

How Deep are the Well-Springs of Hope?

CORNELIUS J. CASEY, C.Ss.R.

‘The faith that I love the best, says God, is hope.’

Charles Péguy

‘Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope.’

Walter Benjamin

FR TONY COOTE died on August 28, 2019, of motor neurone disease. His memoir tells of the shock of first diagnosis: ‘[The consultant] left me to get dressed. Turning around to put my clothes back on, I fell flat onto the floor. The consultant came back into the room. “Oh, you poor man”, she said.’

Some weeks on, he was organising a fundraising walk, to raise funds for research and care for those afflicted as he was. Hope is a social project.

Later, his limbs wasted, his vision dimmed, he wrote:

I now feel that I am facing the greatest challenge of this illness as my voice begins to weaken. ... It is time for me to literally practise what I preach. I feel now that I am aboard a fast train with only one stop. I’m not in a mad hurry to disembark. I’m like everyone else; I only know this world and this life, but I see no meaning in this life ending in a grave. When the train stops,

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I will step onto that platform with hope and no fear.¹

In relentless fidelity to the present, he hopes for its transfiguration. Hope, says Thomas Aquinas, is ‘concerned with arduous endeavours’.²

How deep are the well-springs of hope? Does it go all the way down? In the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, there is a vision of a Lamb ‘looking as if it had been slain,’ standing amid the ruins of history. Then, to great rejoicing, the Lamb comes forward to take the scroll of history from the one who is sitting on the Throne. The Lamb (of God) is ‘the one who is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals’. (Rev 3:5-9) In this last book of the Bible there is a vision of ‘hope for us’, hope for our history, and for our planet home: ‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth,... and a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God’. (Rev 21: 1,2). The Lord of history is also the Lord of Creation.

The concept of hope is deeply embedded in the Christian narrative. In advance of a reflection on specifically Christian hope, let us ask the simple question, ‘what is hope? The plain answer is that hope is a form of desire. ‘I really hope we can have a good outcome to this current health crisis.’ Hope has its beginnings in our yearnings. Yet there is more to hope desire, than yearning. I must *do* whatever I can to bring it about that this health crisis will pass. Hope is a matter of performance, as well as a matter of desire. Hope is something we *do*. When hope doesn’t show a performative dimension, it is thin and vague and unformed. When I ask you ‘what do you hope for?’, I’m asking you to give me some understanding of what your project is. In this way authentic hope is a social practice, not just a mental attitude. Hope of this kind is not a once-off event. It is a way of living, a form of life and a form of life acquainted with difficulty. Hope can be defined

1. Tony Coote, *Live While You Can* (Hachette Books: Ireland, 2019), 181

2. *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae, 40, 1

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as a disposition to act affirmatively even when the outlook is dismal and it is a disposition that acts as an organising principle for a whole way of life.

Hope crops up in a myriad of human activities. There are certainly common-or-garden hopes (fine weather, a sporting result) as well as hope at a more fundamental or existential level, where my existence itself is at stake. At the existential level two inquiries come together: 'Is there hope for *me*, for my particular, vital reality?' and 'Is there hope for *us*, for our future, for our children's future, and for our planet home?' These two inquiries, though distinct, cannot be separated. They are interlinked.

HOPE IS NOT OPTIMISM

Authentic hope should be distinguished from optimism. The issue between the two is one of moral realism. Optimism as a worldview refuses to take the desolation of the world seriously enough. It offers a rose-tinted alternative. This rose-tinted version shapes all the vital decisions. It shapes what is to be undertaken both morally and politically. 'Always look on the bright side of life', is the cheerful advice.

This is advice that should come with a health warning. If you do look on the bright side, always, you will fail to see where monsters lurk until it is too late and disaster strikes. The truth is that humankind is in danger, not just from outside forces, but from itself, as in the case of the spoliation of the very ecological environment in which humankind lives. As well as a record of progress and kindness there an ugly wound running through the human narrative, a record of violence, domination, exploitation. Averting one's eyes will not change the reality. The cheerful advice of optimism is a kind of inoculation against this reality: 'worldly optimism is a prophylactic against reality.'³ When the situation is stark, optimism does not signify, it by-

3. B. Myers, *Christ the Stranger, The theology of Rowan Williams* (T&T Clark, London: 2012), 25

passes the reality. Its energies are bent on keeping reality at bay.

In such situations, when the challenges are most pronounced, it is hope, not optimism, that is needed. Authentic hope in such situations is a resource to face down disaster and still not capitulate. The core issue of moral (and political) realism sharply distinguishes hope and optimism. Thinkers who give us unvarnished truth are of more service to humanity than wide-eyed optimists, as the German philosopher, Theodore Adorno, observed.

Hope is learned, nourished and cultivated over time and through often difficult experiences, learned lessons from failure as well as success. Optimism, on the other hand, is more a matter of temperament than of reasons. It is a kind of hunch that everything will pan out fine. If you ask the optimist for reasons you will not get many. Hope is different. Authentic hope needs reasons, it needs to be able to pick out features of a situation that render it credible. Hope scrutinises reasons for persisting in hope, as no doubt Nelson Mandela did during long years of incarceration. Reasons for hope are constitutive of hope, part of its nourishment, part of its engagement with moral realism. It is not a hunch. 'Always be ready to give reasons for the hope that is in you' (1 Pet 3:15), is the instruction in one of the letters of early Christians that are collected in the New Testament.

'Although a conservative is not necessarily an optimist, I think that an optimist is pretty likely to be a conservative' (Henry James).⁴ Terry Eagleton, prompted by this quotation from Henry James, goes on to say that optimism is a typical component of ruling class ideologies.⁵ Perhaps one could say this of the middle-classes. Could it be that this is component in the world-view of those who, living in the affluent regions of the world, are tempted to be over confident

4. Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism*, (University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville: 2015). The quotation from Henry James is on p. 5 and is cited from Henry James, *Literary Criticism*, vol. 2: *European Writers: Prefaces to the New York Edition* (New York, 1984), 931.

5. Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism*, 4

about in the essential soundness of the present, and hence have less urgency for needed radical change? Too easy optimism is an obstacle to true hope. The journey beyond optimism is likely to be an arduous one. For the Christian the Eucharist is food for that journey. The Eucharist that takes us to the gateway to hope, the entrance, the portal, of the mystery of hope.⁶

WALTER BENJAMIN:

AGAINST THE IDEOLOGY OF PROGRESS

‘Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope.’

The optimist’s mindset has a prediction for thinking that human history is on an upward curve, as if, being woven into the fabric of history, progress was assured. The past and the present are the prelude to a much finer future. This view is not simply the recognition that there has been some progress in history. There evidently has been progress in many aspects of human reality. There have manifestly been many changes for the better. What the optimist peddles is different. It is an ideology, or a doctrine, of progress in capital letters. The upward curve towards betterment will always recommence, and is assured. While there may be setbacks, if we sit these out, history will be on our side, progress is its way, progress is its arc. This seems to be another version of ‘always looking at the bright side’, and thereby turning a blind eye to more disturbing reality. It is a view of history fiercely contested by Walter Benjamin who wrote, ‘There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism’.⁷

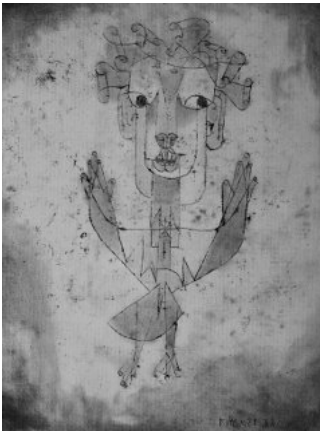
Walter Benjamin (15 July 1892 – 26 September 1940) was a German Jewish philosopher, cultural critical and essayist. His thought combined elements of western Marxism and Jewish mysticism. In

6. Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope* (London: Continuum, 1996).

7. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed Hannah Arendt (Fontana Press: 1973), p.248 (Thesis VII)

one of his earliest works he wrote: 'only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope'.⁸ His dominant preoccupation is how to articulate authentic human praxis in a dark age. The ideology of Progress which had much currency in his day, he considered both morally complacent and politically suicidal.

In 1921 Benjamin bought a painting by Paul Klee. It was entitled *Angelus Novus*. Benjamin hung *Angelus Novus* in every apartment in which he lived. In 1933, when the Nazis came to power, Benjamin fled. He left the painting behind. In early 1940, and a few months before his suicide at the Spanish border still fleeing the Nazis, and thinking back of his beloved painting, he wrote an essay entitled



Angelus Novus, by Paul Klee

'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in which he gave the painting his own distinctive interpretation. The angel in Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*, said Benjamin, is fixedly contemplating something and his gaze is horror struck. It is as if the Angel of History is longing to intervene, to participate, to play a part. However, in the painting, his wings are outstretched, as if forced open; he is being moved away, against his will. The An-

gel, Benjamin writes, is contemplating history. What he sees is a huge pile of all that is lost, abandoned and beyond reclamation. 'Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.' Con-

8. This is the concluding sentence of the essay 'Goethe's Elective Affinities', in the English edition of Walter Benjamin's *Selected Writings*, Vol 1, 1913-1926 (Belknap Press, 1996), p. 356.

templating this horrific past, the angel of history would like to stay. He would like to intervene and make whole what has been destroyed. Yet he cannot stay. There is a storm blowing and propelling him into the future: the name of that storm is progress:

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the Angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. ... The Angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing ... it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress.⁹

The Angel of history is blown forward into the future by the full force of the storm which is called progress. The Angel is unable to resist its formidable force. The long catastrophe of history continues to roll forward under the cover provided for it by the myth of progress. The myth of progress strips history of the truth of its catastrophic character. History will roll forward generating new wars, catastrophes, barbarisms, and ecological ruination. The Angel of History is powerless to intervene.

For Benjamin, there is no hope in secular history as such. Instead, he points to a network, a constellation, of moments of emancipatory hope. In these moments, men and women strike out for justice and fellowship. These are moments of emancipatory hope but they are not part of history's central plot. They are more like a sub-plot or a secret code that runs against the grain of the central plot of history.¹⁰ They are like lightning bolts breaking into the continuum of history.

In the tradition of Judaism to which Benjamin adhered, the Mes-

9. *Illuminations*, p. 249, Thesis IX

10. Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism*, p. 30

siah was absent from history as such. So it is that history as such has no coherent meaning, no hope. However, there is a series of Messianic interventions that burst open the continuum of history. These are the moments when men and women strove for justice. These moments, these actions of emancipatory hope, open up the past. Their boldness brings new meaning to the story of the defeated. In this way, for Benjamin, the past retains a certain malleability. It has a capacity to live on. It has a capacity to be re-vivified by emancipatory action in the present. It is we who can endow it with a definite form by virtue of our actions. There is a secret agreement between the past generations and the present, Benjamin writes. 'The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one.'¹¹ We bring a certain weak Messianic power which the past has a claim on.

There are many memorials of the great famine in Ireland, many famine graveyards without headstones, without names, with no signifiers of who the dead were. It is we who determine whether a person who lived through the famine in Ireland (1840s) belongs to a species destined to blow itself to bits, to bring the planet to ruination. In this way for Benjamin the meaning of the past lies in the keeping of the present.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE OF HOPE

'The faith that I love best, says God, is hope.'

There is much spiritual wisdom in Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history, and, in particular in his insistence that the concept of hope must be based on catastrophe, and his declaration that the defeated are to have a pivotal presence in the Messianic age.

Christian hope is much acquainted with catastrophe. For the

11. *Illuminations*, p. 246, Thesis II

Christian the greatest catastrophe has already happened. Calvary is the moment of truth about human history. Looking back from there, we can see that it was all leading up to this. Human gifts of communication have, throughout history, been turned with a terrible inevitability into structures of domination and exploitation. On Calvary it becomes clear that humankind is doomed to reject its own meaning. This is the way we have written our history. The New Testament interprets the crucifixion of Jesus from this viewpoint. 'From noon onwards, darkness came over the whole land ... At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.' (Mt 27: 45, 52)

Yet at the heart of this event there remained the fidelity of Jesus to his Father. His Father is the One who sent him to be the Word of the Father dwelling among us. It is precisely here in that fidelity of Jesus that Christian hope is enacted. It is akin to the creation of the world out of nothing. Its range and significance narrated in the Book of Revelation: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the one seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new'. Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true'(Rev 21: 1,2,5).

Charles Péguy, (1873- 1914), French poet and philosopher, is the supreme of this new hope. Its strangeness, its ordinariness, its extraordinariness, its fragility and its catholicity is the theme of his wonderful, long poem, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*. Péguy's writings combine Christianity, socialism, and patriotism. Patriotism, and above all socialism, came first into his life, Christianity came later. It was after his conversion that he began to write poetry. *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope* was written at a time of great anguish.¹² The corruption of socialism at the time, and the betrayal of many that Peguy had revered in the course of the Dreyfus Affair had sapped Péguy's

12. The poem, in the French original, is *La Porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu*, published in English as *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*.

spirit, alongside experiences in his personal life. His poem narrating and celebrating hope sprang from his most profound despair.

The story of hope is narrated by God. 'What surprises me', says God, 'is hope'. Faith is understandable, says God, because of the splendor of creation, the movements of the stars in heaven, the wind that blows upon the sea, and the wind that blows in the valley and 'in the tiny one, in my tiny creature, in the tiny ant', and above all, in the human heart, and in the sacraments. The opening verses of the poem are reminiscent of the Franciscan 'Canticle of Creatures'. In the recital, God concludes, faith doesn't surprise me because 'in order really not to see me these poor people would have to be blind.' Charity, says God, that doesn't surprise me either. 'It's not surprising'. How could they not love each other, and my Son who had such a great love.

'But hope, says God, that is something that surprises me, even me, I can't get over it.' As the poem proceeds, it celebrates the ordinariness of hope, the way hope is woven deep into the fabric of the ordinary life of 'my poor people'. Workers in the fields or the forest or at home are thinking of their children. The children fill their horizon. They work in hope. They themselves will not be around forever. They think tenderly of the time which will be their children's time, no longer their time. The fields, the forests, the homes, the tools they are using, these are all instruments speaking of hope. They will be their children's fields and forests and homes and tools. 'They see how things are going today and believe that they will go better tomorrow morning' This ordinary human hope is fragile. It is anxious, vacillating, and yet constant. The poem refers this ordinary human hope as 'the little girl of hope'. Like the sanctuary light in the church, it flickers but stays constant. 'It is by far the greatest marvel of our grace', says God, 'and I'm surprised by it myself'.

Most eloquently the poem describes the night when this hope was first enacted, the evening of Calvary. This was the moment when ordinary hopes became God's hope. 'It was the time when the blood

of my Son flowed for the salvation of the world.' 'He caused the very heart of God to tremble with the shudder of worry and with the shudder of hope.' 'He introduced into God's heart the theological virtue of hope.' The poem instructs us: 'Therein my child lies the secret. Therein lies the mystery'.

The mystery is that our ordinary hopes are God's hope. Their source is in God. The little child of hope, our ordinary hope, is God's child. That is the mystery, and in baptism, 'the sacrament of beginning' it becomes the deep mystery of our very particular stories of hope. The portals of great cathedrals often narrate in sculpture the story of redemption. The poem takes its name from such portals. It is a verbal, poetic narration of the moment that caused God's very heart to tremble with the shudder of hope, the moment that introduced into God's heart the theological virtue of hope.

The catholicity of hope, its universal coverage, is the concluding theme of the poem. On the way to this conclusion, the poem meditates on the significance of night and of night rest. Night refreshes. 'Night is the most beautiful of all my creation'. Night is the reservoir of being, as the sea is the reservoir of water. 'Night is the dwelling place of hope'. We are all covered at night with the mantle of hope. As darkness falls on Calvary, the burial of Jesus and of all human history is covered with the mantle of night, the reservoir of being, the dwelling place of hope.

I alone, God,
 My hands tied by this adventure,
 I alone, father at that moment, I alone was unable to bury my
 son.
 It was then. O Night, that you came and, in a great shroud, you
 buried
 The Centurion and his Romans,
 The Virgin and the Holy women,
 And that mountain, and that valley, upon which the evening was

descending,
 And my people Israel and sinners and, with them, he who was
 dying, he who had died for them.
 And the men sent by Joseph of Arimathea who were already ap-
 proaching,
 bearing the white shroud.

This shroud becomes an emblem of the resurrection in St Luke's Gospel. Peter finds the white shroud folded neatly in the empty tomb.¹³

PERFORMING HOPE

Hope is something we do, not just a way of thinking and feeling and yearning. The first social practice of theological hope is the practice of prayer. Prayer is the idiom of Christian hope.¹⁴ This idiom is at the full range of its deployment in the liturgy of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is 'a communion in horror and in glory'. It is a fresh entry to 'the night on which he was betrayed and entered into his passion.'

The Eucharist introduces us to the horror of the world. To enter into the Eucharist is to visit the horror and the catastrophe of human history, to see the pile of debris building up at our feet, as in the vision of the 'Angel of history'. Even though the Eucharist is 'a pledge of future glory' we are not at a safe distance from the catastrophe. The Eucharist is 'a pledge of future glory', the hope that is generated here takes place in the presence of the defeated ones, the hopeless ones, the forgotten, the crucified. We are not shielded from the horror. We are there when God 'shudders with the anxiety of hope and this is the pledge of future glory' We learn that kingdom comes at a price. Yet in this very place we see the Lamb, looking as if slain, standing amid the ruins of history, and open the scrolls of the new creation. In this light too we see 'the company of the saints', 'the thousands and

13. Lk 24: 12

14. For Aquinas a petition is hope interpreted: *Summa Theologiae* 2.2ae 17, 4

thousands, singing with full voice'. (Rev 5:11)

The second practice of the virtue of hope is learning what it means to live in 'the company of the saints'. The saints are case studies in the performance of hope. The saints are not just our forebears, those who have gone before us. They are also our contemporaries. They are the brave doctors and nurses and priests of Lombardy struggling amidst today's pandemic. They include parents and neighbors. They include founders of the great Religious Congregations who have done works of mercy and education through the ages. They include defeated heroes of the struggles for justice and liberation.

Péguy has the beautiful image of people passing the holy water, baptismal water from hand to hand, in a relay, passing on hope from one to another: 'We pass to each other', says Péguy, 'we give each other. From neighbour to neighbour, one after the other, like a relay, the same hope is passed on.' In a curious way, the deprivation of the coronavirus time is a reminder, not a denial, of this reality. Hope, hope coming to us always as a new creation, is nonetheless a reality to be nourished, to be learned, to be cultivated in the company of others.

A third practice of hope is to pay attention to and develop characteristics that hope requires. These are qualities such as courage, resilience, humility, truth-telling. Their cultivation supports activities of hope. We each have particular tasks to do in hope, and our character should strive to be such that we lie in wait and be alert:

We are not optimists; we do not present a lovely vision of the world which everyone is expected to fall in love with. We simply have, wherever we are, some small local task to do, on the side of the justice, for the poor.¹⁵

The theme of hope, central to Christian self-understanding, is the

15. Herbert McCabe, *God, Christ and Us*, (Continuum: London and New York)2003, p. 14.

subject of the encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI which is *Spe Salvi Facti Sumus* – ‘in hope, we are being saved’. When we are gripped by hope, when we are acting in hope, what is occurring in us is nothing less than the healing of the ugly wound of history. That is the mystery of which Charles Péguy rhymed and sang. If we ask, ‘How deep are the well-springs of Christian hope?’, the answer must be, ‘as deep as God’.

Responding to a pandemic – 21 January 1721. I have been told that in the last great Plague at London, none that kept Tobacconists shops had the plague. It is certain that smoaking was looked upon as a most excellent Preservative. In so much even children were obliged to smoak. And I remember that I heard formerly Tom Rogers say that when he was that year when the plague rag’d a schoolboy at Eton, all the boys of the school were obliged to smoak in the school every morning and that he was never whipped so much in his life as he was one morning for not smoking.

‘Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne’, 1906, in Tony Farmar (ed.), Quirks and Quiddities, privately published

A Pandemic Observed

Camus and the Coronavirus

✠ RICHARD CLARKE

RE-READING Albert Camus' 1947 novel, *The Plague / La Peste*, in the light or darkness of the unfolding Coronavirus pandemic is a singular experience. Reading the book a number of years ago as an unashamed devotee of Camus was both instructive and illuminating. Reading it again today, as the spectre of Covid-19 reaches out through communities and nations, is little short of mesmerising. There is an amazing sense of *déjà vu*, almost as though Camus were indeed speaking to us from within our own current circumstances.

His narrative is of a fictional outbreak of bubonic plague in the Algerian city of Oran in some undisclosed year within the 1940s. The novel is sometimes interpreted as an allegory for Nazi occupation and resistance to it, but – as one might expect with Camus – it may be read on any number of levels. Much of the book revolves around a young doctor, Bernard Rieux, in the doomed city. We finally discover at the conclusion of the novel that he is the narrator (although the book is written in the third person). But there are many other fascinating characters besides Rieux. Tarrou is a newcomer to Oran, befriended by Rieux, and he proves to be an acute observer of the events in the city, whose musings in a notebook form part of the latter's narrative. Paneloux is a learned Jesuit priest who has to make a difficult journey from abstract theologising to confronting the actuality of the death

✠ RICHARD CLARKE, whose ministry in the Church of Ireland included being (until 2 February 2020) Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, is author of *Shouldering the Lamb*.

of a young child from the epidemic. There is also Rambert, a visiting journalist from Paris who is trapped by the quarantine in Oran. We come upon Cottard, a black-marketeer, suicidal at the beginning of the story but then elated by the opportunities provided by the plague for his murky operations. Grand his neighbour, a somewhat pathetic and unquestionably exploited city official, has hopes of becoming a great writer. And one of Rieux's patients is an old Spaniard, an almost senile asthmatic, who takes wry and cynical delight in all that is going on around him, as he awaits his own death from causes unrelated to the plague.

Behind the colourful *dramatis personae* of *The Plague*, we encounter Camus' acute psychological insights and relentless philosophical probing. He writes of the sense of amazed disbelief in the community as the full terror of the situation strikes them. With this we may surely identify. He tells of how some in charge of the city begin by seeking to soften the reality of what awaits the inhabitants. We learn of how some of the citizens resolutely deny the truth of what is happening around them, of how others resort to revelry as a response to the horrors of plague, and of how people may seek to cover their relative's illness (or even fight off health workers) for fear of what awaits those they love when they are taken from their homes.

We also become aware of how an individual in need of help – in this particular case, Rambert, separated from his lover in Paris – may encounter different responses from those in authority whom he approaches, varying from a resolute 'rules are rules' mentality, to a vapid consolation that would suggest that the present situation will not last for ever, or to a condescending promise that their individual case will indeed be examined, even as it is almost certainly about to be cast into a waste-paper basket.

There are also those who, having come to believe that there is a definable end-time for the plague, perhaps six months, become disillusioned and hence fall into real depression as suggestions

emerge that it may be a great deal longer before things could return to some form of normality. It may be, as one of the characters in the novel suggests, worthwhile just regarding every 24-hour-period as bringing each person 24 hours closer to the conclusion of the plague, whenever that may be. And there are, of course, absurd rumours and there are the crank remedies. Little seems to change in the individual human psyche or in social behaviour when the crisis that people are helpless to prevent descends upon them. This we must quickly understand if we did not already know it.

EXILE

Camus, as this section of his narrative unfolds, locates a single noun to encapsulate the emotion of those who are now quarantined – a sense of ‘exile’. It is an unexpected word, but it condenses accurately the feeling that many must have, even in their own communities or their own homes, when they cannot be where they would wish to be, whether it is in another place, or with family or friends with whom they cannot unite. It is the term that Camus employs throughout the novel as he considers the effects of the infection on minds as well as bodies. We are told how the relentless continuation of the plague produced in people a lassitude, a sense of simply marking time, but, more dangerously, the melting down of emotional resilience.

In the context of today, the idea of ‘exile’ remains a valuable model. Exile, unsought though it may be, can be a place of rich discovery as well as of lonely isolation, as at least some of the inhabitants of Oran came to discern. Exile certainly concentrates the mind, but it may also deepen the individual soul. ‘Singing the Lord’s song in a strange land’ will be for us no easy task as we now learn how to live in the exile of Coronavirus, but this does not make it any the less vital.

Right through the novel, Rieux continues his medical work, selflessly if at times despondently. At one point, he discusses with his friend Tarrou something of his motivation as a doctor. He may, he

explains, have begun his career with no greater stimulus than to have a fine profession, but he quickly discovered that he could not remain disengaged in the face of pain and of death; they were not things he might simply become used to. He must fight against the reality of human suffering and death even if, at such times as the tsunami of plague, it is a hopeless task. He has no religious belief, but this does not affect his deep commitment to humanity. When a young boy dies, in his presence and in that of Fr Paneloux who is earnestly praying for the child to be spared, he does not rail for long against the priest but in their shared distress, they realise that they are – in some mysterious way – on the same side, albeit from wholly different standpoints. They are each not only altruistic but committed.

We are struggling in our setting to learn how we may move beyond the floundering individualism that has become so deeply ingrained in societal psyche.

Contrariwise, one of the doctor's irritations is to hear, on his radio late at night, emotional messages of solidarity with the city being broadcast: 'Oran, we're with you!' But not to love or to die together, muses Rieux and this, he says to himself 'is the only way'.

We are struggling in our setting to learn how we may move beyond the floundering individualism that has become so deeply ingrained in societal psyche. The 1980s may be a distant memory today but the 80s' motto, 'greed is good', although it may have disappeared from everyday prattle, has unquestionably had its subtle impact on succeeding generations. People may not admit to greed (or indeed be particularly materialistic even when they are out of the public gaze) but individual fulfilment, rights and 'autonomy' are still the primary tropes for much of society.

THE SUFFERING 'OTHER'

What Rieux and Paneloux struggle to express to one another is

their shared commitment – regardless of any divergence in their motivation or underlying beliefs – to the suffering ‘other’, whoever that other may be.

Even Rambert, having made every effort to escape from Oran (even resorting to some seedy people-smugglers at one point), comes finally to believe that he cannot leave Oran. His place must be there if he were ever to live with himself – ‘now that I’ve seen what I have seen, I know that I belong here whether I want it or not. This business is everybody’s business’.

NO MIDDLE GROUND

In the course of the novel, we are given details of two sermons preached by Fr Paneloux. In the first, where Paneloux is being (as he would understand it) strictly theological, he argues that his hearers should see the plague as being a divine visitation. It is in many ways a harsh sermon, although at the conclusion, the priest does suggest that perhaps his congregation can learn from this encroaching horror and make themselves more serious. The citizens of Oran, we are told at the end of the novel, had learnt ‘prudence’ by the time the plague had waned. Perhaps this world may have learnt something of the same when the Coronavirus finally subsides, whenever that may be? After the death of the little boy Paneloux’s outlook changes. He has been challenged by the horror. His next and final sermon, touching on the child’s death, admits that such an occurrence means that ‘our backs are put to the wall’. He demands of his hearers that will accept that there is no middle ground in the Christian life, they must either believe or deny. An existentialist decision indeed.

Camus was emphatically not a religious believer but nor was he, in Schleiermacher’s familiar phrase, a ‘cultured despiser’ of all religious faith. His was too generous a mind for that and, in any case, God’s existence or otherwise was, as far as he was concerned, not a matter of any great moment. In *The Plague*, we encounter not only

this generosity of spirit but also remarkable insights into human behaviour, from both of which we may surely learn. It is in response to the lament of the journalist Rambert that people have lost the capacity for love that Dr Rieux, while not disagreeing with Rambert, best expresses his own credo and perhaps that of Camus:

There's one thing I must tell you: there's no question of heroism in all this. It's a matter of common decency. That's an idea which may make people smile, but the only means of fighting the plague is – common decency.

*No one has monopolies on truth.
 Rather, like a prism's dispersed side
 Rainbow'd truth allows us variants
 Of another side's pure gathered light.
 Each tradition draws on its own hues
 To extend a hospitality
 As host to host they all in turn unfold
 Millennia of riches in their thought;
 Sharing they then better understand
 Other texts and practice and their own.
 Hosts, of course, may often disagree,
 Seeing eye-to-eye discuss in peace.*

*Micheal O'Siadhail, The Five Quintets,
 3, Steering, Canto 5, 'A Beckoned Dream', p. 231.*

Mass Appeal: A Meditation

JOHN HORGAN

THE TIME-LINE of what has happened to the Mass in the last century or so, is to me, as I approach 80, almost as interesting as any of the other changes I have personally witnessed, within the church and outside it. Some of them have reached me only by way of anecdote. Others are woven into the integument of my memory as if they had happened only yesterday. In the time of Covid-19, when the fear of contagion is leaving our churches empty, it is also, perhaps, the opportunity for a bit of perspective.

One of the most electrifying celebrations of the Mass I heard of was one which I did not attend myself, but which I heard about from the late Austin Flannery, O.P. It was in the Tipperary parish where he was brought up, and while he was still a child, some time in the 1920s, either during or shortly after the Civil War. Austin was in the congregation with his parents when the parish priest, in lieu of a sermon, began to inveigh against the iniquities of the Republicans in that conflict, which was still a very recent memory for many in his congregation.

Austin's father decided on a unique, and uniquely effective, form of protest at this confluence of pulpit and politics. He simply stood up in his seat and remained standing, and silent, until the entire attention of the congregation was focussed on him. The parish priest,

JOHN HORGAN reported on Vatican II and the early Synods of Bishops, later entering politics both in Seanad Éireann and Dail Éireann. He then became the first professor of journalism at Dublin City University, and from 2008 to 2014 he was the first Press Ombudsman. His books include *Irish Media: a Critical History since 1922*.

in Austin's memory of that occasion, eventually gave up the unequal battle for attention, and addressed the silent protester directly.

'Will ye sit down, Flannery!'

'When you preach the word of God,' Flannery *père* was reported to have replied, 'I will sit down – and not a moment before.'

The Masses of my childhood rarely offered such memorable moments. My earliest recollection is of going to St John's parish church in Tralee, but little detail remains, although I made my First Communion there. An old photograph of a small boy in short trousers, with flaxen hair, reminds me only of the vastness, and the chilliness, of that church. I have a stronger memory, though, of the First Confession which preceded it. This was not as eventful as that chronicled by Frank O'Connor's plangent short story, but memorable nonetheless. Rehearsals in my communion class in the Presentation convent school in Tralee involved the nun in charge of the class calling me – it often was me – up to the front of the class to rehearse. Genuinely, I could not think of any infraction of the moral code for which I required forgiveness, except that I had stolen pats of butter out of our family fridge.

Holidays in West Kerry generated more permanent recollections. In Cloghane, the small village where we went to Mass every Sunday, we generally went onto the balcony, from which we could look down on the pews, each of which was occupied, by custom rather than as of legal right, by the same local families for years and years.

Many of the men never entered the church at all, but clustered outside the door, regardless of the space available within. The ones inside were easily identified, even at a distance and from a height. As they had all removed their caps, the whiteness of the top of their skulls contrasted dramatically with the burnt ochre of their necks, bronzed by countless days in the fields or on the bog.

It was also in West Kerry that I was introduced to the 'Stations', the practice whereby each parish priest would, over many months,

set aside a weekday from time to time to say Mass in a parishioner's house. I was too young at the time to register more than childish fascination with the welcome for the priest, the gleam of cut glass, the immaculate altar cloths, and the strange intimacy of a cottage kitchen transformed into a place of worship. Much later I learned that this was more than merely a privilege bestowed on some particularly pious or otherwise deserving parishioners. It often had a hidden, additional agenda – the healing, often without words, of some deep and generally unarticulated local or family feud.

Castlegregory, an alternative Sunday venue, had its own special interest. The elderly parish priest, Fr O'Connor (at least I thought he was elderly; to my ten-year-old gaze, anything over 40 was positively antique), was idiosyncratic. Each year he refused to move to summer time on the appropriate date, but instead organised his Masses on what he described as 'parish time', which was half way between winter time and summer time.

One Sunday, he referred, not for the first time, to the question of the parish 'dues', or financial contributions for the support of the clergy, including himself. Acknowledging the relative impecuniousness of many of his parishioners, he indicated that he would be willing to accept parish support in kind rather than in cash, if the latter was in short supply.

A few weeks later, he returned to the topic. This time, it was to ask those of his parishioners – unknown to him by name – who had interpreted his request too literally by sending him large parcels of sods of turf in lieu of financial support, to desist. As the packages were all unstamped, he explained, he had to pay double postage on each and every one of them.

At St Gerard's, in Bray, where I was a boarding pupil for three years from the age of nine, we were taught how to serve Mass by the chaplain. This was Fr Cunningham, a young man who had played international rugby for Ireland and therefore evoked instant hero-worship.

This did not, of course, prevent those of us who were Mass-servers from sampling – like every schoolboy Mass-server before and since, I am sure – the dregs of the altar wine left in the cruets after Mass.

Religious practice in Glenstal Abbey secondary school was a revelation. Compline on Sunday evenings in the church was an awesome experience; and the Gregorian plain chant we were all taught to sing at Mass every Sunday left such a strong impression that, during the annual Old Boys' residential retreat in the school, it would be revived during late night sessions, fuelled by whiskey contributed by one of the monks.

CONCILIARITIES

A hiatus followed, until I was sent by the *Irish Times* to report, first, the final session of Vatican II in 1965, and then the Synods of 1967, 1969 and 1971. My mentor, Seán Mac Réamoinn of RTÉ, immediately introduced me to the daily Mass in the chapel of the Jesuit Curia just behind the Via della Conciliazione, which was attended by a floating population of journalists, stray visitors, priests, nuns, *periti*, and the occasional bishop. Always in English, with the celebrant(s) facing us, this strikingly combined the intimate and the universal, and the kiss of peace gave the more adventurous members of the congregation the opportunity for suspiciously vigorous embraces of adjacent members of the other sex.

At the other end of the scale there was a spectacular open-air Mass celebrated by Pope Paul VI at Pomezia, in a huge gypsy encampment outside Rome. Silhouetted in his scarlet and white robes against a back-drop of dark storm clouds rolling in from the sea, he resembled an Old Testament prophet addressing a biblical multitude.

Another large congregation, but of a different kind, attended a Mass celebrated on one Sunday in Rome in the large garden of a Jesuit establishment on the outskirts of the city. Here the congregation, assembled on a sloping lawn, were facing a huge-semi-circle of

celebrants – possibly two dozen priests – in a ceremony which was dramatic as well as liturgical.

In the congregation, I was standing beside Archbishop Thomas D. Roberts, a Jesuit who as a missionary had been in charge of the Bombay diocese in India until he had resigned in order deliberately to ensure that an Indian priest would be appointed as his successor. At the end of the Mass, we were chatting when he made an unexpected confession.

‘During the Mass,’ he said, ‘the Devil tempted me. I resisted, of course.’

What had the temptation involved, I enquired.

‘He suggested,’ the archbishop replied, ‘that if I said the words of consecration moments *before* the concelebrants, then none of them would have said Mass!’

He paused briefly, before adding: ‘He [i.e. the Devil] then added that, if I did so, I could collect all their stipends. I resisted, of course.’

CHANGES

After the Council, I was sent on a peregrination around Europe to report on the changes that were taking place in Catholicism. At one stop, in Holland, there was an interdenominational Eucharist at which we were all invited take Communion under both bread and wine. Even now I can remember the *frisson* – of risk, danger, or sheer adventurism – accompanying that experiment. I was reminded of it many years later when President McAleese got into trouble for something similar.

As part of the same expedition, I went to Burgos, in the north of Spain, where a radical priest was celebrating for a congregation composed of the poorest of the poor in a converted garage in a working class suburb. There, not for the first time, I was struck by the extraordinarily effective way in which the core values of the Eucharistic Celebration could be adapted to a myriad different situations.

Later, on my way to Cuba, I spent some time improving my Spanish in Cuernavaca, in the extraordinary educational establishment established by that equally extraordinary product of *mittel-Europa*, Ivan Illich. Yet another liturgical experience was available in that city's cathedral, presided over by its legendary bishop, Mgr Mendez Arceo. High Mass on Sunday there was enlivened – indeed, illuminated – by the presence of a mariachi band, whose vibrant, bouncy rhythms evoked full-throated participation by a largely working-class congregation. It was not difficult to imagine that the musicians' next engagement would be in a local bar.

My experience of Cuban Catholicism, though not liturgical, was just as interesting. Prompted by American friends who knew something of Cuban Catholicism, I arranged to see a bishop in the eastern end of the island, who interpreted his apostolate radically, joining his laity in the summer in their compulsory work in the sugar-cane fields, stripped to the waist like them. He expressed little concern when I asked him whether bishops like him were worried by the diet of compulsory Marxism in the country's schools. I wondered why not.

'I think', he said after a moment's reflection, 'that they are making the same mistake that we did.'

THE UNIVERSAL AND THE INTIMATE

This experience of a Catholicism that could, at its most relevant, combine the universal with the intimate was repeated and reinforced in all sorts of ways and in all sorts of places. On a visit to the Holy Land, where I was doing academic work in a university in Bethlehem run by an American order of priests, I participated in the evening Eucharist around an ordinary table in the dining room of the small apartment they shared. The window was open, and through it we could see, in the dusk, the hills on which Christ had walked.

Nor were these liturgical experiences exclusively Catholic. At the

meeting of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala in Sweden in 1968, one of the core events was the celebration of a Lutheran High Mass, characterised by an extraordinarily lengthy liturgy in Uppsala Cathedral. It took the best part of three hours, and featured on fewer than three different sermons, one each from the Protestant, Orthodox and other Reformed traditions. As we emerged somewhat wearily into the Nordic night, my companion, Seán Mac Réamoinn, remarked pensively that there were occasions when he found himself longing for ‘the ancient simplicities of the Roman rite.’

HERBERT McCABE

A Mass I didn’t attend, but which had a profound effect on all who did, had been celebrated in the English town of Whitby many years earlier by a handsome young priest. According to Herbert McCabe, O.P., who attended the Mass as a lowly clerical student and later told me the story, the celebrant, as was normal, turned to face the congregation at the point in the Mass at when it was time for the sermon, and said simply:

‘There will be no sermon today,’ he said quietly. ‘I just wish to make it quite clear that I am *not* the father of Mrs J—’s child ... *Credo in unum Deum.*’

I doubt that any sermon, before or since, has evoked such attention.

Herbert had many friends in Ireland, and visited often. He combined an impish disregard for many social and political niceties with a deep, almost childish piety, and a presence that radiated his commitment to the weak and powerless.

On one of his visits here, Eileen Cluskey, Frank Cluskey’s wife, had just come out of hospital after a serious illness, and Frank invited Herbert to say Mass in their family home to mark the occasion. A bottle of wine and a loaf of crusty brown bread was procured from the local supermarket for the ceremony, and I can safely say that I

have rarely experienced such reverence, or so much meaning, on either side of the front door of a church.

JOHN CHARLES McQUAID

I have served Mass myself only once since leaving school. This was some time after the end of the Vatican Council, when I received an unexpected invitation to do so from Osmond Dowling, the former *Irish Independent* journalist who had been appointed by Dr. McQuaid as his Press Officer – the first such appointment by any Irish bishop.

The occasion was World Communications Day, to mark which the archbishop had arranged a Mass in All Hallows College, and Ozzie (as we all knew him) rang to ask if Seán Mac Réamoinn and I would serve the special Mass being organised for the occasion. ‘Alright,’ I said to Seán. ‘Each to his own: you take the booze, and I’ll take the book!’

We served the Mass without incident, Dr McQuaid observing us, with a Sphinx-like expression on his face, from a prie-Dieu in the sanctuary. After Mass, there was a general move towards the large gymnasium, in which refreshments of various kinds had been prepared. The practiced eyes of Seán and myself, and a few other gentlemen of the press, saw right at the end of the gymnasium the glint of light on cut glass.

That, of course, was where the alcohol had been sequestered, in generous quality and quantities it must be said. Some time later, the same gentlemen of the press were among the last to leave and we noticed, with some apprehension, that the archbishop had stationed himself by the exit to say a personal farewell to each of his guests.

There was no avoiding it, and each of us had, in turn, to execute the traditional knee-bending, ring-kissing routine of obeisance. As I rose unsteadily to my feet at the end of this procedure, I swear I saw the ghost of a smile – perhaps of triumph – cross the archbishop’s face. I could hardly blame him.

EXPERIENCE AND TRADITION

Today, at a time when Covid-19 is emptying our churches more rapidly than any heresy or secularisation could, maybe we should use the opportunity to re-visit questions of liturgy in ways that can combine the universal with the deeply personal, to encourage a variety that does not challenge the centrality of what is happening, and to develop models that reflect our lived experience as much as our ancient traditions.

I am reminded, somewhat perversely, of Michael Frayn's marvellous column in the *Observer* – later published as part of a book-length collection of his journalism - in which his principal character belonged to the 'Carthaginian Monolithic Church', which forbade its adherents to drive cars with rear-view mirrors, because it was immoral to look backwards while driving forwards. Maybe, in the church as well as behind the wheel, we should sometimes learn to look in both directions at once, at the primitive but dynamic simplicity of the rural Station Mass as well as the more public, universal, but sometimes static and formulaic, model that now sometimes seems, despite everyone's best intentions, to be almost on life support.

Coming in Doctrine & Life

**Towards a Church of Democratized
Mysticism**

John O'Brien

**Coronavirus: towards a Theological
Response**

John Scally

No Man Is an Island

DAVID BEGG

THE ARRIVAL in the post of the yellow coronavirus public information booklet stirred in my memory a period of great fear in my childhood. Readers of a certain age may remember in the 1960s every home receiving a similar size booklet telling us how to prepare for nuclear war. For 13 days between 16 and 28 October 1962 the United States and the Soviet Union stood on the precipice of a great conflagration that could have killed millions of people. It was the period of the Cuban Missile Crisis and our escape seemed extraordinary.

Graham Allison and Philip Zeikow wrote an account of the crisis in 1999 based on declassified material which reveals that John and Robert Kennedy were under enormous pressure from hawks on their own side to strike first against the Soviets.¹ That they resisted the pressure ensured our deliverance. Given their Catholic background, I wonder whether the brothers prayed for guidance? Allison and Zelikow's work has canonical status in the field of international relations studies. Reading their forensic account of the crisis, no other explanation seems plausible.

The palpable fear that seeped into every part of our being in 1962 is a lot like that which we are experiencing in the face of the coronavirus. Just as with nuclear war, everyone is vulnerable to the virus. It

1. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (2nd ed) (New York: Longman, 1999).

DAVID BEGG served as secretary general of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions from 2001 to 2015.

exposes the fragility and interdependence of our world. It is an interdependence which the passage of sixty years, the achievements of science and, more recently, the propensity to withdraw into nationalistic isolation, cannot assuage.

The policy response to the coronavirus by our government, and indeed most governments, has been swift and decisive. Globally, central banks have cut interest rates and have embarked upon large-scale new quantitative easing programmes which amounts to printing money to buy bonds issued by governments. This is important because it minimises the cost of borrowing for governments and governments are spending huge amounts of money to prevent companies from going bust and subsidising wages. *The Economist* points out that even in normal circumstances, roughly 8% of businesses in OECD countries fail every year, while 10% of the workforce lose a job.² Taken in conjunction with the massive injection of cash into health services to try to save lives, this represents a massive expansion of the protective role of the state. For libertarians no doubt this is the so-called nanny state on steroids. But as the *Financial Times* columnist, Janan Ganesh observes, if there are no atheists in foxholes, neither are there libertarians.³

IS GOVERNMENT THE PROBLEM?

Although the United States Congress voted a \$2 trillion package to fight the pandemic, the initial response of the President was, to put it charitably, underwhelming. The reason, perhaps, is that antipathy to big government is deeply rooted in the Republican Party. In the modern era this can be traced back to Ronald Reagan who, in his inaugural address on 20 January 1981, declared: 'In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem, it is the problem.' In

2. 'Building up the Pillars of the State', *The Economist*, March 28, 2020, p. 20.

3. Janan Ganesh 'Coronavirus and the comeback of the administrative state', *The Financial Times*, March 11, 2020.

consort with Margaret Thatcher in the UK, he introduced sweeping changes in the political economy of the Anglosphere including the privatisation of state companies, large scale de-regulation, and welfare retrenchment. It was an ideology which has dominated for 40 years but now, with the tragedy of the coronavirus, these chickens are coming home to roost. In a decade bookended by two global crises, it is no longer possible to deny the necessity for large-scale state intervention; and that implies having a robust public infrastructure to provide public goods like health services, and, as happened in 2008, the slump-averting recapitalisation of the banks. While the 2008 financial crisis led to recession and mass unemployment, the coronavirus will not only be worse in economic terms but it will also involve the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. It has been described by the former President of the European Central Bank (ECB), Mario Dragi, as a human tragedy of potentially biblical proportions.⁴

CUT-BACKS

At the beginning of April, the numbers of people in the US infected by the virus and the number of deaths exceeded those of China, making it the global epicentre of the disease. The tragedy is that this need not have happened in the richest country in the world. The Trump administration is well known for its hostility to experts. At the centre of the US response to the coronavirus is the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. In recent years, its capacity has been debilitated by a series of funding cuts (10% in 2018, 19% in 2019). At the start of the year the President called for a 20% cut in spending on programmes to fight emerging infections and zoonotic diseases (that is, pathogens like coronaviruses, which originate in animals and jump to humans).⁵

4. Mario Draghi, 'We face a war against coronavirus and must mobilise accordingly', *The Financial Times*, March 25, 2020.

5. Joseph Stiglitz, 'Plagued by Trumpism', *Social Europe*, March 12, 2020.

Hardly perfect timing, but this approach was in perfect harmony with the small-state ideology of the Republicans going back to Reagan. Policy choices, made over decades, have relentlessly favoured the interests of the private sector in general, and large corporations in particular, over both the state and labour.

In the case of the latter, the costs to public health are manifested in structural problems that make a pandemic response more difficult – lack of paid sick leave, a large uninsured population, and a significant number of insured people nonetheless worried about out-of-pocket medical bills – cannot be mended overnight even with a \$2 trillion cash injection. The \$1,200 ‘helicopter money’ per adult benefit being handed out as part of the package will not go far. In New York, the most affected US city, it will pay only a little over one-third of a single month’s median rent. So the people who work in the gig economy – childminders, cleaners, Uber drivers and others – will try to continue working, possibly becoming viral vectors and making it harder to control the disease.

How insane is it, anyway, from a public policy perspective, that a company such as Uber, with a market valuation of \$46 billion, has been able to maintain the fiction that its drivers are not real employees, rendering them ineligible for benefits? The result, apart from the public policy implications altogether, is to push the burden on to taxpayers. Uber is leveraging the free-market fantasy that there is an equal power dynamic between America’s gig workers and its biggest corporations.⁶

Moreover, America under Trump has been moving steadily towards an isolationist position in a geo-political sense. He has abandoned long-standing allies and has embarked on an ‘America First’ kind of mercantilist policy, picking fights with China, Mexico, Canada and other countries. Likewise, Britain, with Trump’s encour-

6. Rana Foroohar, ‘Fifty years of US policy comes home to roost’, *The Financial Times*, March 29th, 2020.

agement, has embraced a version of Brexit which, as the crisis has evolved, looks more and more unsustainable. Writing in *The Guardian* on 13 March, the former British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, appealed for international co-operation in these terms:

It used to be said of the Bourbons that they would never learn by their mistakes. Centuries on, national leaders still seem unable to apply or even absorb the hard-earned lesson that crises teach us, from the Sars and Ebola epidemics to the financial meltdown: that global problems need global not just local and national, responses.⁷

SOLIDARITY

What is needed is a co-ordinated health, monetary and fiscal policy response to the crisis with a view to tackling the spread of the disease, managing financial shocks, stabilising economies and helping the vulnerable.

In the case of Europe, the European Central Bank (ECB) launched a €750 billion bond-buying programme on 18 March. Almost all constraints that applied to previous asset-purchase programmes have been removed.⁸ Crucially, this includes a self-imposed limit to buy no more than a third of any country's eligible bonds. This flexibility is in marked contrast to the way the 2008 crisis was handled. And yet, just as Greece was isolated during the financial crisis, there has been a disappointing lack of solidarity towards Italy which is suffering terribly on this occasion.

Moreover, the core ideological fault-line that prevented the mutualisation of debt in 2008 remains. Ireland, and eight other coun-

7. Gordon Brown, 'In the coronavirus our leaders are failing us', *The Guardian*, March 13, 2020.

8. 'Europe, more or less: the EU must move closer together – or let states save themselves', *The Economist*, March 21, 2020, p.25.

tries have called for the issuing of Corona bonds by the Eurozone, which would in effect mean that debt incurred to respond to the crisis would be shouldered collectively. This has been rejected by the Dutch and Germans, albeit that there is strong disagreement within the Dutch government at this stance.⁹ The truth of the matter is that the Germans and their Dutch allies are afraid they will be left to carry the can for debts incurred by other countries and, in that respect, they see Corona bonds as fraught with 'Moral Hazard'.

The coronavirus is stress-testing financial, economic and social systems to the limit. As Mario Draghi wrote in a recent article for *The Financial Times*:

Faced with unforeseen circumstances, a change of mind-set is as necessary in this crisis as it would be in times of war. The shock we are facing is not cyclical. The loss of income is not the fault of any of those who suffer it. The cost of hesitation may be irreversible. The memory of the suffering of Europeans in the 1920s is enough of a cautionary tale.¹⁰

The Economist, a self-proclaimed liberal newspaper, frets that there will be no turning back when the crisis is over. It fears that calls for more activist fiscal and monetary approaches to government will come against a backdrop of structurally higher demands for state spending. This will be compounded by the demands placed on health care by an ageing population and the costs associated with the more effective treatment of a wider range of illnesses.¹¹

Fair enough, but if the coronavirus crisis has proved anything, it is that a lot of things in our world are very flawed, none more so than our understanding of the relational nature of what it means to

9. Naomi O'Leary, 'Dutch face fierce backlash over bonds', *The Irish Times*, April 1, 2020, p. 17.

10. Mario Draghi.

11. *The Economist*, March 28, 2020, p. 22.

be human. The eminent Irish theologian, Dermot Lane, captures it well when he writes that human life is organically inter-connected, inter-related and inter-dependent.¹² The truth of this must be assimilated if we are to deal, not just with the present crisis, but the one which is surely coming with climate change in the next decade.

I hope readers will indulge me if I conclude with this rather long quotation from Thomas Merton which seems to me to be apposite in current circumstances:

The meaning of life is not to be looked for merely in the sum total of my own achievements. It is seen only in the complete integration of my achievements and failures with the achievements and failures of my own generation and society, and time. It is seen, above all, in my integration in the mystery of Christ. That was what the poet John Donne realised during a serious illness when he heard the death knell tolling for another. 'The church is Catholic, universal', he said, 'so are all her actions, all that she does belongs to all ... Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? But who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of the world?'

Every other man is a piece of myself, for I am a part and a member of mankind ... Nothing at all makes sense, unless we admit, with John Donne, that: 'No man is an island, entire of itself; everyman is a piece of the continent, a part of the main'.¹³

12. Dermot A. Lane, 'Eschatology: Hope Seeking Understanding' in Anne Hession and Patricia Kiernan (eds), *Exploring Theology: Making Sense of Catholic Tradition*, (Dublin: Veritas, 2007).

13. Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1996 (1955) pp xx-xxi

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, 30 Years On

JOHN COONEY

TUESDAY May 8, 1990 had been quiet in the *Irish Times* newsroom. A colleague and I were preparing to leave ahead of closing time to enjoy a few pints in Bowes Bar when an anxious-looking Renagh Houlihan, news desk duty editor, came over and whispered to me: ‘We are getting reports that Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich has died suddenly in France. Will you check this out?’

Immediately, I rang Fr Raymond Murray, the cathedral administrator in Armagh, to find out if the rumour was true, but before I could even pose the question, he said with palpable grief in his voice: ‘Yes, John, I’m afraid the Cardinal has died of a heart-attack.’

I signalled to Renagh that the cardinal was indeed dead, and as she began organising a team of reporters who included Mark Brennock, Jim Cusack and Kate Holmquist to assist in next day’s lead story. I obtained from Fr Murray details of the circumstances surrounding the cardinal’s premature passing, at age 66, while leading Armagh’s diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes.¹

In the days that followed the national and international media gave massive coverage to the cardinal’s untimely death. The *Irish Press* group despatched Aidan Hennigan and Tom O’Mahony to Lourdes, while the *Irish Independent* group sent Joe Power. I remained in Dublin to coordinate coverage primarily based on reports from the *Irish Times* Paris Correspondent, Katherine Hone, who travelled

1. *Irish Times*, 9 May 1990.

JOHN COONEY, historian and a former religious affairs correspondent, is preparing *Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, Ireland’s Lost Peacemaker*.

to the Marian shrine. Photographs showed a strained-looking cardinal addressing the Armagh pilgrims at his last Mass in Lourdes grotto before he was taken to hospital in Toulouse, where he died.

I was among the journalists at Cardinal Ó Fiaich's funeral on Tuesday May 15 in Armagh Cathedral who heard Bishop Cahal Daly, later cardinal primate, declaring to a huge congregation which included President Patrick Hillery, Taoiseach Charles Haughey, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, and Sinn Féin leaders, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, that 'Cardinal Ó Fiaich was totally opposed to all use of violence purporting to advance nationalist aims.'²

STATURE

His stature as one of the most significant figures of twentieth century Irish Catholicism was affirmed by the range of tributes. He was the first priest for 100 years to become archbishop of Armagh without having been bishop in between, and the first local priest for 800 years. 'No Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh was more embroiled in politics this century than Cardinal Ó Fiaich,' wrote Maurice Manning, 'Yet no cardinal was less of a traditional ecclesiastical politician than he. For many Unionists his enthusiasms for the Irish language, Gaelic games, his republican views and his concern over republican prisoners in the Maze Prison, confirmed their deep-seated suspicions about his long-term motives. He had to deal consistently with Margaret Thatcher's Government which was sometimes insensitive, arrogant or simply uninformed.'

Professor Manning, a Fine Gael T.D., acknowledged that most Fine Gael and Labour politicians viewed him (fairly or unfavourably) as an instinctive Fianna Fáiler.'³ This observation struck me as accurate when I reported for the *Irish Times* de Valera's funeral in Dub-

2. *Irish Times*, May 16, 1990.

3. *Sunday Press*, May 13, 1990.

lin's Pro-Cathedral on September 23, 1975 at which the homily was preached by Monsignor Ó Fiaich, then President of Maynooth.⁴

Fellow Armaghman and deputy leader of the SDLP, Seamus Mallon, said that had he known it was to be the last farewell when they met in Mullaghbawn on the Friday before his sudden death, he would have told him that that people had listened and turned their backs on violence in response to his pleas. 'But most of all I'd have told him that we admired and respected him.'

Recalling that Ó Fiaich's elevation to Armagh in 1977 was a traumatic shock to the British Government which 'bit its stiff upper-lip, and studiously denied that it had turned every diplomatic stone to prevent the appointment', and that in the North, unionists found it easy to respond to those vibes – after all, wasn't he a GAA fan who spoke Irish and came from Crossmaglen.'

'ONE OF THEIR OWN'

Mallon also noted that 'Northern nationalists saw it all differently. Tom Fee was one of their own, a Northerner, the first Armagh man since St Malachy to be Cardinal. He was of their soul; he shared their roots; he knew their pulse. He was aware of their suffering – economically and socially yes, but perhaps more deeply their political and cultural isolation from the rest of Ireland. To them he epitomised that unique fusion of religious allegiance and political identity which goes to make up the Northern Catholic nationalist. From the day of his appointment he was their man – and to hell with the begrudgers. As murder followed murder, he was to be found in the homes of the bereaved. When the trauma of the hunger strikes moved inextricably towards stark tragedy he was in the prisons, in 10 Downing Street, in Rome, trying to save lives and to prevent the emotional haemorrhage which he knew would follow. After the slaughter of worshippers in

4. See Nollaig Ó Muraile, Homily at Eamon de Valera's Funeral Mass, 1975, *Sean-chas Ard Macha*, Volume 26, No. 2, 2017.

the Mountain Lodge Pentecostal Church, he was in their homes too, offering sympathy and consolation.⁵

Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, Robin Eames, stressed Cardinal Ó Fiaich's commitment to ecumenism. 'His ecumenical spirit and a yearning to understand other Christian traditions were never really appreciated by Protestants. In private conversations he would say "Can you tell me what really worries Protestants?"'⁶

EGALITARIAN

In a coincidence which would have elicited a chuckle and a puff of his pipe from Cardinal Ó Fiaich, his death was recorded in the 150th anniversary edition of the international Catholic weekly journal, *The Tablet*. Enda McDonagh, professor of moral theology at Maynooth, observed that becoming a cardinal 'did not alter in any way his relations with people. He remained what he had been when he was ordained in 1948, a people's priest, a more contemporary, more engaging and, above all, a more democratic version of the traditional Irish pastor, the *sagart aroon*.'

For McDonagh, Ó Fiaich broke with episcopal remoteness and the image of the authority figure. In his egalitarian attitudes he was a quintessentially modern man and a truly Christian disciple, as he met with rich and poor, powerful and powerless. From Unity Secretariat in Rome to Dublin Castle reception for the King of Spain, to Gaelic football match in Croke Park or Travellers' site or prison, Cardinal Ó Fiaich moved confidently and kindly, knowing people's names and remembering their interests, their joys and their sorrows. The pompous, authoritarian image of bishop could not survive the impact of a cardinal so much at ease in the convivial company of Irish musicians or footballers or Lourdes pilgrims. Episcopacy and apos-

5. *Sunday Press*, May 13, 1990.

6. *Sunday Press*, May 13, 1990.

tolicity were finally restored to the people.

In all that nature and grace combined beautifully. His more systematic contributions to Irish Catholicism derived from his early commitment to Irish (Gaelic) language and culture and his later specialisation in the history of early Irish Christianity. *Le catholicisme du type irlandais*, which has benefited from the robust pastoral engagement of Irish priests had largely lost touch even in Ireland with the substance of its early Gaelic spirituality. This rich heritage was no longer nourishing a modern faith. Tomás Ó Fiaich strove throughout his life to give back to the Irish people something of this remarkable rich heritage.

It was not all the fault of his critics. The cardinal was intuitive in judgement, in action impulsive and given to improvisation; the limitations of a warm and imaginative human being. He was not systematic in his thinking or strategic in his planning and activity. He had little of the managerial skills and tactical mind of his predecessor, Cardinal William Conway, whose management of the Irish Church through the difficulties of post-Vatican II reform and the early years of the Northern Troubles could not be emulated by his much warmer but less calculating successor. On a number of occasions he accepted the principle of the separation of Church and State in Ireland and indicated that the constitutional provisions on divorce, would change in the context of a united Ireland. He did not follow this through in the public debates in the Republic, yielding, it would seem, to the more conservative views of the two Dublin archbishops, Dermot Ryan and Kevin McNamara.⁷

Within three months of the cardinal's death, a slim book was written by former priest and head of religious programmes at RTÉ, Billy FitzGerald, drawing on their production of television documentaries made in the footsteps of Ireland's wandering missionaries across Eu-

7. *The Tablet*, May 19, 1990

rope, particularly Sts Columbanus, Kilian and Oliver Plunkett.⁸

Tom O'Mahony and I planned a joint biography of the cardinal. With a view to obtaining a British publisher I contacted our Oxford-based friend, Peter Hebblethwaite, for recommendations about how to approach the London market. Peter, a former Jesuit and editor of *The Month*, was the premier Vaticanologist. Unfortunately, Peter shared the British Establishment's negative view of Cardinal Ó Fiaich as being pro-IRA and a theological lightweight. So nothing came of our initiative. For our prospective project, however, I compiled a hefty file of speeches, interviews and anecdotes on Cardinal Ó Fiaich which, three decades on, provides invaluable source material unavailable on the internet.

SCHOLARSHIP

Indeed, few Irish prelates have left more tangible monuments dedicated to scholarship than Cardinal Ó Fiaich as the founder-editor of *Seanchas Ard Marcha*, the journal of the Armagh Historical Society. It has published memories by colleagues such as Seán Brady, recalling that when Rector of the Pontifical Irish College in Rome in the 1980s, he enjoyed picking up Cardinal Ó Fiaich at Fiumicino Airport, hearing from him the latest GAA results as 'he struggled usually unsuccessfully to light his pipe and recover from the smokeless flight.'⁹

In 1999 the splendid Ó Fiaich Library and Archive was opened in the cathedral grounds in Armagh containing his books and papers as well as those of his primatial predecessors. Plans for the opening of his personal papers as Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland from 1977 to 1990 under the 30 years rule have been delayed not least on account of the Corona Virus Epidemic but also as a result of slippage in opening the papers of Cardinal William Conway,

8. Billy FitzGerald, *Father Tom, An Authorised Portrait of Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich*, Collins, Fount Paperbacks, 1990.

9. *Seanchas Ard Macha*, Volume 26, No. 2, 2017.

1963-1977. This may prove no great disadvantage as the extensive collection of the papers of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, which I first explored in the Dublin archdiocesan archives for my 1999 biography *Ruler of Catholic Ireland*, have at least another two years of extractions before this rich minefield is declared officially exhausted. Not open for inspection yet are the papers of McQuaid's successors, Dermot Ryan, Kevin McNamara and Cardinal Desmond Connell. No doubt, too, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, has been preparing his bulky papers for posterity, now that he reached the obligatory date for offering his resignation to Pope Francis in April 2020.

THE JOHN HUME CONNECTION

Exactly 30 years on from Cardinal Ó Fiaich's death, his legacy as one of the most significant figures of twentieth century Irish Catholicism is growing. In 1997, with the publication of Paul Routledge's perceptive and significant biography of John Hume, focus was placed on Cardinal Ó Fiaich's exceptional influence on the shaping of the future Nobel Laureate's political philosophy. Hume came under Ó Fiaich's spell in 1953 when the Armagh man became the Derry seminarian's history tutor at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. Routledge spotted how the sociable Ó Fiaich was to the fore in removing traditional barriers which had distanced professors from students. 'First *The Tablet* appeared,' Routledge wrote, opening up Hume's mind beyond the narrow horizons of pre-Vatican II theology, and then in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, seminarians were allowed to read the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*.

Again, under Ó Fiaich's supervision Hume's M.A. thesis, entitled 'Social and Economic Aspects of Growth of Derry, 1825-50', became the basis of his plan for Derry's development in the post-1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement era. Furthermore, Ó Fiaich's specialist expertise on Ireland's missionaries in Europe such as St Columbanus is detect-

able in Hume's decision in 1979 to run for membership of the European Parliament; and even before Hume broadened 'the Irish Question' through his engagements with President Jimmy Carter and the 'Four Horsemen' – House of Representatives Speaker, Tip O'Neill, Senators Ted Kennedy, and Daniel Moynihan and New York Governor, Pat Carey – Ó Fiaich had visited America regularly, speaking out, time and time again, against Irish-Americans sending financial support to the Provisional IRA. It was Hume who brought this diplomacy with America to political fulfilment with President Bill Clinton.¹⁰

POPE JOHN PAUL II

In 2011 Bishop Edward Daly published an important memoir on the preparations for the 1979 visit to Ireland by Pope John Paul during which a strong bond was forged between the Polish pontiff and the Irish primate through their interest in early Irish missionaries, and of how during those days from September 29 to October 2, Cardinal Ó Fiaich 'never stopped smiling. He was happy and radiant, beaming all over'.¹¹

It was in September 1975 that I first met then Monsignor Ó Fiaich at a launch by Veritas Publications of his *Columbanus* and my *No News is Bad News*. For me, he embodied the ideal that 'A Catholic intellectual formation requires more than a knowledge of philosophy and church teaching. History is also needed,' as expounded by Christopher Dawson in *The Making of Europe, an Introduction to the History of European Unity*. He invited me to lunch and placed me on his right hand side at his top table in Maynooth.

Reopening my Ó Fiaich file, 30 years on, I discovered a cache of seven letters from him to me as Humbert School director. The last time we met was in January 1990 at Ara Coeli where assembled scholars discussed developments in Irish ecclesiastical history: an encoun-

10. *John Hume*, Harper-Collins Publishers, 1997.

11. Edward Daly, *A Troubled See*, Four Courts Press, 2011.

ter re-establishing Armagh as a centre of historical exchanges in the manner of the *studia* of medieval Europe.

His last letter thanked me for informing him that his paper on *The Irish Colleges in France*, delivered in Castlebar in 1989, would be published during the 1990 August Humbert School. ‘The Bishop Stock lecture will be an interesting experience for me.’¹²

Rather than have an empty pulpit where the cardinal would have surely opened new ecumenical horizons, I recounted my contacts with him, saying the next step in our relationship was for him to become the Humbert School patron. That baton was taken over by John Hume.

My abiding memory is of Cardinal Ó Fiaich, pipe in mouth and glass in hand, in Bessie’s bar, overlooking Kilcummin Strand, giving an impromptu lecture on Irish priests in Mayo politics, a moment immortalised by Alan Murdoch in *The Independent*.

12. Cardinal Ó Fiaich to John Cooney, 26 January 1990. See John Cooney and Bernard Treacy O.P. *Dialogue towards Peace & Justice, The Bishop Stock Addresses*, Dominican Publications, 1990. Cardinal Tomas Ó Fiaich, *The Irish Colleges in France*, Foreword by John Cooney, Veritas Publications, 1990.

Understanding Transgender Persons

GERALD D. COLEMAN

IN *The Revelatory Body*,¹ Luke Timothy Johnson points to the growing perception that one of the inadequacies of the binary understanding of sex as male/female is its failure to take into account the variety of ways humans embody themselves sexually.² Transvestites, *e.g.*, have a powerful yearning to clothe themselves and adopt the manner of a gender not ostensibly their own.

What we have designated ‘transgender,’ Johnson names ‘gender displacement or misplacement’, a sense that one really belongs in another gender than the one apparently dictated by the arrangement of one’s sexual organs. Johnson describes gender dis/misplacement as a ‘dramatic form’ found in people who are utterly convinced, often from a remarkably early age, that although anatomically men, they are really women, or although anatomically women, they are really

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1. *The Revelatory Body*, Luke Timothy Johnson, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015.
 2. Johnson, 195. See Jonathan Heaps and Neil Ormerod, ‘Statistically Ordered: Gender, Sexual Identity, and the Metaphysics of ‘Normal,’ *Theological Studies* 80:2 (2019), 346-369.
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men. With medical technology, some transgender persons undertake to change their sex anatomically (called sex reassignment surgery, gender reassignment surgery, or gender confirmation surgery), hormonally, and behaviorally, while others attempt to remedy their dysphoria to some degree of satisfaction, including surgical interventions, for example, breast augmentation, removal of the Adam's apple.

Transgendered persons have a profound psychological and emotional experience of being embodied in the wrong way. They are convinced their present sexual configuration is a distortion of what they were meant to be, that is, their true identity. It is critical to understand the distinction between authentic gender dysphoria and gender ideology. Gender theory is an ideology which advocates pan-sexualism or sexual fluidity where persons choose a gender identity according to their whims, desires or social/cultural ethos, *e.g.*, teens becoming transgender because it is trendy. Gender dysphoria is not an experience one chooses.³ A person might choose to engage in cross-gender behaviors, but the experience of true gender dysphoria is not chosen, nor is it a sign of willful disobedience or personal sin.

In a 2017 opinion piece in *the New York Times*, a mother speaks about the experience of her young daughter. 'She's not transgender. She's a Tomboy.'⁴ Lisa Selin Davis explains that her daughter is 'not gender nonconforming ... She is gender *role* nonconforming.' This story highlights a highly-charged study by Brown University's Lisa Littman, a behavioral and social science professor.⁵ Littman argues

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3. See Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015, 81.
 4. http://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/opinion/my-daughter-is-not-transgender-shes-a-tomboy.html?_r_0.
 5. See Joy Pullman, *The Education Invasion: How Common Core Fights Parents for Control of American Kids*, New York: Encounter Books, 2017. Littman's study can be found at <https://thefederalist.com/2018/08/31/explosive-ivy-league-study-repressed-for-finding-transgender-kids-may-be-a-social-contagion/>.

that ‘rapid-onset gender dysphoria’ is likely to be the result of a social contagion linked with having friends who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender. Her study presents data about adolescents, mostly girls, who with no prior history of dysphoria, are requesting irreversible medical interventions and are being supported by the rapid growth in transgender treatment centers. Littman believes that transgenderism is nothing more than a dangerous fad.

PIONEERING EXPERIENCES

This study serves as a bridge to better understand adult persons who have exhibited genuine gender dysphoria. The first highly-publicized and unprecedented case received recent attention in the 2015 film *The Danish Girl*⁶ which brought to the screen the life of Einar Magnus Andreas Wegener who was born in Denmark in 1882. His year of birth is sometimes stated as 1886 which appears to be from a book about him which changed certain facts to protect him and the identities of persons involved in his life. He was better known as Lili Ilse Elvenes (or Elbe), a transgender woman (MtF) and the first identifiable recipient of sex reassignment surgery (SRS).⁷ She has often been referred to as a ‘transgender pioneer’.

While in college at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, he married Gerda Gottlieb in 1904. He was 19 and she was 22 years old. After graduation, they travelled through Italy and France and eventually settled in Paris in 1912 where Elbe could live openly as a woman. Gottlieb identified herself as lesbian. Elbe was an accomplished landscape painter and exhibited her works in several distinguished salons and museums. Gottlieb became famous for her paintings of beautiful women. Elbe once stood in for one of her absentee models, wearing stockings and heels and enjoying women’s clothing. She then be-

6. At its Venice Premiere, the film received a ten-minute standing ovation.

7. Some reports indicate that he had rudimentary ovaries in her abdomen, thus making her intersex.

came more at ease in her identification as a woman. An unsuspecting public was shocked to discover that the model who inspired Gottlieb's depictions of *petites femmes' fatales* was in fact Elbe.

In the 1920s, Elbe regularly presented as a woman and was often introduced by Gottlieb as her own sister when she was dressed in female clothes. In 1930, Elbe went to Berlin for sex confirmation surgery which was highly experimental at the time.⁸ The first surgery removed his testicles and was done under the supervision of sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. The rest of her surgeries were carried out by Kurt Warnkros, a physician at the Dresden Municipal Women's Clinic. The second operation was to implant an ovary into her abdominal musculature, the third surgery removed the penis and scrotum, and the fourth surgery in Dresden in 1931 to transplant a uterus and construct a vaginal canal. By the time of this final surgery, her case was a sensation in the newspapers of Denmark and Germany.

In October 1930, a Danish court invalidated her marriage to Gottlieb, and Elbe legally changed her sex and name. Elbe was the second transgender woman to undergo Gohrbandt's vaginoplasty technique. Remnants of her scrotum were left intact and modified into labia. These surgeries were new and experimental leading to Elbe's immune system rejecting the transplanted uterus.

In a pre-antibiotic age, the labiaplasty and surgical procedures led to her death from infection in September 1931, three months after the final surgery. She died of cardiac arrest brought on by the infections. The full narrative of her surgical processes will never be fully uncovered due to the book-burning at the Institute for Sexual Research by Nazi students in May 1933, and the obliteration of the Dresden Women's Clinic by the Allied bombing raids of February 1945.⁹

8. See <http://allthatsinteresting.com/lili-elbe>

9. See Hoyer, ed., *Man into Woman: A Portrait of Lili Elbe*, London: Blue Boat Books, 2004.

Christine Jorgensen lived her early life as a man,¹⁰ born on May 30, 1926 as George W. Jorgensen. She felt great discomfort, anxiety, and depression in her assigned gender and eventually had surgery to transition to a woman. She described her early years as George as ‘unhappy.’ She had an aversion to masculine games and clothes and ‘knew something was wrong.’ She wanted to play with her sister’s toys and dolls, while admiring her sister’s long hair and dresses. His sister and others noted his ‘outstanding feminine mannerisms’. He often expressed fear and frustration. For years, Jorgensen struggled with what she later described as an ‘ineffable, inexorable, and increasingly unbearable yearning to live his life as a woman.’¹¹

In 1950 she sailed to Europe in search of a physician who would alter her bodily sex. Within months she found Dr Christian Hamburger, an endocrinologist, who agreed to administer hormone treatments. She also underwent psychiatric evaluations. She told her psychiatrist, ‘I desperately need to live as a woman.’ In 1952, George changed his name to Christine out of respect for Dr Christian Hamburger.¹²

Over the next two years she took massive doses of estrogen and in 1952 she underwent a penectomy, and her scrotum was reshaped into labia. She did not initially undergo surgery to construct a vagina as her stated wish was to live as and look like a woman, not to have sexual intercourse. Evidence suggests, however, that she did not lead the kind of chaste life she tried to project. In 1954, she underwent a vaginoplasty from skin grafts taken from her thighs. In 1959, she attempted to secure a marriage license which generated another flurry of attention.¹³

10. Claudia Kalb *Summary of Andy Warhol Was A Hoarder*, San Francisco: Instaread, 2016, 2-21.

11. Meyerwitz, 1.

12. Yarhouse, 13.

13. In the 1950s sex change also made its debut in B-grade movies such as *Glen or Glenda?*, followed soon by cheap paperback novels such as *The Lady was a Man*.

She became a media sensation and the personification of glamour due to her youth and beauty. On December 1, 1952, the *New York Times Daily News* announced the ‘sex change’ surgery of Jorgensen.¹⁴ The front-page headline read, ‘Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty: Operations Transform Bronx Youth’. She went from being the quintessential postwar masculine GI to a blonde beauty epitomizing feminine glamour. One story read, ‘Beautiful Christine Dazzles Newsmen’.¹⁵

DEBATES

Her story opened debate on the mutability and conceptualization of sex in the twentieth century, leading to the notion that biological sex is mutable and can be defined and redefined as physicians modify chromosomes, hormones, and external genitalia. The belief began to grow that masculinity and femininity do not spring automatically from biological sex. Jorgensen’s story raised questions about how to define a man and a woman and provoked anxiety about the end of the seemingly natural, binary categories of male and female.

She identified as heterosexual and distanced herself from any version of same-sex desire. ‘Her drastic move ... had transformed her into a heterosexual woman, but it ... also forced the question of what counted as “normal”.’¹⁶ Numerous doctors classified her as a pseudo-hermaphrodite or intersex who had masculine genitals but female organs inside. One urologist opined that in her case ‘the actual sex had been disguised and was simply released.’ Some went so far as to claim that the whole case was a hoax and a sham: ‘Christine is still George, a guy ... a man with a deep and tragic problem.’¹⁷ She

14. Joanne Meyerowitz *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. We will follow Meyerowitz’s presentation of Jorgensen’s transition.

15. *New York Daily News*, December 3, 1953, 3.

16. Meyerowitz, 69.

17. Meyerowitz, 71.

was often the butt of jokes and mockery. The comedian Victor Borge was asked if he planned to return to his homeland of Denmark and replied, 'No, I might come home as Hildegard.' These hostile reactions did nothing, however, to damage her general popularity and she refused to portray herself as a freak or pervert. As long as she stayed in the news, her fame heightened and one organization in New York named her 'Woman of the Year.'

The Jorgensen story brought many transgender people out into the public eye and she remained a popular figure until her death in 1989. Her impact continued onto successive generations and numerous transgender people saw her as a model for struggles for human rights, setting a pattern for transgender people to fulfill their desires for bodily transformation.

Perhaps the most publicized transgender person in recent times is Bruce Jenner. It was 2015 when Jenner, an Olympic champion, American hero, and step-father to the Kardashians, was interviewed in a special two-hour segment of 20/20 by ABC journalist Diane Sawyer 'about his experience as a man who had long lived with a deep secret. All his life, though revered as a model of athleticism and masculinity, Bruce Jenner believed he was really a woman.'¹⁸

A few months later, Jenner made an astonishing appearance on the front page of *Vanity Fair* magazine. Wearing lingerie and posing provocatively on a barstool, hands tucked behind her back, Jenner copied that hyper-femininity of exaggerated sex appeal often displayed on the covers of glossy magazines. The cover was an act of self-revelation, a transition to fully identify as a woman. 'Call Me Caitlyn,' the cover proclaimed. 'The message was clear: men can become women if they feel or perceive themselves to be women, and vice versa.'¹⁹ Jenner's hands were hidden because they betrayed

18. Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, Denmark: TheGoodBook Co., 2017, 19.

19. Walker, 20. Acrimonious debates unfolded about bathroom and locker room

his masculinity and defied feminization. In July 2015, Caitlyn won the Arthur Ashe Courage Award from ESPN and later that year the Woman of the Year from *Glamour* magazine. She then launched a documentary series *I am Cait*, which lasted for only two seasons.

In 2017 Caitlyn published *The Secrets of My Life*.²⁰ She writes in the author's note, 'Bruce existed for sixty-five years, and Caitlyn is just going on her second birthday. That's the reality.' Elsewhere she writes, 'I have high hopes that Caitlyn is a better person than Bruce. I'm very much looking forward to that.'²¹ *The Secrets of My Life* is a helpful guide as to what transgender means for Caitlyn and sets a blueprint for other transgender persons.

Caitlyn believes that when people come to see her, they are really coming to listen to Bruce Jenner, the decathlon competitor who was dubbed 'the world's greatest athlete'. Associated Press named him 'Hollywood-handsome' and the *Washington Post* called him the 'golden boy from San Jose, CA.' Caitlyn claims that she loathed her body and her chest should have had breasts. 'I go to bed with frustration and shame. I wake up with frustration and shame ... I was always uncomfortable.' She details her fears as having the 'Final Surgery', loneliness, abandoning her children, being seen as a 'sex deviate.' She writes that 'I was terribly at odds with myself, consumed by failure because of dyslexia and massive reading difficulties, and my poor image was only reinforced when I flunked second grade and had to repeat it.' She worries about transgender teens the most (51% of transgender youth report thinking about suicide and 30% have attempted suicide), the intolerance of adults toward transgender people [transphobes], and the effects of her transitioning on her family.

usage and one State threatened to fine citizens who failed to use the preferred pronoun of a transgender person: www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/05/17/you-can-be-fined-for-not-calling-people-ze-or-hir-if-thats-the-pronoun-they-demand-that-you-use/?utm_term=.392879cd12d.

20. Caitlyn Jenner, *The Secrets of My Life*, New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017.

21. Michael Rondos, *Caitlyn Jenner Talking*: Lexington, KY, 2017, 40.

She has also been told that she is repugnant, indecent, shameful, and an abomination to God.

Caitlyn does not like the label ‘trans’ as she hopes that one day ‘in the next generation’ there will be no qualifiers: ‘we are women and men or whatever we wish to call ourselves, blending into society instead of being stigmatized as some fringe trans species.’ She was often ostracized by the trans community as ‘an insult to trans people. A clueless rich white woman. We have been assaulted by police. We have been assaulted by johns. We have been violated. We have been violated by the system. You don’t represent the trans community.’ She testifies that johns often kill the transgendered woman he had sex with to save face and his manhood due to perceived homosexuality.²²

Chapter 7 of *The Secrets of My Life*, entitled ‘Zap, Zap, Zap,’ explains in detail the excruciating ordeals she endured while undergoing electrolysis to remove hair roots ‘by means of an electric current applied to the body with a needle-shaped electrode.’ Caitlyn claims that she deserved the ‘torture’ for having divorced twice, virtually abandoning her children, and becoming self-absorbed in her transitioning. After a great deal of deliberation, she underwent ‘the Final Surgery’ in January 2017. ‘The surgery was a success, and I feel not only wonderful but liberated.’

CHELSEA MANNING

In 2017, the *New York Times Magazine* devoted its cover story to ‘Becoming Chelsea Manning’, the story of a transgender soldier who in 2010 handed over to Wikileaks approximately 250,000 American diplomatic cables, roughly 480,000 Army reports from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and dossiers on detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the largest leak of classified records in American history. The

22. In 2015 there were 22 killings of transgender or gender non-conforming people, 3 of whom were black or Latinos.

documents captivated the world, enraged the military, and ushered in the age of leaks.²³ In 2013 Bradley Manning was found guilty and was given a thirty-five-year sentence for violating the Espionage Act. After serving seven years, her sentence was commuted in 2017 by President Barack Obama.

As far back as Chelsea can remember, she suffered from a feeling of intense dislocation, something constant and psychic. She compared her feelings to a 'giant, cosmic toothache'. At age five, he told her father that she wanted to be a girl, and soon was sneaking into his sister's bedroom wearing her jackets and applying lipstick and blush, privately referring to herself as Brianna. In 2013, Manning requested access to a regimen of estrogen and anti-androgen drugs prescribed for persons undergoing male-to-female (MtF) transitioning. She was refused as the Army did not yet sanction hormone therapy for soldiers, let alone prisoners.

In the summer of 2014, the Army agreed to supply her with women's underwear. She changed her name on her birth certificate to Chelsea Elizabeth Manning and began hormone therapy in early 2015, while still in prison. She found these early stages of hormone therapy 'deeply fulfilling'. After she ended a hunger strike, the Army allowed her to undergo gender-reassignment surgery (GRS). In August 2018, the Australian Department of Home Affairs denied her a visa for speaking engagements as she is 'a convicted felon, sentenced to 35 years in jail.' The Department added that she 'failed a character test required for entry.'²⁴

AWARENESS

The Danish Girl brought Elbe Elvenes into the twenty-first century

23. Matthew Shaer, 'Becoming Chelsea Manning,' *New York Times Magazine*, June 18, 2017, 34-41, 54-56.

24. Isabella Kwai, 'Visa Troubles for Manny in Australia,' *New York Times*, August 31, 2018, A10.

while Christine Jorgensen, Bruce Jenner, and Chelsea Manning are of more recent memory. There have been several other examples spotlighting transgender persons and awareness. One was the premiere of *Becoming Chaz* at the Sundance Film Festival and on the Oprah Winfrey Network in 2011. The film tells the story of how Chastity Bono, the daughter of Sonny and Cher Bono, transitioned to identify as a man (FtM) at age 40.²⁵ Chaz became better known in 2011 when appearing on *Dancing with the Stars*.

Gender identity made its way into television in 2013 with the popular Netflix show *Orange is the New Black*, featuring a transgender actor, Laverne Cox, in the role of a transgender prisoner. In 2014, Cox became the first person who openly identified as transgender to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine. Amazon Studios released a Web TV comedy in 2014 called *Transparent* about a father transitioning to become a mother. In 2017 a cable reality show called *I Am Jazz* entered its third season, profiling a teenage boy, Jazz Jennings, who identifies as a girl. Diagnosed with gender dysphoria at age four and socially transitioning at five, Jazz was promoted as a model for transgender children. In 2017, *National Geographic* published its 'special issue' on what it called the 'Gender Revolution.'

INTEGRITY, DISABILITY, DIVERSITY

Certain characteristics are evident in the transgender persons showcased in this article and help us to better understand the difference between transgender and gender ideology. Transgender persons sustains an inexorable conviction that they were born in the wrong body and despite difficult transitions and painful treatments and surgeries, they feel a compelling dynamism to push forward and refashion their bodies to come into conformity with the deepest awareness of who they truly were. This belief is profoundly experienced and leads

25. See Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, New York: Encounter Books, 2018, 10-12.

to feelings of anxiety, frustration and intense dislocation.

Are these persons mentally ill? For a long time, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified transgender persons in this fashion. Historically, this classification contributed to enormous stigma, discrimination, harassment, criminalization, and abuse. However, in June 2018, the United Nations health agency in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD) catalog announced that 'gender incongruence' has been moved out of the mental disorders chapter and into the organization's sexual health chapter. The World Health Organization welcomed this change by indicating that 'gender variant behavior and preferences alone are not a basis for diagnosing someone's mental health.'²⁶

In light of Yarhouse's suggested threefold framework for viewing transgender²⁷ – integrity, disability, diversity – the ICD's judgment that a transgender identification alone cannot be the basis for categorizing a transgender person as mentally ill clearly favors transgender-as-diversity. Transgender is therefore seen as a variation in human sexuality and should be of concern only when it causes undue anxiety or distress. We will deal with this viewpoint when discussing the change in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) where transgender is evaluated as 'dysphoria' and not as 'disorder,' and when exploring transgender's etiology.

26. <https://cnn.com/2018/06/20/health/transgender-people-no-longer-considered-mentally-ill-trnd/index.html>. This is not the first time the ICD has changed a classification related to sexuality. In 1990, the WHO declared that 'sexual orientation alone is not to be regarded as a disorder.'

27. Yarhouse. 46-60.

Privileges and Complaints

SOPHIA M. WHITE



Parasite, film, 2019, director: Bong Joon-ho, 132 minutes

The winner of this year's Palme d'Or and Academy Award for Best Picture is an astute and complex social commentary which provides a workout for our emotions and moral compass. *Parasite* challenges us to ask whether symbiosis is possible in our increasingly polarised and unequal society. While this is not a Christian film, it gives us much to think about as to who is our neighbour (Lk 10:29) and why we cannot serve God and wealth (Mt 6:24).

As *Parasite* is best watched with as little foreknowledge as possible, the following are points for consideration drawn from the film while trying not to give too many plot details away.

The director describes *Parasite* as a 'comedy without clowns' and 'a tragedy without villains.' It is a film about two families, and the contrasts of their two worlds. We first meet the Kims, a lower-class family who live in a semi-basement flat and start the film by folding pizza boxes for income and perching in obscure corners of their home in search of free wifi. The son and daughter have both failed

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university entrance examinations on multiple occasions, and the parents have held a variety of relatively menial jobs. These last points may make us question whether they are victims of their circumstances or of their ability.

Next are the Parks, a younger and newly-rich family whose patriarch is the CEO of an IT firm. Their house is an architect-designed modernist wonder which is protected from the world by walls, gates and cameras.

One by one, the Kims manage to gain employment from the Parks: the son as English tutor for the teenage daughter; the daughter as an art therapist for the hyperactive young son who the mother deems to be an ‘artist by nature’; the father as Mr Park’s driver; and the mother, the new housekeeper.

The legitimacy of the jobs may be questioned, due to the means by which they were obtained and the fact that the Kims are never forthright about their true identities. In this time of coronavirus, we may also question where the value and dignity of our work and identity comes from: is being a highly-paid CEO or art therapist of greater value to society or more personally fulfilling than being a housekeeper, driver, or tutor, for example? These questions aside, the Kims are all ostensibly good at their jobs, the Parks are happy to have home help, and there are elements of a relationship beyond the employer-employee boundaries that emerge – even if it is only within the confines of employment that these two families might meet.

HUMANISED

As the Kims never cease to be employees and of a lower socio-economic status, the way that they are viewed by the Parks is arguably never a fully humanised one (with the exception, perhaps, of an ill-conceived romance).

An example of this is Mr Park’s comments about Mr Kim’s smell. This may seem to be a trivial point, but it later has devastating con-

sequences and shows its effect on Mr Kim's sense of self.¹ As the film goes on, we see just how great the chasm between the family's two worlds are. With the garden party scene in particular, hopefully we will all have some pause for thought about our privileges and complaints.

However, the relationship between the Kims and a former employee of the Parks demonstrates that sharing social status does not equate to neighbourliness, with all showing greater love for the Parks than for each other:

'They're rich but they're still nice.'

'They're nice because they're rich.'

After a series of plot twists, the film ends with one of the characters still dreaming of the solution to his problems coming from material wealth. The wider film, however, debunks the myths of hard work paying off, material wealth protecting us, and one-sided solutions serving all.

As Christians, our value comes neither from money nor 'niceness'. Pope Francis' pontificate has been marked by his call for a 'poor church for the poor'. This preferential option for the poor, he writes, is 'primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one.'² If the preferential option for the poor is a theological category, we may ask how *Parasite* would have played out if room was made for God's grace; it most probably wouldn't have won the Oscar.

1. This episode made me consider the place of smell in Christian life. St John of the Cross writes that 'joy in sweet fragrance foments disgust for the poor, which is contrary to Christ's doctrine, aversion for servants, unsubmitiveness of heart in humble things, and spiritual irresponsiveness, at least in the measure of the appetite.' (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel* III.25.4)

2. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 198

What Do We Mean by God?

JOHN LITTLETON



Like Father, Like Son: 'Who Sees Me, Sees the Father', by Wilfrid Harrington, O.P., Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2020, 116 pp, €12.00.

My immediate reaction on hearing that Wilfrid Harrington had written a new book was 'Wow!' because, in addition to teaching Scripture and biblical studies to generations of students, he has – for six decades – been a prolific writer and editor of books and articles dealing with all aspects of the Bible.

Like Father, Like Son contains ten chapters preceded by a short preface and a longer introduction. There are recommendations for further reading at the end of the book.

In the first five chapters (Holy Mystery; Creator; Parent; Just and Merciful; Saviour – Redeemer) dealing predominantly with the God of the Old Testament, Harrington carefully reconstructs the often distorted images of God that have been presented down through the Christian centuries. The irony is that, otherwise, 'we end up with a theologically neat God who does not recognise himself in our portrait of him' (p. 22).

A particular difficulty about imagining God is the language we use. Finite, imperfect human concepts, language and metaphors can never adequately explore or explain the Mystery of God. However, sometimes the limitations of human thinking and its expressions are

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projected onto our understanding of who God is. Harrington repeatedly reasserts that God is not aloof from and disinterested in human beings. Neither is God violent or petty. Instead, God is a loving parent – in the best sense – who is merciful and liberating and who has a personal relationship with us both collectively individually. An alternative term for the Old Testament, he suggests, could be the book of Two Constancies: ‘the constancy of human unfaithfulness’ accompanied by the prevailing ‘constancy of divine faithfulness’ (p. 38).

The remaining five chapters present the uniquely Christian perspective on God found in the New Testament. There we discover that, amazingly, God has revealed himself (once again, the limitations of human language – God is neither male nor female!) to us in the human person Jesus of Nazareth. Harrington’s comment is that ‘we need to think the unthinkable, believe the unbelievable’ (p. 55).

In John’s Gospel especially, the role of the Son (Jesus) is to reveal the Father – the rationale for the book’s title – and, strange as it may seem, the reality is that the Father and the Son were never more at one than when Jesus was dying on the Cross, although Jesus’ feeling was ‘one of God-forsakenness’ (p. 97). God never abandoned him. This is the God whom Jesus reveals to us. God who is Love was ‘active in the Cross’ (p. 106). ‘For, if Jesus is image of the invisible God, he is so as a human person like us in all things. *Jesus* tells us what God is like, *Jesus* is God’s summons to us, God’s challenge to us’ (p.56). Once again, like Father, like Son!

Harrington offers us plenty of timely reminders and challenging corrections to our mistaken thinking. For example, the Old Testament, when read and interpreted in its entirety, teaches conclusively that ‘our God is never God of wrath ... a prodigally loving God’ (p. 24). Unlike human beings, justice and mercy are perfectly balanced in God because God’s mercy is unlimited (see pp. 39ff). Harrington provides a convincing argument for why he disagrees with Anselm’s ‘satisfaction theory’ (see pp. 101-102).

Jesus of Nazareth was a devout Jew living in first-century Palestine who observed the Sabbath, prayed every day and went to the synagogue (see pp. 63ff); we sometimes forget this. Also, Jesus – like the Old Testament prophets – severely criticised religious hypocrisy and casuistry (see pp. 72-77). We should never forget that our God-language is ‘emphatically male’ (p. 33) and we need to acknowledge that, for all our sophistication, ‘Old Testament men and women often had a better understanding of God and, certainly, a more personal relationship with God, than is the experience of many Christians’ (p. 58).

For Harrington, presenting salvation as transcending or denying humanness ‘is tragic because salvation means nothing other than attaining perfect humanness ... Each of us is a human being – but we are flawed human beings. Our destiny is to be wholly human – as God understands humanness. When I have reached that goal I have become what I am meant to be: I am saved’ (p. 52). Consequently, salvation ‘is a matter of healing, of making whole the person’ (p. 53) and Jesus ‘was not in the business of saving “souls”’ (p. 53). This may take some readers out of their theological comfort zones.

I highly recommend this book to both students and teachers of the Bible. Having read the book, I regretted that, years earlier, I had been unable to respond to a colleague’s comment, that Jesus had no sense of humour, with the same competence as Harrington when dealing with that topic (see pp. 69-70). As always, Harrington writes about profound truths with a great simplicity – but a simplicity that could only emerge from a lifetime of dedicated biblical scholarship and a tremendous love for the Bible’s message and, even more, for the God of the Bible. I look forward to Wilfrid Harrington’s next book.