Diocese, it is quintessentially the telling of the Easter story:

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then *they told their story* of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of the bread. (Lk 24:33-35)

7.4 ASSESSMENT

*The essential problem with Irish Catholicism is not that it is out of date but that it is neither understood by those who might gain from it, nor properly explained by those seeking to promote it.*²¹³

Archbishop Michael Neary, speaking on the future of the Irish Church, reflects on the difficulties attaching to the telling of the Easter story in the contemporary Irish context. It is, he holds, to identify with an ecclesial dimension of life in a society where such is marginalised, and where 'very often a caricature of faith is held up as faith itself'.²¹⁴ Again, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, hypothesising on the circumstances of Catholicism in the Ireland of 2030, holds that the point of departure is to question the extent to which Ireland is in fact Christian today.²¹⁵ Outlining that 'belief is not identical with Church affiliation', that it is 'not about numbers but about the quality of the faith relationship', he maintains that such faith is not to be found in 'a vague cultural spirituality'. Rather, we have to revolutionise our structures of faith formation:

The pastoral structures of the Church must be structured in such a way that the believer, young and old, knows that he or she belongs to a community which desires that they be free, responsible and fully human.²¹⁶

change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication'. This is named as a pivotal text in the renewal process undertaken by RVC Diocese (See 'Church Documents support having well formed young people as they approach the Sacrament of Confirmation', issued by Office of Faith Formation, Rockville Centre Diocese, to Confirmation Coordinators, April 2008).

²¹³ John Waters, *Lapsed Agnostic*, (London: Continuum UK, 2008), 170

²¹⁴ Archbishop Michael Neary, 'Turning crisis into opportunity', in *The Irish Times*, May 12, 2008

²¹⁵ Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, 'Will Ireland Be Christian in 2030?' Patrick MacGill Summer School, 18th July 2005.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

It is in that context that we locate the (40 Day) mandate of the Church in Ireland – to tell the Easter story – against any learnings that may issue from the experience of renewal in Rockville Centre Diocese.²¹⁷ Drawing perspective from the realignment of priority within the journey to Confirmation in that diocese, indications relative to the contemporary circumstances of Irish Catholicism are evident. Thus, similar to the catalytic experience of ‘darkness’ *apropos* the call to renewal in Rockville Centre, there is in Ireland too a deeply felt presence of *despondency and disappointment*.²¹⁸ This is named repeatedly, consistently and universally in substantial levels of frustration attaching to apparently ineffectual attempts to communicate the Easter story.²¹⁹ To many it seems that the power of the Christian story to attract and to impact is diminished, and that the ability of the story to engage hearts and minds and spirits has lessened. Demonstrating an ability to read these signs of the times, various local initiatives have been attempted by way of response.

Thus, recent years have seen advances in the capacity of parishes to engage in sacramental preparation beyond the school environment. Central in this development has been the publication and dissemination of the first Eucharist preparation resource *Do This in Memory*. The programme is designed specifically to facilitate the meaningful involvement of the home and the wider parish community in the preparation of candidates for First Penance and First Communion. Correlatively, it acts also to offset the

²¹⁷ This is not intended to analyse the merit or demerit of the approach of that diocese, nor to attach any measure of success (or otherwise) in that regard. Neither is it an effort to develop a model or template that can be applied generically to a restructuring of approaches to sacramental encounter. The purpose is singularly focused: it seeks to explore the potential of constructing, from the renewal of the Confirmation process in Rockville Centre Diocese, an analogy to the telling of the Easter Story as symbolised by the 40 Days encounter, and to apply it to the Irish context.

²¹⁸ Cf. the pattern of Easter encounter in Dermot A. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

²¹⁹ This sense of *despondency and disappointment*, evidenced in a diminished capacity to communicate the Easter story, is seen as central in the construct of the 40 Days, and by extension, therefore, in the rationale underpinning this thesis. We recall that the paschal dimension of the 40 Days, demanding the journey to ascension, compels a process of transformation within which we are given both new life and new spirit (Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138). The task, again, is to fashion a symbiosis between these elements of life and spirit, and so facilitate a recognition of the Lord in the encounter. It is, further, a task benchmarked by the universal manifestation of Easter faith: ‘They were filled with Joy’ (for example, Mt 28:8; Lk 24:32, 41, 52; Jn 20:20)! It is in this context that we apply a paschal reading to levels of *despondency and disappointment* attaching to the contemporary event of the Church in Ireland. Regarding the evidencing of apparently ineffectual attempts to communicate the Easter story in the modern Irish context see Appendix ‘E’, 352.

practice of effectively abdicating this responsibility to the teacher in the Catholic school. In that respect it has proven a popular and creative initiative among parents, priests and parish teams.²²⁰ Yet, although widely welcomed and utilised by parishes throughout Ireland, there exists within this an apparent contradiction.

Do This in Memory is unambiguously announced as a parish-based sacramental preparation programme. The concept is that the children of the parish, preparing to celebrate Holy Communion, gather with the wider parish community at the Sunday Eucharist once a month for catechesis. The conventional practice has been, however, to place emphasis in this regard, not on the children of the parish who are preparing for First Eucharist, but on the children of the parish schools who are similarly preparing. The corollary is that children of a parish who are attending school outside the parish are not included in their indigenous parish preparation, but undertake this preparation in another parish in the context of their school class. As such, in the colloquial and operative mindset, the primacy of school over parish is reinforced. Moreover, the irony relative to a specifically parish-based programme is not lost – that children who, with their families, make the commitment to cultivate their faith journey within their parish community each week, are removed from that community at the very time the parish is celebrating this exact faith commitment.

This indicates a narrow and limited interpretation of ‘parish’ based catechesis. A more authentic approach would be for candidates to attend catechesis based on their home parish, and not where they attend school.²²¹ Furthermore, and critical relative to the cultivation of baptismal identity, this should also be the criterion determining the place and time of sacramental initiation.²²² The alternative is the continued association of

²²⁰ Teachers too have benefited from the initiative. They have found it easier to teach the *Alive-O* programme (the Religious Education Programme in Irish primary schools) because of the children's familiarity with the church and the celebration of the Eucharist.

²²¹ Cf. Maeve Mahon and Martin Delaney, *Do This in Memory* 3, 11. This is consistent with the thinking of the authors of the Programme, who believe ‘that the greatest benefit will be obtained if the programme is used as designed.’

²²² In that regard, since 1991 three parishes of Bray, in the Archdiocese of Dublin, in conjunction with one another and local schools, have been developing a strongly parish based approach to sacramental initiation. Elements of their programme include: 1) The requirement for the candidates for first Eucharist and confirmation to attend catechesis in their parish. Catechists are drawn from the local community, usually

sacramental encounter with the school curriculum, the attending association of First Eucharist and Confirmation as satisfying the need to mark cultural rites of passage, and the *de facto* cultivation of a disconnect in the telling of the Easter story. In that light, given the symbiotic relationship in Ireland associating sacramental initiation with the school environment, a transformation in mindset and practice of Copernican dimensions is called for. This is not without precedence in the formation of Christian identity – it is in fact the transformation rooted manifestly in the 40 Day experience and template.²²³ Accordingly, it is the transformation asked of the Church in Ireland as it seeks to claim the spirit of the new life it is in fact already living.

It is in that context that reference to the paschal journey outlined by the renewal process in Rockville Centre Diocese may offer perspective. Consistent with the pattern of Easter encounter they engaged in the pursuit of the spirit for the new life immediate to their experience. From that they came to name new elements in their telling of the Easter story – particularly the implementation of an integrated, cohesive and pan-diocesan approach to sacramental initiation. In the Irish context this may indicate that the capacity to look at alternative approaches to sacramental preparation offers potential for greater affiliation between it and the telling of the Easter story. The prudent way might be to seek counsel from the first teller of the story, the *apostola apostolorum*. ‘Mary Magdala’s Easter Prayer’ is a poem by Ronald Rolheiser. It interprets the paschal dimension of the 40 Days through the prism of her experience. Naming the ‘painful’ realisation of resurrection Mary Magdala reflects:²²⁴

from the parents of those preparing for the sacrament. Having undergone the required preparation they work in liaison with home, parish and school in an effort to bring to candidates a more holistic experience and understanding of the sacramental encounter; 2) The ritual of first Eucharist takes place among the parish community on the Sunday’s of May. Given the emphasis on Parish based celebration, candidates attend Mass on these days with their family, not their class, at their chosen place of worship, not the geographical location of their school. Furthermore, all candidates for first Eucharist, and Confirmation, dress uniformly. Drawing from Christian tradition they wear the white alb designating their dignity as believers.

²²³ See Dermot Lane, *Christ at the Centre*, 86.

²²⁴ From Ronald Rolheiser, ‘Mary Magdala’s Easter Prayer’, in *Forgotten Among the Lilies*, 176.

*I never suspected
 Resurrection, and to be so painful
 to leave me weeping*

*With joy
 to have met you, alive and smiling, outside an empty tomb*

*With regret
 not because I've lost you
 but because I've lost you in how I had you –
 in understandable, touchable, kissable, clingable flesh
 not as fully Lord, but as graspably human.*

*I want to cling, despite your protest
 cling to your body
 cling to your, and my, clingable humanity
 cling to what we had, our past.*

*But I know that ... if I cling
 you cannot ascend and
 I will be left clinging to your former self
 ... unable to receive your present Spirit.*

This is the journey. Yet, at a time when the Church in Ireland is in transition to a new and a different form of presence in Irish society,²²⁵ the paradox is named prophetically by Timothy Radcliffe – namely, that the birth of the Church community happens when the community is breaking up. He reflects that it was at the Last Supper, when Christ Jesus gave his body and blood as the new covenant, that the Church ‘lost any story to tell about the future’.²²⁶ Furthermore, in that regard, and addressing the circumstances of the contemporary event of Irish Catholicism, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor is unequivocal: ‘This is the story that is never broken because, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we discover that it is not our story but the one we have been given’.²²⁷

²²⁵ Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, *Event In Honour Of Archbishop Desmond Tutu*, Trinity College, Dublin, 17th February 2009

²²⁶ Timothy Radcliffe, ‘The future of the Church’, in *Priests and People* (August 2004).

²²⁷ ‘Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor addresses Ireland's Priests’, delivered June 15, 2010 at the Maynooth Union celebrations to mark the end of the Year for Priests. Accessed March 2011 at <http://www.zenit.org/rssenglish-29853>

Chapter VIII

The Call to Paschal Imagination

8.1 DARKNESS

*I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.¹*

The precise levels of disconnect between the proclamation of the Easter story by the Catholic Church in Ireland at the conclusion of the first decade of the new millennium, and the competence of that proclamation to engage the lives of its hearers, is open to debate. The fact, however, that a disconnect exists cannot, based on the evidence, be credibly challenged.² We have reflected that, whatever other circumstances apply, the dominance and influence, and capacity to engage hearts and minds, exercised by the Church in previous generations has been largely deconstructed. Further, we recall that Micheál Mac Gréil, applying a sociological and ecclesiological perspective to this deconstruction, identifies the scale of the challenge facing the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland in its mission to construct a response. It is, definitively, the task of finding a language capable of engaging with 'the challenge of indifference', and, concomitantly, the initiation of 'a religious revival' in Ireland.³ Relative to the context of the 'new and serious challenges to the faith' concurrent with this task,⁴ it recalls that fundamental in the contemporary telling of the Easter story in Ireland is to accurately assess the point of departure.⁵

In that light, it is seen that, in these embryonic years of the third millennium, the Church in Ireland is in a place of darkness.⁶ We have addressed an amalgam of factors which have engendered an unprecedented level of crisis, both within Irish ecclesial

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day', in Walford Davies (ed), *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Poems*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1979), 99.

² See, for instance, Section 7.1, text referenced by footnotes 22-27, (pp 285-286).

³ Micheál Mac Gréil, *The Challenge of Indifference: A Need for Religious Revival in Ireland* (National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2009).

⁴ Benedict XVI, Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland, 19 March 2010 (4).

⁵ See Section 7.1.1, 'The Point of Departure' at 288.

⁶ Enda McDonagh, *Faith in Fragments*, 10-11, and 7-17 *passim*. It is the darkness of the church, and it is the darkness of God. It is 'faith in a wintery time'. Cf. Section 4.2.2, 'Death and New Life', at 132.

life and in terms of its relationship to the broader Irish context.⁷ The cumulative effect of an incessant eradication of the status and position of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland has been unrelenting in its intensity, and unprecedented in its outcome. As such, the demise of the Catholic Church in Ireland has been widely proclaimed, and, in places, acclaimed. The darkness within the Church is manifest in a palpable fusion of disillusionment, fear, anger, hurt, betrayal and confusion.⁸ This marks its place of crucifixion. It marks also, in terms of the claims of the paschal mystery, the point of departure as the Church in Ireland seeks to fulfil the mandate of the call to resurrected life, 'he saw and he believed' (Jn 20:9).

John Dalrymple reminds us that, from St Paul onwards, preachers have oriented towards the theme of dying in order to rise again.⁹ Reflecting this, Joseph Ratzinger names the death of Jesus on Good Friday as 'an act of prayer'.¹⁰ Thus,

Death which by its nature is the end, the destruction of every relationship, is by him transformed into an act of communication of himself; and this is the salvation of humankind, in that it signifies that love conquers death.¹¹

In this way, Easter is recognised as the divine response to the cross, and the divine interpretation of the cross.¹² It is

the encounter of God and the world, the triumphant breaking in of God to the world which would give him no room, yet now at the end can debar him from none whatsoever.¹³

⁷ These included the scandal and unrelenting magnitude of clerical child sexual abuse, and the response of the ecclesial authorities to this (Section 1.3.1, 'Scandal in the Church', 32-36); the revelation of systematic physical, emotional and sexual abuse of women and children in the care of Irish religious at various church-run institutions (Section 1.3.2, 'Institutional Scandal', 36-38); the influences advancing the 'Liberal Agenda' within the zeitgeist of contemporary Irish society (Section 1.3.4, Influences advancing the 'Liberal Agenda', 44-47).

⁸ Cf. Patsy McGarry, 'The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland', 43. This acts in contrast to acclamation within political and social circles of the post-Christian order in Irish Society.

⁹ John Dalrymple, *The Cross a Pasture* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1983), 89. We have referenced this in our naming of the emphasis that Paul places on the characteristically transforming nature of the resurrection: that what dies is perishable, weak, and mortal, and that what rises is imperishable, glorious, and immortal (1 Cor 15:42-43, 52-54).

¹⁰ Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI* (London: Burns & Oates, 2007), 146.

¹¹ J. Ratzinger, *Il cammino pasquale* (Milan 1985). Quoted in Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 146.

¹² Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 146.

¹³ J. Ratzinger, *Dogma and Verkündigung* (Regensburg 1973), 341. Cited in Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 146.

This is the context from which we recall our frame of reference in pursuing a theological reading of the events of contemporary Irish Catholicism, namely the need for it to be faith based.¹⁴ That is, the interpretation applied should consider speculation on the terminal demise of the Church as an inaccurate prognosis ‘for *Jesus is present, alive and at work in his Church*. He is in the Church and the Church is in him (cf. *Jn 15:1ff.*; *Gal 3:28*; *Eph 4:15-16*; *Acts 9:5*)’.¹⁵ Echoing this, Thomas Casey, interpreting the circumstances of contemporary Ireland reflects, notably, that ‘we find ourselves today in the midst of a darkness that is both paschal and purifying’.¹⁶ Ultimately the choice for the Church in responding is not between restlessness and restfulness, but between two kinds of restlessness:

*The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre -
To be redeemed from fire by fire.*¹⁷

The destiny of the Church in Ireland is to be consumed by one kind of fire or another, but the flames of each are very different – God’s flames or those of its own choosing. In that regard, Ronald Rolheiser, charting the way of Paschal journey, outlines as ‘darkness’ the circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus, and links it generically to the experience of ‘tasting the darkness of Good Friday’.¹⁸

As the Book of Lamentations says, all we can do is put our mouths to the dust and wait. Wait for what? Wait for darkness and death to have their hour, wait for the curtain of the temple to be torn from top to bottom, and the earth to shake, and the rocks to split open, and the graves to open and to show themselves to be empty.¹⁹

This is what we have referenced as ‘paschal death’ (as opposed to ‘terminal death’). It is that form of death which opens to us the pathway to a deeper and richer form of

¹⁴ Cf. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 115.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 22.

¹⁶ Thomas G. Casey, ‘Immigrants in their own land’, *The Tablet* (Irish Focus), 17th March 2007, 1-2 at 2. Casey draws precedence from the legend of the collapse of darkness brought about by St Patrick. According to the myth, it was around the year 433 that Saint Patrick lit the Easter fire on the hill of Slane. In so doing, he symbolically heralded the collapse of the darkness of paganism and ‘the blazing arrival of the liberating Good News of Christianity’.

¹⁷ T.S. Eliot, ‘Little Gidding (IV)’, from ‘Four Quartets’ in *The Complete Poems and Plays of TS Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1978 edition), 196.

¹⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, ‘Tasting The Darkness of Good Friday’, Column Archive, 20th March 2005. <http://www.ronrolheiser.com/columnarchive/?id=119> [accessed March 2011]

¹⁹ Ibid.

life.²⁰ It is that form of death intrinsic with the contemporary event of Irish ecclesial life – of the church undergoing crucifixion in order that it may rise again to a new place.²¹ As such, it establishes parameters in the context of this concluding chapter. Reflecting this, John O’Donohue speaks of death as an invitation to freedom. His imaging resonates with the embryonic moment of such freedom as named by the 40 Day encounter, ‘Do not cling to me’ (Jn20:17).

When you learn to let go of things, a greater generosity, openness and breath comes into your life. Imagine that multiplied a thousand times at the moment of your death. That release can bring you to a completely new divine belonging.²²

The pursuit of this new divine belonging has been the impetus driving this exploration of paschal journey in the contemporary event of Irish ecclesial life. Drawing from that, and offering assessment, a guiding principle is named by Pope John Paul II as a precondition accompanying the mandate to tell the Easter story to contemporary society – the need to first remake the Christian fabric of contemporary ecclesial life.²³ Drawing from that, two elements have emerged as intrinsic to this directive: the call to ecclesial renewal, and the call to re-image the encounter with the Easter story. In advance of addressing these elements there is value in restating the context by naming the story in terms of a ‘40 Day vignette’.

8.1.1 An issue of Choice

Naming the elements integral to a constructive engagement with that aspect of the paschal journey designated by the 40 Days, Ronald Rolheiser asks us to consider the case of a person on their seventieth birthday.²⁴ They realise that in the chronology of this life they are no longer considered a young person. Further, any attempts to manipulate this reality – for example by way of cosmetics, or plastic surgery, or adopting a particular mindset – only distracts from the reality, and is a trivial pursuit. This is because, at seventy, the person’s youth is dead. However, they are not dead.

²⁰ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138.

²¹ Anthony Philpot, ‘The Church will rise again’, *The Tablet*, 3rd October 1998, 1272-1274 at 1272.

²² John O’Donohue, *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World* (London: Bantam Press, 1997), 265.

²³ *Christifideles laici*, 34. Pope John Paul II outlines a precondition that accompanies this ecclesial work. He reflects that to imbue societies with a Christian spirit, ‘what is needed is to *first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself*’.

²⁴ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 140.

Rather, they are alive as a seventy year old, and with all that entails. They are alive, therefore, with a physical capacity more limited than in their youth, but with a life that is deeper in wisdom, more profound in understanding, and richer in journey. Accordingly, in terms of their status within the paschal cycle, for the person who is seventy, Good Friday has already occurred in that their youth has died. Yet, Easter, too, has occurred. The resurrection is present in the journey of the seventy-year-old in terms of the new life they have received – a life different from that of their youth but richer in virtue of their journey. It is therefore, inexorably, an issue of choice. Thus, rooted in an innate fear and sadness of the ageing process, they can refuse to embrace the new life they have received by continuing to focus defectively on a longing for the life of their youth. Alternatively, by engaging positively with the reality of their life journey, they are free to accept the new life that has been given them and allow it to bear fruit in their journey.

The choice is not without consequence. That is, if the focus remains solely on trying to hold on to the life of their youth, it is irrationally based because they are focusing on a reality that has passed. Moreover, they are refusing to embrace the reality that is present, and thereby refusing the life and opportunities afforded by this gift. This gift of new life is accessible only to those who engage with the circumstances that mark the reality of their journey, and embrace this reality as the present manifestation of life in their journey.

So it is we address elements critical to the remaking of the Christian fabric of contemporary Irish ecclesial life.

8.2 A PARADIGM SHIFT

8.2.1 A New Departure

Gerald Arbuckle holds that to speak of the vision of Vatican Council II as a call to ‘renewal’ is utterly inadequate in terms of the immensity of the challenge facing the Church.²⁵ Such a designation he believes is too ‘gentle’, and effectively deficient

²⁵ Gerald Arbuckle, *Refounding The Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993), 4, 22.

regarding what the Council truly envisions. Thus, fidelity to the Conciliar vision demands not a ‘refurbishing’ of existing pastoral strategies but, rather, the summons to ‘apostolic creativity of quantum-leap proportions’.²⁶ As such, reflecting the radical newness of life brought about by Christ and given witness by his followers,²⁷ the vision marks a call to ‘radically different and as yet *unimagined* ways to relate the Good News’.²⁸

In that light, we are reminded of a guiding principle of 40 Day encounter – that, definitively, ‘it is not just more of the same’. Reflecting this, there is an emerging consensus among Irish ecclesialogists regarding the critical need for the Church to engage proactively with the imagination and understanding of both its own membership and the culture within which it is present. Accordingly, the Church in Ireland is called to advance the conditions that facilitate and respond to the ‘revelation of the risen Christ’.²⁹ Commentators reflect substantial unanimity on the pathway forward.

Michael Paul Gallagher, addressing the extent of the challenge facing the Irish Church, points to its ‘wounded credibility’ as a debilitating influence in its attempts to engage constructively with the current milieu of Irish societal and cultural expression.³⁰ This is manifest in the rendering of the Church’s proclamation of its message as ‘both harder to voice and harder to hear’.³¹ Of greater import, however, is the sense that, even where a level of such engagement is facilitated, the substance and quality of discourse is often limited in vision and superficial in character. Debate is often underscored by an essentially structural and mechanistic agenda where energies are expended on thematically external issues such as the decline in church attendance

²⁶ Ibid, 22.

²⁷ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 7

²⁸ Gerald A Arbuckle, *Refounding The Church*, 22. [my italics]

²⁹ See Section 3.3.1, ‘The Impact of Encounter’, at 111.

³⁰ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘Religious Readings of our Culture’, in *Studies* 94/374 (2005), 141-150 at 148. Similarly, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, reflecting on the capacity of the Church in Ireland to present itself as a credible witness to the Gospel, draws analogy with the practice of receiving a gratuitous percentage mark for sitting an Irish State examination through the medium of Irish. In the case of the Church, however, and apropos its status within contemporary Irish society, he employs the analogy to demonstrate that the opposite applies – that the Church begins always with a substantial percentage of credibility deficit (Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin, Presentation and Dialogue on the Book of Mgr Luigi Giussani, *Beyond Optimism*, 9th January 2009 Available at [accessed March 2011] http://www.dublindiocese.ie/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1388&Itemid=372

³¹ Ibid.

or in numbers exploring vocationally the sacramental priesthood. Even where engagement on social changes within Irish society does occur, such as the ongoing relationship of the Church in the areas of health and education, their content ‘misses a crucial horizon’.³² That is, it tends to overlook or to circumvent what should be the primary concern for the Irish Church (and indeed Irish society) going forward – namely, the anthropological crisis, especially in the younger generation, emanating from a generic absence of anchorage and identity named by the ‘rapid loss of cultural roots in religion’.³³

Furthermore, given that this crisis is empowered by an inability to access positively one’s spiritual imagination,³⁴ the need is to move away from the predictable arguments around church externals and recognise in the context of the new pluralism in Ireland a new opportunity for dialogue. The challenge is to move the conversation toward ‘the hidden anthropological level of our spiritual imagination’³⁵ – issues of relationship, community, and the ultimate goals of life.³⁶ Recognising that this marks a new departure, and perhaps a more humbled position, for Irish Catholicism, Gallagher locates it against the chaos of the ‘faith darkness’ intrinsic in our reading of the 40 Days: ‘to live with religious faith means being called to a change of identity’.³⁷ It is a reading echoed in the observations of others.

Against a background of an evolving ‘marginalisation of Christian faith within modern Ireland’,³⁸ and therefore the urgent task of re-establishing the integration of the Easter story as credible to the intrinsic nature of human existence, Dermot Lane

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. Cf. also John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 9: This echoes the thinking of Pope John Paul II: He holds that ‘we are witnessing the emergence of a *new culture*, largely influenced by the mass media, whose content and character are often in conflict with the Gospel and the dignity of the human person. This culture is also marked by a widespread and growing *religious agnosticism*, connected to a more profound *moral and legal relativism* rooted in *confusion regarding the truth* about man as the basis of the inalienable rights of all human beings. At times the signs of a *weakening of hope* are evident in disturbing forms of what might be called a “*culture of death*” ’ [my italics].

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 149.

³⁶ See Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism*, 49 In that regard, Vincent Twomey warns against any sense of complacency or naïveté. Reflecting on the treatment by the Irish media of the discipline of theology as a valid component within the national debate, he recounts how it differs from that in other countries. The experience elsewhere, he holds, allows for theologians to promote viewpoints at variance with an established liberal consensus in an atmosphere that may be critical but is equally respectful. ‘The contrast with the situation in Ireland could not be more crass’.

³⁷ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘Religious Readings of our Culture’, 148.

³⁸ Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 168.

proposes a focused reconstruction of this story. In that regard, talking of the paschal mystery as ‘the centerpiece of Christian hope’,³⁹ and, moreover, ‘normative’ for disciples of Jesus in understanding the future,⁴⁰ he proposes a viable and constitutive presence of this Mystery, where ‘hope and history rhyme’,⁴¹ within the dialogue of shared human experience. As such, his premise is consistent with the elements named as integral to the process of refounding the Church in Ireland.⁴² That is, if the ‘chaos’ is referenced by the recasting of the Church’s position within Irish society, the alternative voice of ‘dissent’ is referenced in the call to a new religious imagination intrinsic to the tradition of Christianity.⁴³ Moreover, Lane specifies that this reconfiguration of the Irish ecclesial imagination demands a shift of paradigm proportions.⁴⁴

Neal Carlin, addressing the ‘New Life’ aligned to the call of collaborative discipleship, advocates a re-imagining of the concept of ministry in the Irish Church in terms of a ‘Paradigm shift’, defining this as ‘a fundamental break with preceding theological paradigms’.⁴⁵ We are reminded of his call for ‘a paradigm shift in the concept of priesthood’.⁴⁶ Outlining the feminist critique of ‘patriarchal religion’, Linda Hogan, calling for a reinterpretation of the dialectic intrinsic to collective religious experience, by ‘imaging an alternative religious consciousness’,⁴⁷ holds that this demands ‘no less than a paradigm shift’ in attitude and vision.⁴⁸

³⁹ Dermot Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive*, 69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 114.

⁴¹ See Seamus Heaney, *The Curé at Troy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 77.

⁴² Cf. Gerald A Arbuckle, *Refounding The Church*, 4: Pursuing the Conciliar vision as a call to a ‘refounding’ of the Church, Arbuckle names the elements necessary for refounding to emerge – namely, a degree of ‘chaos’, and the presence of ‘dissent’. He identifies chaos generically with the ‘pastoral problems’ ensuing from of a rapid cultural disintegration in peoples meaning systems. The dissenters he associates with the ‘persons who see and can make it happen’, the proposers of alternatives (*ibid*, 1). Their synergy is that chaos offers the potential, in the view of dissenters, for an ‘immense surge of faith-inspired evangelisation’ (*ibid*, 4).

⁴³ Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 169. Locating this call to a new religious imagination as intrinsic to the tradition of Christianity, and not alien to it, Lane traces its history within the journey of the Christian Church (*ibid*, 173) : thus it is present at the foundation of Christianity in the encounter between Jesus and Judaism; in the process of enculturation that took place in the second century in the movement from Jewish Christianity to Hellenistic Christianity; in the development of ‘the analogical imagination of the middle ages’; in the emergence of ‘the dialectical imagination at the time of the Reformation’.

⁴⁴ Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 169.

⁴⁵ Neal Carlin, ‘Ministry: No Clerical Preserve’, 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ Linda Hogan, ‘Occupying a Precarious Position: Women in Culture and Church in Ireland’, in Dermot Lane (ed.), *New Century New Society: Christian Perspectives*, 140-148 at 144.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 143.

This recurring emphasis on the claims of a ‘paradigm shift’ in reference to the contemporary circumstances of the Church in Ireland, reflects the primary task facing the Church in its embrace of the 40 Day template – to receive the Spirit of the expression of ecclesial life it is in fact already living. Collectively, and in conjunction with our naming of ‘new life’ present to the Irish Church,⁴⁹ the recurrence conspires to invoke a sense of converging probability regarding the (complex) assemblage of conditions by which the call to a paradigm shift can be identified, and justified – that is, ‘when a particular constellation of changes and values, beliefs and cultural shifts begins to coalesce into a new picture’.⁵⁰ Moreover, given that our deliberations have named the event of the Second Vatican Council, a ‘new Pentecost’ in the Church, as the ‘New Life’ *par excellence* present to the Irish Church, it is contextually significant that ‘with the coming of John XXIII a dramatic paradigm shift in the Church’s thinking begins’.⁵¹

An indication that this call to realignment might be gaining momentum within the Petrine dimension of the Church in Ireland is referenced in a response to the Pastoral Letter issued to Irish Catholics by Benedict XVI. Reflecting that Irish ecclesial life is ‘working out of a Church based on a society that no longer exists’,⁵² Bishop Joseph Duffy holds that the incumbent model of Church in Ireland is ‘crying out’ for reform. Moreover, in a reading integral to the application of the 40 Day template to the Irish Church, he is unambiguous in naming the presenting impediment in that regard – that Church leaders in Ireland have ‘not embraced the great reform that was brought about by Vatican II’.⁵³ In that light, echoing the experience of encounter marked by the 40 Days, he implicitly applies the call to conversion essential to the encounter by naming the need for a ‘radical’ restructuring of the Irish Church. Further, he outlines elements attaching to this need for reform:

⁴⁹ See, the ‘New Life’ named by the event of the Second Vatican Council as ‘A New Pentecost in the Church’ (Section 5.1.1, 165); the ‘New Life’ marked by ‘The Call to Collaborative Discipleship’ (Section 5.1.2, 171); the ‘New Life’ inherent in ‘The Search for the Sacred’ (Section 5.1.3, 184); the ‘New Life’ present in the concept of the Church as *Koinōnia* (Section 5.1.4, 192).

⁵⁰ Dermot Lane, ‘Faith’, 169.

⁵¹ Gerald A Arbuckle, *Refounding The Church*, 24.

⁵² Michael Kelly, ‘Irish Church is “Crying Out” for reform – Bishop’, in *The Irish Catholic*, March 25, 2010, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

We need to dramatically address whether we're fit for purpose. We've got far too many dioceses, far too many parishes, far too many Masses. We need to accept it with courage if structures are not working, our structures need reform.⁵⁴

It may be that this marks a shift in consciousness and method by the Irish Episcopal Conference, yet it remains undetermined whether the shift is of the Copernican or paradigmatic dimension required. The hesitancy relates, not to the need for structural reform of the Church in Ireland, but to an absence in Bishop Duffy's remarks concerning the need also for radical vocational reform – that is, the absence of any reference towards a more proactive (and 'radical') acknowledgement of the baptismal vocation shared by all in the Church.

Against that reading, the call to a Copernican-style realignment is significant also in naming a pathway for the Irish Church through its encounter with the 40 Days.

8.3 A PASCHAL IMAGINATION

Determined by the understanding that 'Christ and His act of founding are never over but always new',⁵⁵ and agreeing that this act of 'founding' relative to contemporary Irish Catholicism demands of it a shift in emphasis of paradigm proportions, the call to realignment outlines the defining characteristic underpinning this call to change – definitively, 'changes in the configuration of the human imagination'.⁵⁶ This finds resonance in the thinking of Karl Rahner, who believes the evolution of the Church demands a 'charismatically inspired, creative *imagination*'.⁵⁷ Again, exhorting the discovery of new pathways in the face of 'old maps' and 'faded geographies' that no longer offer much, John O'Donohue asserts that it is a time in the Irish Church for '*imaginative* responsibility and maturity: to allow something new and subversive to emerge'.⁵⁸ Similarly, canvassing the need to 'remake, re-create, *re-imagine* a new and very different Church', Brendan Hoban prophesises that 'unless we change radically

⁵⁴ Michael Kelly, 'Irish Church is "Crying Out" for reform – Bishop', 1.

⁵⁵ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 'The ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council', 4.

⁵⁶ Dermot Lane, 'Faith', 169.

⁵⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 47. [my italics]

⁵⁸ John O'Donohue, 'Before the Dawn I Begot You', in *The Furrow* 57/9 (2006), 462-473 at 467. [my italics]

the Irish Roman Catholic Church will just continue to die'.⁵⁹ Again, Vincent Twomey, sharing common ground with those advocating a refounding of paradigm dimensions in the method of being Church in Ireland, holds that it is not reason that is against us, but *imagination*.⁶⁰ He concludes that the response of the Irish Church to the chaos implicit in 'the void at the heart of society' must in the first place be 'at the level of the imagination'.⁶¹

In a similar vein, Ghislain Lafont grounds many of the problems in the Church today in 'our inability to imagine', a fact which, tellingly, explains 'the rather fruitless efforts to interpret rather woodenly the documents of Vatican II'.⁶² Further, locating the event of the Second Vatican Council as the response by the Church to 'the need for reform in the face of the tragic impasse of our time',⁶³ he outlines the immensity of the task regarding the implementation of these reforms:

If we rejoice humbly in the gifts of the Spirit which the Church has received and capitalized on, as rarely before in its history, the believer is still obliged to admit that very little of this vast wealth shines brightly on the world of our contemporaries.⁶⁴

Against that, rhetorically asking if something else is necessary apropos the effectiveness and efficacy of Conciliar reform, Lafont is unequivocal:

In spite of the advances made since Vatican II, I am convinced that something else is not functioning well in the Church's institutions. In a word, there is a certain need to 'imagine the Catholic Church today'.⁶⁵

Collectively, these arguments are consistent with what has emerged as indisputably and imperatively the task facing the Irish Church. It is the task demonstrated repeatedly in our reflections on the call for the Church to engage faithfully with the encounter symbolically named by the 40 Day paradigm. Thus, referencing the parameters of this engagement variously as the call to 'Claim your births',⁶⁶ to 'Adjust

⁵⁹ Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 86. [my italics]

⁶⁰ Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, 65.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church*. See John Burkhard, 'Translator's Preface', xix.

⁶³ Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church*, 32.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁶ See Section 5.1, 'Claim Your Births (New Life)', at 165.

to the new reality',⁶⁷ and to 'Manage an ascension',⁶⁸ it is evident that a single overarching avenue of engagement has presented as essential. This key element of 40 Day engagement is, fundamentally, the call to a new imagination – to a Paschal imagination.⁶⁹

This new imagination acts as the conduit by which the Church in Ireland accesses the new and prophetic interpretation of ecclesial expression being called to prominence at this time in her journey. It is this new imagination that enables the Church to see things as being other than they have been. As such, it is this new imagination which encourages proactive engagement with the call to a paradigm shift in Irish ecclesial life – a change already occurring in the experience of new ecclesial movements and lay associations.⁷⁰ It is this new imagination that empowers the Church to fulfil its specific mandate at this time – that 'acknowledging and claiming new life is the issue of choice at hand'.⁷¹ It is this new imagination that allows the freedom to pastorally challenge the 'indifference and unresponsiveness' of cultural expectation regarding the practice of sacramental initiation,⁷² and to reclaim from the secularist and consumerist altar the inherent sacredness of the ritual of sacramental encounter.⁷³ It is this new imagination that brings to awareness the understanding that prejudicial attachment to a juridicalist mindset acts as a practical denial of the grace of baptism, and is theologically unsupportable.⁷⁴

Not unrelated, it is this new imagination which names patriarchalism in the Church as an objective injustice, and not to be condoned.⁷⁵ Again, in that context, it is this new imagination that exposes 'Irish clerical paternalism, and Irish lay Catholic serfdom', historically endemic in the Irish Church, as anathema to the dignity of the Christian

⁶⁷ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 139. Cf. Section 3.1, 'A Theological Reading – Introduction', at 78.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 143. Cf. Section 3.3.5, 'Introducing the Irish Context', at 119.

⁶⁹ For an outline of occurrences on this call to a 'new imagination' named throughout these reflections see Appendix 'F', 'The call to a 'new imagination'', 353.

⁷⁰ Cf. John O'Brien, *Seeds of a New Church*, 138.

⁷¹ See Section 3.1, 'A Theological reading – Introduction', at 79.

⁷² See Section 4.4, 'Sacramental Encounter', at 152. Also, Niall Coll 'Catechesis', 128.

⁷³ See Section 4.4.1, 'Appraisal – Retelling the Easter Story', at 157.

⁷⁴ Cf. Section, 4.3.2, 'Vocation', at 140: Further, Benedict XVI advises that lay people 'must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy but truly recognised as "co-responsible", for the Church's being and action' (*ibid.*, 143). Also, John O'Brien, *Seeds of a New Church*, 33.

⁷⁵ See Section, 4.3.3, 'One Priesthood', at 144-146.

vocation.⁷⁶ Accordingly, it is this new imagination that helps refute the idea of a ‘vocations’ crisis, and see instead ‘a crisis of ideas and imagination’.⁷⁷ Definitively, responding to the call to ‘ecclesial maturity’, named by the ‘co-essential’ unity and collaboration of the Petrine and Marian dimension of Church, it is this new imagination that, in the darkness of chaos, allows the light of the Lord Jesus, as ‘principled dissenter’ to enter:

One sees how *our ecclesial communities* are struggling with weaknesses, weariness and divisions. They too need to hear anew the voice of the Bridegroom, who invites them to conversion, spurs them on to bold new undertakings and calls forth their commitment to the great task of the “new evangelization”.⁷⁸

8.3.1 For forty days he had continued to appear to them

Furthermore, consistent with the ‘axis of Christian faith’, this call to a ‘new imagination’ draws comparison with the initial experience of 40 Day encounter. That is, it inspires belief that Jesus, who had entered into the grief of Mary of Magdala (Jn 11-18), and into the fear of the disciples (Jn 19-23), and into the doubt of Thomas (Jn 24-29) – effecting in each instance what is established as a ‘pattern of encounter’⁷⁹ – will enter into the chaotic darkness of the Church in Ireland. Addressing specifically this claim of paschal imagination in terms of fidelity to the task of the 40 Days template, Ronald Rolheiser is unequivocal:

So much of the frustration and stagnation in Christian circles today stems from a failure of imagination. To let ourselves be led by God through changing times requires on our part, a great imagination.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Cf. Seán O’Conaill, ‘We need an end of Irish Catholic serfdom’, in *Reality* 75/1 (2010), 22-24 at 24. See also Section 4.3.3.2, ‘Customer and Shopkeeper’, at 148-151 *passim*.

⁷⁷ See Section 5.1.2.2, ‘Ministry’, at 176 (regarding ‘a crisis in vocations’). Also, John Littleton, ‘Being a Catholic in Ireland Today’, 21 (regarding ‘a crisis of ideas and imagination’).

⁷⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa* 23. Cf. Gerald A Arbuckle, *Refounding The Church*, 7: Rejecting a colloquial understanding of dissenter, in ecclesial terms, as the purveyor of disrespect or, indeed, repudiator of authority structures in the Church, Arbuckle instead defines them in terms of those gifted with ‘pragmatic imaginations’, a ‘shrewdness for timing and organizing’, and ‘the carriers of the Gospel vision through radically new language and action’. Significantly, referencing the hermeneutical text underpinning the 40 day template (Acts 1:3), Arbuckle is specific: in that context Jesus was acting as ‘a principled dissenter’ (ibid, 2).

⁷⁹ See Section 3.2.5, ‘A Time of Formation’, at 106. Also, Dermot Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, 51.

⁸⁰ Ronald Rolheiser, *Against an Infinite Horizon*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 150-151.

Grounded in this 'great imagination' the need is to let go of an obsession with a model of Church that has passed. We are called to move to the stage where we have grieved for an experience of Church that has died and is lost. We are compelled to search for the ability to let it go – but to let it ascend in blessing not as a curse. This call to blessing is imperative, not only when letting go of a model of Church experienced as positive and healthy, but even where it has been experienced as 'negative or positively abusive'.⁸¹ This is premised on the basis that Pentecost is not an abstract mystery. It is, rather, a call (as it was to the disciples in the upper room) to move from a place of fear and paralysis to the acceptance of the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ, and thus to be alive to the new spirit that has been given to us. Rolheiser here uses the analogy of the older brother of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32).⁸² He points to the unfreedom of the older son, manifest in his sense of bitterness and inability to celebrate in the new life of his brother, as indicative of what he is still clinging to – a sense of life's unfairness, his personal hurt, and 'the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable'.⁸³ Thus, although living in his father's house, the elder son is no longer receiving the spirit of that house.⁸⁴

So too with the Irish Church. It is engaged in the process of grief resolution characterised by the naming of its deaths of Good Friday and the claiming of its births of Easter Sunday. It is a process that correlates symbiotically with Rolheiser's reading of the journey towards the embracing of renewed life in the church:

I can look at the church that gave me the faith, recognise that it has died, grieve its passing, let it bless me, let it go, and then receive the spirit for the church within which I am actually living.⁸⁵

Thus, it is a process of transformation within which we are given both new life and new spirit. The task is to claim the 'new spirit' of the 'new life' we are in fact already living. As such, the proper response to the crucifixion and death experienced by the Church in Ireland, as proper to death in all its forms, is not to engage in 'the primary repression within Western culture',⁸⁶ the denial of death,⁸⁷ but to engage proactively

⁸¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 156.

⁸² *Ibid*, 153.

⁸³ Ronald Rolheiser, *Against an Infinite Horizon*, 1. 'In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable we come to understand that here, in this life, all symphonies remain unfinished.'

⁸⁴ Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 153.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 151.

⁸⁶ Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lilies*, 167.

with the mystery of the paschal journey. Essentially, therefore, it is not to 'deny, daydream, mummify, pretend, cling, drug, refuse to wake up, and do everything except accept that we must let go'.⁸⁸ It is, definitively, *to* let go – to yearn for and claim the new spirit that is given for the life we are already living.⁸⁹

Moreover, the Church is mandated in this by the directive of Pope John Paul II who draws linkages to the initial experience of 40 Day encounter. Thus, he invites us to 'Rediscover your origins. Relive your roots';⁹⁰ to 'Rediscover the sense of mystery ...[and to] testify to it with conviction and contagious joy';⁹¹ to 'Rediscover the enthusiasm of proclamation',⁹² that is, to 'Hear today, addressed to you at the beginning of this third millennium, the plea heard at the beginning of the first millennium ... the most profound and genuine plea [of those] who yearn for a hope which does not disappoint'.⁹³ This hope is named in the hermeneutical key attaching to 40 day encounter:

He had shown himself to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3)

The encounter with the paschal dimension symbolised by the 40 Days is the encounter with the Easter story. It is a journey of formation in identity and mission.⁹⁴ The identity, assigned to the event of Catholicism in Ireland, is to give witness to the Encounter. The mission is to reveal the experience of Encounter. Thus, in the spirit of the new springtime of the Church – the new Pentecost named by the event of the Second Vatican Council – the pathway is to joyfully tell the story of the Encounter: 'Simply proclaim the Lord Jesus holy in your hearts, and always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you' (1 Peter 3:15). (1 Peter 3:15).

⁸⁷ Cf. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York, NY: Free Press Paperbacks, 1973).

⁸⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lilies*, 167.

⁸⁹ Cf. Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 138.

⁹⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 120.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 69.

⁹² *Ibid*, 45.

⁹³ *Ibid*.

⁹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 214

Appendix 'A'

Exposition of Survey Data

The *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) chose religion as its theme for research in 1998. In Ireland the interviews were conducted among a sample of 1010 people aged eighteen years and over in May and June 1998. It was conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin.¹ The breakdown in the categories surveyed were:

Gender	Age Profile	Status
Female, 53%	18-28, 17%	Married or living as married, 59%
Male, 47%	29-38, 18%	Divorced or separated, 3%
	39-48, 18%	Widowed, 10%
	49-58, 15%	Single, 28%
	59-68, 15%	
	69 and over, 16%	

The *European Values Study* (EVS) is a pan-European project which surveys especially values associated with work, religion, life-styles and other issues. In 1999 it completed and registered 1012 interviews in Ireland.² The breakdown in the categories surveyed were:

Gender	Age Profile
Female, 50.80%	18-24, 15.6%
Male, 49.20%	25-34, 20.7%
	35-44, 21.0%
	45-64, 27.9%
	65 or more, 14.8

Table 1
Mass Attendance (EVS)

	1990	1999
<i>Once a Week</i>	85%	63%
<i>Once a Month</i>	83%	75%

1990 data sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 26.

1999 data sourced from Tony Fahey, 'Is Atheism Increasing?' 51,

¹ Conor Ward, 'Intimations of Immorality: An Analysis of the ISSP 1998', 67.

² Michael J. Breen, 'Different from their Elders and Betters: Age Cohort Differences in the Irish Data of the EVS 1999, in Eoin G. Cassidy (ed.), *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2002), 94-120 at 95.

Table 2
Importance attached to Religious Ritual (EVS)

	All	25-34 Age Group
<i>Birth</i>	92%	88%
<i>Marriage</i>	93%	87%
<i>Death</i>	96%	93%

Data on '25-34 age group' sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 27.

Data on 'All' sourced from Tony Fahey, 'Is Atheism Increasing?' 51, 53.

Table 3
Religious Attitudes

	Belief in God	Belief in life after death	Belief in heaven	Belief in hell*	No religion
<i>ISSP 1991</i>	96%	80%	87%	-	2%
<i>ISSP 1998</i>	94%	78%	85%	53%	6%
<i>EVS 1999</i>	96%	80%	86%	54%	-

All ISSP data, unless otherwise indicated, sourced from Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" is the Ireland We Live In', 600.

All EVS data sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 23.

* Data sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 23.

Table 4
Roman Catholic Moral Teaching

	1991	1998	1998, 18-28 age group
<i>Abortion is always wrong</i>	48%	41%	30%*
<i>Premarital sexual relations are always wrong</i>	36%	30%	8%
<i>Extra-marital relationships are always wrong</i>	71%	63%	43%
<i>Same sex relations are always wrong</i>	68%	60%	30%

All data, unless otherwise indicated, sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 25.

* Data from 1999 EVS survey and refers to 18-26 age group. Sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 25.

Table 5
Attitudes towards the Church

	1991	1998
<i>Complete confidence or great deal of confidence in the Church</i>	46%	27%
<i>Churches have too much power</i>	38%	46%
<i>Disapprove of religious leaders trying to influence voting</i>	26%	44%
<i>Disapprove of religious leaders trying to influence government decisions</i>	28%	45%

All data sourced from Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" is the Ireland We Live In', 600.

Table 6
Confidence in the Church (EVS 1999)

	1990	1999
<i>A great deal</i>	40%	22%
<i>Quite a lot</i>	33%	32%
<i>Not a great deal</i>	24%	37%
<i>None at all</i>	4%	9%

Data sourced from Tony Fahey, 'Is Atheism Increasing?' 58.

Table 7
Confidence in the Church (EVS 1999)

	1990	1999
<i>To the moral problems and the needs of the individual</i>	42%	31%
<i>To the problems of family life</i>	35%	27%
<i>To peoples spiritual needs</i>	71%	58%
<i>To the social problems facing the country</i>	34%	24%

Data sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 25.

Table 8
Attitude towards local clergy (ISSP 1998)

	All	Female 18-28	Female 48-58	Male 18-28	Male 48-58
<i>'complete' or 'a great deal of confidence'</i>	42%	53%	30%	59%	40%

Specific age category data sourced from Eoin G. Cassidy, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland', 39.

Data referenced as 'All' sourced from Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" is the Ireland We Live In', 591.

Table 9
Religious Identity

	All	18-28 Age Group
<i>Belief in 'Christ in the Eucharist'</i>	65%	74%
<i>Belief in 'having a Pope as head of the Church'</i>	58%	64%
<i>Belief in 'Mary, Mother of Jesus'</i>	53%	68%
<i>'Help for the poor'</i>	62%	71%
<i>Belief that 'God is with us in the Sacraments'</i>	62%	70%

Data sourced from Andrew M. Greeley & Conor Ward, 'How "Secularised" is the Ireland We Live In', 602.

The Irish Association for cultural, economic and social relations ³

11th October 2003

The report offers a broader perspective of trends in Irish Catholicism by drawing comparisons over a period three decades.

Mass Attendance in the Republic of Ireland % At least once a week		
1974	Nic Ghiolla Phadraig Survey	91
1984	Breslin & Weafer Survey	87
1989/90	MaGreil Survey	82
1990	European Values Survey	85
1992	AGB Adelaide Survey	78
1995	IMS Survey	64
1996	IT/MRBI Survey	66
1997	Catholic Church/IMS Survey	65
1998	RTE/MRBI Survey	60
1999	IMS Survey	57
2002	Millward Brown IMS	48
2003	TNS/MRBI	44

It further designates the 'Number of Vocations' (presumably a narrow interpretation of that term and relating to the numbers entering into a seminary), as follows.

1965	1375
1994	201
1998	92
2000	61

It indicates the changing religious environment in the Republic of Ireland with the growth of minority and Orthodox Christian church's :

- There are significant numbers of people in Black-Majority Churches in the Republic of Ireland (perhaps upwards of 10,000).
- There are significant numbers of people in New Churches/Independent Churches in the Republic of Ireland which are not included in the Census figures (estimate 5,000 in the Dublin area alone).
- The number of people in Orthodox Churches in the Republic of Ireland has risen from 400 in 1991 to 10,400 in 2002.

³ From RD Stevens, 'Speech to the Irish Association', Armagh, 11 October 03. Available at http://www.irish-association.org/archives/david_stephens10_03.html [accessed March 2011].

Similarly, it traces the growth of world faiths in the Republic of Ireland over a period of a decade (1991-2002). Drawing from the 2002 Census it registers as follows:

- the number of Muslims as 19,100, up from 3,900 in 1991;
- the Jewish Community was 1,790, up from 1,581 in 1991;
- the Buddhist Community was 3,894, up from 986;
- the Hindhu Community was 3,099, up from 953.

Further, drawing from the 2006 Census (referenced against 2002), religious affiliation registers as follows:⁴

- the number of Roman Catholics as 3,681,446, up 218,840 (6.3%);
- the number of Apostolic/Pentecostal as 8,116, up 4,964 (157.5%);
- the number of Muslim (Islamic) as 32,539, up 13,392 (69.9%);
- the Jewish Community as 1,930, up 140 (7.8%);
- the Buddhist Community as 6,516, up 2,622 (67.3%);
- the Hindhu Community as 6,082, up 2,983 (96.3%);
- those claiming 'no religion' as 186,318, up 48,054 (34.8%);
- those named as 'Atheist' as 929, up 429 (85.8%);
- those named as 'lapsed Roman Catholic' as 540, down 50 (-8.5%).

Mass attendance in the Republic

According to the latest European Social Survey (2006/7), 'there has been a steady decline in the rate of decline of the proportion of Catholics attending Mass weekly or more often from 63.4% in 2005 to 56.4% in 2006/7, with more attending monthly (16.4%) than 2002/3 (14.4%)

Intercom July/August 2008 p.18

⁴ Central Statistics Office of Ireland. Available at <http://www.cso.ie/census/default.htm> [accessed March 2011]. Based on actual population increase of 322,645 (8.2%).

Appendix 'B'

The use of 40 in the Old Testament

'Forty' marks the number of days of rain at the time of the flood (Gen 7:17), and before the sending forth of the raven (Gen 8:6). It marks the number of days needed for embalming: *'The doctors embalmed Israel, and it took them forty days, for embalming takes forty days to complete'* (Gen 50:3). Also, it is seen as significant in regard to the rules of fasting as a prelude to engagement. Thus, for example: *'Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights'* (Ex 24:18). Further, *'He stayed there with Yahweh for forty days and forty nights, eating and drinking nothing, and on the tablets he wrote the words of the covenant—the Ten Words'* (Ex 34:28). This is reiterated in the Deuteronomy account: *'I had gone up the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant that Yahweh was making with you. I stayed forty days and forty nights on the mountain, with nothing to eat or drink'* (Dt 9:9; cf. also vv. 11, 18). Moreover, this compares with the journey of Elijah to Sinai when, zealous to maintain the covenant and restore the ancient faith, *'He got up and ate and drank, and strengthened by that food he walked for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, God's mountain.'* (1 Kgs 19:8).

'Forty' is used in reference to petitionary prayer: *'I fell prostrate before Yahweh and lay there those forty days and forty nights... And I pleaded with Yahweh'* (Dt 9:25-26; cf. also 10:10). It is used in reference to the world of espionage by the tribesmen in the land of promise, for having been sent to spy on the land of Canaan *'After forty days they returned from reconnoitring the country'* (Nb 13:25). Again, it is outlined by Jonah as the time of probation given to the Ninevites: *'Only forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown'* (Jonah 3:4). The concept of 'forty' is used also in prophetic and symbolic terms: *'You are to lie down again, on your right side, and bear the guilt of the House of Judah for forty days. I have set the length for you as one day for one year'* (Ez 4:6).

This analogy (of a day of lying down for each year of sin) is a reference to the forty years of the exodus and a demonstration that the concept of 'forty' is used extensively not only in terms of days but also of years. For instance the rebellion of Israel was met by sanction and punishment: *'Your children will be nomads in the desert for forty years, bearing the consequences of your faithlessness, until the last one of you lies dead in the desert. For forty days you reconnoitred the country. Each day will count as a year: for forty years you will bear the consequences of your guilt and learn what it means to reject me'* (Num 14:33-34, cf. also Num 32:13, Jos 5:6). Thus it was that *'The Israelites ate manna for forty years, up to the time they reached inhabited country'* (Ex 16:35). Reference to the exodus experience is often marked in terms of forty: *'Remember the long road by which Yahweh your God led you for forty years in the desert, to humble you, to test you and know your inmost heart—whether you would keep his commandments or not'* (Dt 8:2). The test was scarcely an unmitigated success: *'For forty years that generation sickened me, and I said, "Always fickle hearts."'* (Ps 95:10).

The exodus was also however a time where the providence and protection of God is evident: *'For forty years you cared for them in the desert, so that they were short of nothing, their clothes did not wear out, nor were their feet swollen'* (Neh 9:21; Cf. also Dt 2:7; Dt 8:4; Dt 29:4). And further, *'It was I who brought you up from Egypt and for forty years led you through the desert to take possession of the Amorite's country'* (Am 2:10). In the eyes of the eighth century prophets the period in the desert was seen as a time of perfect union between Yahweh and his people, a unity which was given expression through sincere and authentic, if

circumstantially simple, worship. Thus, reacting against the hypocrisy of an exclusively external practice of religion, they argue rhetorically: *'Did you bring me sacrifices and oblations those forty years in the desert, House of Israel?'* (Am 5:24-25; Cf. also Jr 2:2-3, Ho 2:16-17). This text is quoted verbatim in the testimony of Stephen (Ac 6:8 – 8:3, at 7:42) where, in the recounting of the story of Israel, he outlines a further detail relative to the use of 'forty' in the Old Testament – namely that the 120 year lifespan of Moses (Dt 34:7) is providentially divided into three 40 year periods (Cf. Ac 7:24, 30, 36), thus symbolising God's close direction of each phase of his life.⁵

Again, 'forty' marks the number of years of peace in Israel (Jg 3:11; 5:31; 8:28). It marks both the desolation and the restoration of Egypt: *'For forty years it will remain uninhabited'. I shall make Egypt the most desolate of countries; for forty years its cities will be the most desolate of wasted cities. And I shall scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the countries. The Lord Yahweh, however, says this: After forty years have passed, I shall gather the Egyptians back from the nations where they were dispersed'* (Ez 29:11b-13). It marks the time of the Israelites oppression at the hands of the Philistines (Jg 13:1). It characterises the reign of various rulers: The reign of David as King, *'David was thirty years old when he became King, and he reigned for forty years'* (2 Sam 5:4); The reign of Jehoash in Judah, *'Jehoash became king in the seventh year of Jehu, and reigned for forty years in Jerusalem'* (2 Kgs 12:2); The reign of Solomon, *'Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years'* (2 Ch 9:30). Also, *'Joash was seven years old when he came to the throne and he reigned for forty years in Jerusalem'* (2 Ch 24:1). Further, it defines the parameters of a generation in that at the death of Eli we are told *'He had been judge of Israel for forty years'* (1 Sam 4: 18).⁶ It even counsels on the number of lashes to be administered in punishing criminals: *'He may impose forty strokes but no more'* (Dt 25:3).⁷

In the New Testament reference to the number 'forty' is dominated by two instances. Firstly, in the gospels it is exclusive to the synoptic writers, when it is used in reference to the experience of the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:2; Mk 1:12; Lk 4:2). In the second place it is found in the introductory comments of Acts (Ac 1:3). Against that commentators construct a linkage between the desert experience of Jesus, retrospectively to the forty years desert experience of the exodus, and prophetically to the forty days of appearances recorded in *Acts*.

⁵ Richard J. Dillon, 'Acts of the Apostles', 741. Indeed not dissimilar to the inaugural address of Paul (Ac 13:16-41) where he too offers a history of salvation. In this he talks of the forty years in the desert (13:18), and the deposition of Saul after forty years reign (Ac 13:22).

⁶ That is 'for a generation': *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1 Sam 4, f 'm'.

⁷ Cf. for example Paul: 'Five times I have been given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews' (2 Cor 11:24).

Appendix 'C'

Church fails to react to shortage of priests

Rite and Reason⁸

Over the past six years 10 Catholic priests have died for every one ordained. The result is "catastrophic", writes Fr Gerard Moloney.

Fr Tom is a parish priest in a rural Irish diocese. The population of the parish is not large, but it is geographically spread out, with two churches at opposite ends of the parish. Until last year, Fr Tom was assisted by his elderly predecessor, who acted as his curate. But when Fr Tom's colleague died suddenly, he was not replaced. Nor will he be. The reason is simple - there is no priest to replace him. There are no spare priests to go around. So now Fr Tom ministers on his own. He is on call 24 hours a day seven days a week, and is able to take a few hours away from his parish only when his equally busy colleague in the parish next door can cover for him.

Fr Tom's story is far from unique. There are many more like him in parishes up and down the country (and in parishes throughout the western world), one-man bands, aging, tired and increasingly burned-out – trying to serve their people as best they can. Though they have no curates to help them, they still have to fulfil the entire range of priestly duties which do not diminish even as the number of clergy goes down. They have to celebrate Mass and the sacraments, visit the sick and the schools, chair committees, prepare homilies, comfort the bereaved, as well as be available morning, noon and night to respond to whatever emergency may arise. And the number of one-man parishes, and of no-man parishes, will continue to increase. It is inevitable.

Since November 1st, 2000, 1,173 Irish priests have died. In the same period, 101 Irish priests have been ordained. That means that one diocesan priest in five is being replaced at present, and just one religious/missionary priest in 30. On average, the deaths of Irish priests continue to outnumber ordinations more than tenfold. In 2005, 199 Irish priests died, whereas only eight priests were ordained (Intercom magazine, July/August 2006). And this does not take into account clergy who have left the active ministry. These statistics are catastrophic. And they will get only worse.

Priests are an aging band of brothers. The numbers in ministry will continue to fall – and the decline will accelerate – and old men past retirement age will be asked to take on more and more. This is good news for the Catholic Church's enemies and for those who want to eliminate religion from society but it is a tragedy for those who love the church. For a church with a small and aging bunch of clergy will not be a vibrant church – no matter how good or committed those clergy are. And parishes without priests are parishes where the Eucharist cannot be celebrated – no matter how many active, enthusiastic lay ministers may be involved in those parishes. And the other tragedy for the church is that there is no short or medium-term solution to this crisis. The number of seminarians in training is tiny and, unless something entirely unexpected happens, will not increase any time soon.

Amalgamating parishes and closing churches is not a solution to the priest shortage but merely a response to it. However, the biggest tragedy of all is that the Catholic Church does

⁸ From *The Irish Times*, November 20, 2006.

not appear to have even a Plan A as to how to face up to the shortage of clergy, not to mind a Plan B. Possible radical solutions, such as redefining what we mean by priesthood, is not being discussed. Even the possibility of ordaining worthy married men or of extending the ordained ministry to women are not options. And all the while the church continues on its merry way, closing churches here, twinning parishes there, and asking overstretched priests to take on more and more. And so Fr Tom soldiers quietly on, silently wondering what will happen in another few years, when he will be old and burned out and, unlike the Energiser Bunny, simply won't be able to keep on going.

Appendix 'D'

An outline of some New Ecclesial Realities in the Irish Context

This section is adapted from *Profiles of "the movements" in the Irish Church*, an article by Patrick Duffy on the Catholic Ireland website.⁹

Alpha Ireland

Alpha is a 10-week course which began in 1990 in a Church of England context in Brompton London. It was initiated as a renewal course for the unchurched and those who had lapsed. It became highly successful, particularly through the work of Nicky Gumbel, a barrister become clergyman.¹⁰ As Alpha became more established Gumbel developed a series of booklets and a DVD focusing on evangelisation. Alpha has been approved by Catholic bishops worldwide and has attracted support across the spectrum of Christian belief.¹¹

The 10 week course explores the basic questions and truths of the Christian faith – Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus die? How does God guide us? What about the Church? It also uses a weekend away in the middle of the course to talk about being filled with the Spirit. It mirrors thematically a type of 'Christianity for Dummies', presenting the core of the Gospel, the 'kerygma'.

While Alpha has been running in Ireland since 1998, an *Alpha Ireland Board* was formed to promote Alpha in February 2005. This Board currently includes Fr. Pat Collins, Gerard Gallagher (Dublin Office for Evangelisation), Ray McNicholas, Evelyn Hamilton, Jackie Haughey, Basil Good, Pat Shannon, Helen Murray, Michael Fairley (all Dublin), Rev. Ken Wilson (Gorey), Michael Monks (Ennis), Sr. Brigid Dunne (Cork), Catherine Corkery (Longford). In March 2005 Paddy Monaghan was appointed National Co-ordinator. In Ireland the number of Alpha Courses has grown from 12 in 2004 to some 120 in 2009.¹²

Alpha is seen to work best as part of an overall parish programme of evangelisation or catechesis. Participants in the course are encouraged to continue their spiritual journey afterwards through parish cell groups.

⁹ <http://www.catholicireland.net/pages/index.php?nd=2&art=1310> [accessed March 2011].

¹⁰ An avowed atheist Nicky Gumbel (1955-) was converted to Christianity in his first year at Trinity College, Cambridge through reading the New Testament. In 1982 he left his position as a barrister to train for ordination in the Church of England, and was appointed as curate at the church of Holy Trinity Brompton London in 1986. In 1990 Gumbel took over the running of the Alpha Course that had been running there since 1973. The course was transformed under his leadership from being one designed for new Christians to one primarily for those outside the church who would not consider themselves as Christians. He is the author of a number of books related to the Alpha course, including *Questions of Life*, which has sold over 1,000,000 copies. Voted 'Christian Book of the Year' in 1994, it has been published in 48 languages

¹¹ See what Church Leaders in Ireland say about Alpha: <http://www.alphacourse.ie/about-alpha-2/what-participants-say> [accessed March 2011].

¹² <http://www.alphacourse.ie/about-alpha/the-alpha-course-in-ireland> [accessed August 2010]

Charismatic Renewal

This movement originated in 1967 at a weekend retreat in Duquesne University, Pittsburgh and had its biggest impact in Ireland from the mid 1970s. It focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian emphasising two key aspects – baptism in the Spirit and the charisms.

Baptism in the Spirit is seen as an intense spiritual experience akin to a spiritual rebirth. It can occur at any time within the prayer group culture but is usually prepared for through the *Life in the Spirit* seminars. This is a seven-week series of prayer meetings with instruction how the Spirit enlivened the Apostolic community with the expectation that this power then can be similarly experienced in the here and now. The fifth week session is an opportunity for people to be prayed with so as to be ‘baptized in the Holy Spirit’ – seen as a ‘fanning into flame’ of the gifts and graces of baptism and confirmation. It enables a profound personal response to God's call to take Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of your life. The remaining two sessions are to stress continuity and give teaching on the charisms.

Some of the Charismatic Renewal culture – laying on of hands, expressive and spontaneous prayer, hymns, awareness of different gifts, etc – has been incorporated into mainstream Catholic practice. There are Charismatic Renewal prayer groups meeting in every Irish diocese and an annual conference is held. The central office is at Emmanuel, 3 Pembroke Park, Ballsbridge Dublin 4. Bishop Martin Drennan of Galway is the liaison bishop.

Focolare

The *Focolare* Movement was founded by Chiara Lubich in Trent, northern Italy, during the disturbances of World War II. Established as a lay movement it has its origins in the Catholic Church though it has now spread to many Christian denominations and to other religions, with emphasis on the living out of the gospel, especially the phrase ‘That all may be one.’ As such, its ideal is the unity of the human race as a single family, a communion of diversities. It seeks to promote this through prayer, dialogue and social action across generations, social classes, cultures and peoples. The term *Focolare* Movement (*focolare* means ‘fireplace’) was applied since its beginnings by the people of Trent because of the ‘fire’ of Gospel love, a love which animated Chiara Lubich and her first companions.

Focolare is present in 182 nations, reaching about 5 million people. It arrived in Ireland in 1971 and now has nearly 500 people committed to its ideal of unity. Another 5,000 people from all around the country share in its spirituality through the *Word of Life*, a commentary for bringing the Gospel into everyday life. Members can be found in Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Cavan, Kilkenny, Limerick, Galway, Cork, Belfast and many other places. They include young people, families, priests, sisters, members of different churches and non-believers. It has a centre at Curryhills, Prosperous, Co Kildare.

Sant'Egidio Community¹³

The Community of Sant'Egidio began in Rome in 1968, in the period after Vatican II at the initiative of a young man, who was then less than twenty, Andrea Riccardi. He gathered a group of high-school students, like himself, to listen to and put the Gospel into practice. The small group immediately began going to slums on the outskirts of Rome, and do an afternoon school for children. Today it is a movement of more than 50,000 members dedicated to evangelisation and charity, in more than 70 countries throughout the world. The community has as its centre the Roman Church of Sant'Egidio in Trastevere in Rome, from which it takes its name.

The different communities spread throughout the world share the St Egidio spirituality and principles: prayer, communicating the gospel, solidarity with the poor, ecumenism. In Dublin a small group of up to 30 young women and men meets in St Paul's Church, Smithfield, Arran Quay, Dublin 7 after the 8 pm Mass on Sunday evening and at 8.30 pm on Wednesday.

¹³ See Patsy McGarry, 'Christianity for a new millennium', in *The Irish Times*, January 20th 1998. Available at www.santegidio.org/archivio/cse/19980120_irishtimes_EN.htm [accessed March 2011].

Appendix 'E'

Evidencing of ineffectual attempts to communicate the Easter story in the contemporary event of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland

See, for instance, Michael Paul Gallagher who holds that the Easter story is routinely understood as 'a boring and empty legend' (*The Disturbing Freshness of Christ*, 7). Anne Thurston names as an inherent deficiency within Irish Catholicism an absence in the levels of confidence, energy or imagination required to 'carry the story forward' (Anne Thurston, 'A Not So Secular City', 639). Orla O'Toole reflects that, for many young people, the only attachment of narrative to their experience of Christian faith is that the traditional Catholic sexual ethic 'has all the reality and immediacy of a fairytale' (Orla O'Toole, 'A View from the Class-room', 654).

Eugene O'Brien names the subtext of the deconstruction of the story as named by the Church in Ireland: succinctly, 'people have moved on' (Eugene O'Brien, 'Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse', 64). Michael Drumm teaches that the meaning of the Easter story, and the creative imagination to understand it, has largely been 'lost' in the Irish context. Yet, we persist in initiating new members and then attempt to justify an often 'meaningless gesture' with 'all sorts of meandering efforts' (Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, *A Sacramental People*, 22).

Oliver Brennan, reflecting on the capacity of the Church in Ireland to relate the Christian narrative to young people, observes that the Church 'is rapidly losing its youth, and that without some appropriate intervention, this exodus will accelerate' (Oliver Brennan, *Cultures Apart?*, 65). Brendan Hoban believes that the *raison d'être* of the Second Vatican Council, effectively a renewed way of expressing the Easter story, has, in the Irish context, been 'torpedoed by bishops and clergy' (Cf. Brendan Hoban, *Pieces of my Mind*, 85). John Waters speaks of the cultural and historical residue still attaching to Irish Catholicism, namely 'a form of idolatry that placed moralism at the centre of its message, making it all but impossible for the Christian story to be understood' (John Waters, 'Hearing only pious clichés', in *The Irish Times*, 22nd October, 2007).

John O'Brien, speculating on the seeds of a new church in Ireland, names its point of departure: the church is becoming 'increasingly incapable of communicating with larger and larger numbers of people and seriously risks becoming irrelevant' (John O'Brien, *Seeds of a New Church*, 19). Donal Harrington, referencing a disconnect between the spiritual hunger of people and the gospel of Jesus Christ, understands that the challenge to the Irish Church is, therefore, clear: it must address itself 'to the spiritual hunger in people and to speak to people about how the Christian gospel offers a way for their spiritual quest' (Donal Harrington, *Parish Renewal*, 55).

Appendix 'F'

The call to a 'new imagination'

The call to a 'new imagination' is evidenced prolifically throughout our analysis.

For instance, we restate a fundamental axiom applicable to the initial 40 Day encounter which we have referenced as necessary to the contemporary Irish experience: that 'the appearances were effective because they adapted to the imagination, understanding, and sense experience of the disciples in a manner that facilitated the revelation of the risen Christ' (*Section 3.3.1, 'The Impact of Encounter'*, at 111). Similarly, we recall that Dermot Lane, reflecting on the 'joylessness' in the transmission of Christian faith today, presents it as not merely to do with faith but also with imagination (*Section 4.2.1 'Name Your Deaths'*, at 125). Moreover, exploring the phenomenon of 'the yawn factor' in Irish Catholic experience, he sees this as pointing to the need for 'a new imagination out of which the Christian story might be retold' ('Faith', 170). Or, again, it calls for a reconfiguration of the religious imagination to facilitate 'a new way of looking at life and interpreting experience' ('Faith', 169).

Michael Paul Gallagher, establishing parameters within which the Irish Church must engage with society cautions that as the culture 'kidnaps their imagination in trivial ways', many people today are blocked in terms of a readiness for faith (*Section 4.2.1 'Name Your Deaths'*, at 126). Concisely, therefore, the creation of a Christian ecology of the imagination is imperative (*Section 5.1.3.2, 'A Renewed Imagination'*, at 190). Michael Drumm concurs, believing that 'we need to re-awaken our theological imagination so as to mediate the divine in ways that are ever ancient and ever new' (*Section 4.4.1.3, 'Encounter with a 'Stranger'*, at 161). Canvassing the need for the Irish Church to return to the pattern of encounter with death and resurrection in Christ, in order to positively and critically shape its destiny, we hold that it must respond with a paschal imagination (Cf. Rolheiser, *Against an Infinite Horizon*, 152).

There is, further, the argument of Karl Rahner: that the evolution of the Church demands a 'charismatically inspired, creative imagination' (*Section 8.3, 'A Paschal Imagination'*, at 333) Gerald Arbuckle, outlining the need for the Church to engage in a process of 'Refounding' defines 'dissenters' in terms of those gifted with 'pragmatic imaginations' (*Refounding The Church*, 7). Michael Paul Gallagher holds that the evidence pointing towards the need for a paradigm shift in the approach of Irish Catholicism is rooted in a contemporary inability to access positively one's spiritual imagination (*Section 8.2.1, 'A New Departure'*, at 329). Dermot Late outlines the call to formulate a new religious imagination intrinsic to the tradition of Christianity (*Section 8.2.1, 'A New Departure'*, at 330). Amos Wilder concludes that 'it is at the level of imagination that any full engagement with life takes place' (*Section 7.1.1, 'The Point of Departure'*, at 286).

Against all this, however, cautionary sapience is advised on the basis that Vatican II, 'died' in Ireland through a lack of courage and imagination, and a dogged, determined, fear-driven (and successful) resistance to change (*Section 5.1.1. 'New Life – A 'New Pentecost' in the Church'*, at 170).

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