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THE IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING



# **The Dearest Freshness Deep Down Things**

*Papers from  
THE WORKING PARTY on SPIRITUALITY*

2005

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*"There lives the dearest freshness deep down things"* is a quotation from Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem *"God's Grandeur"*

*Gerald Manley Hopkins*, A selection of his poems and prose by W.H. Gardner, London: Penguin, 1953. p. 27.

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## **PREFACE**

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting serves as a discussion forum for the 14 member churches of the Irish Council of Churches\* and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Meetings have taken place on a regular basis since the first one was established at Ballymascanlon in 1973.

This collection of papers has been written by members of the Working Party set up by the Irish Inter-Church Committee. They provide a range of both familiar and fresh perspectives to deepen our understandings about Christian Spirituality in the island of Ireland today.

Each member of the Working Party has shared their own unique perspective as men and women, lay and ordained, living in different parts of Northern Ireland and the Republic, and coming from different church traditions as Catholic, Anglican, Reformed and New Churches.

Together, they combine to create a rich tapestry about what it means to witness to our shared heritage in following the person of Jesus Christ and critique the prevailing postmodern culture of “just doing it”.

The Meeting commends this ecumenical resource to our member churches and hope that the questions raised from each section will stimulate further internal and inter-church discussion at both local, regional and national levels. Any comment or feedback from your dialogues would be welcomed.

We are indebted to all members of this Working Party for the time spent in sharing their insights and gifts with us on this core issue about our shared faith and its relevance in interacting with the wider community. They have given us a further opportunity to open this window and discern a fresh way what God is calling us to do in being church in this island and deal with those “deep down things” that touch the mystery of our shared spirituality in the person of Jesus.

I'd particularly like to acknowledge my predecessor, Dr David Stevens, who did all the hard yards in steering this project to the pre-publication stage.

**Michael Earle**  
*Executive Secretary*  
*Easter 2005*

\* **ICC Member churches:**

The Cherubim & Seraphim Church  
The Church of Ireland  
The Coptic Orthodox Church in Ireland  
The Greek Orthodox Church in Britain & Ireland  
The Lifelink Network of Churches  
The Lutheran Church in Ireland  
The Methodist Church in Ireland  
The Moravian Church Irish District  
The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland  
The Presbyterian Church in Ireland  
The Religious Society of Friends  
The Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland  
The Russian Orthodox Church in Ireland  
The Salvation Army

## **MEMBERS OF THE WORKING PARTY**

Rev Frances Bach	Rev Laurence Murphy sj
Rev William Crawley	Rev Seamus O'Connell
Rev Tom Jordan op	Rev John O'Riordan
Rev Rosemary Lindsay	Rev Myles Rearden cm
Rev Alan McCormack	Mrs Susan Lecky Williams
Rev Alan McGuckian sj	Dr David Stevens (Secretary)
Dr Roy Miller	

## INTRODUCTION

Ronald Rolheiser in his book *Seeking Spirituality* says the following about the word 'spirituality':

*Few words are as misunderstood in the English language as is the word 'spirituality'. First of all, in English, this is a relatively new word, at least in terms of signifying what it does today. That is not the case in the French language where the word has a much longer and richer history. However, if one went to an English library and checked the titles of books, he or she would find that, save for a few exceptions, the word 'spirituality' appears in those titles only within the last thirty years. It is also only within these latter years that the concept of spirituality has become popular, both within church circles and within the population at large. Today bookstores, church and secular alike, literally teem with books on spirituality.*

*A generation ago, this was not the case. The secular world then had virtually no interest in the area. This was also true for most of the churches. What we would call spirituality today existed, but it had a very different face. In the Christian churches it existed mainly within certain charismatic prayer-groups and theologies of the Pentecostal churches, the social action of some Protestant churches, and the devotional life within the Roman Catholic Church. In secular bookstores you would have found very little in the area of spirituality, other than a section on the Bible and some books on the merits of positive thinking. In ecclesial bookstores, since this was considered an area distinct from strict, academic theology, you would have found very little as well, save for Roman Catholic bookstores where you would have found devotional literature and some books labelled 'ascetical theology'.*

*Today there are books on spirituality everywhere.<sup>1</sup>*

Clearly something is going on in our culture that makes the word 'spirituality' of significance. The Irish Inter-Church Committee set up the Working Party in 2001 to explore what was being said by the increasing use of the word and the issues raised for and the challenges to the churches.

The Working Party began with an examination of how people are nourished within a particular faith tradition. Five members were asked to write papers on 'How are people nourished in the faith in your church?' Section One of this document are the answers, refracted through the personalities of particular individuals, from a Roman Catholic, a Presbyterian, a member of the Church of Ireland, a Methodist and a member of a Christian Fellowship Church (one of the new churches). From these papers it is clear that all our religious traditions foster 'spirituality'.

Ronald Rolheiser, however, makes it clear that:

*As Christians we find ourselves standing in a rich, but confusing, spiritual pluralism with quite different backgrounds in spirituality. We have not always agreed on what is essential within the spiritual life and we have lived out our faith lives somewhat differently.<sup>2</sup>*

Protestantism and Catholicism have agreed on an emphasis on church going and the importance of private prayer. However, beyond agreement on the essential practices there were significant differences in spirituality.

Thus, Catholicism has emphasised certain devotional and sacramental practices. In Protestantism, emphasis was placed on the Bible: on the expounding of it in sermons, on personal reading of it and trying actively to guide life in the world by it. Sometimes these emphases have developed in opposition to each other. Thus, many Protestants distrusted Catholic devotional and sacramental practices. Until recently, private reading of Scripture was discouraged by the Roman Catholic Church. The significance of particular institutions in spiritual formation has been given different 'weight' in Catholicism and Protestantism, for example, schools. And indeed particular institutions for spiritual formation have been invented within traditions, for example Sunday Schools within Protestantism.

The second part of the exploration was to look at a cluster of questions: What is going on that is making the word 'spirituality' so prominent? What is meant by the word? Are there all sorts of different meanings? Do they connect with anything that Christians mean by the word? Finally members were asked – given all of this – what was the way forward for us in the churches?

The resulting papers are in Sections Two and Three. There may be a certain disjointedness between these two sections, reflecting how the different contributors developed their thoughts. The papers are the fruits of a rich discussion. They are individual 'offerings' refracted through personal experience and the group discussion and they 'play' off each other. There is not a uniformity, instead there is a weave of variety which, perhaps, reflects the reality of a discussion on the subject of spirituality today. Nevertheless, there are certain themes which emerge. One of these is the real difficulty that many have today with the church as institution and the increasing inability that institutional religion has in focussing people's spirituality. This links to a certain sense of crisis in Irish religion which challenges us in the churches to escape banality and numbness and recapture mystery and a freshness of expression (both in word and symbol). There is another connection demanding to be made: the link between faith and spirituality and work for justice and reconciliation, expressed in the French Catholic writer Charles Peguy *'Tout commence en mystique et finit en politique'* and in Eberhard Bethge, the biographer of the German Protestant martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, summarising his life in terms of *'prayer and righteous action'*. And there are other themes: the importance of relationships in the search for faith and people's quest for vibrant worship and for meaningful liturgy to hold them before the transcendent.

The final section is a section of particular explorations: on Celtic Spirituality; Feminine Spirituality; and the Impact of Trauma on Spirituality. They reflect particular interests of members of the Working Party. Celtic spirituality at its worst can express a twee, romantic vagueness. At its best it can have a profound Christ-centred physicality and a sense of the thinness separating the material from the spiritual. The paper on the impact of trauma on spirituality causes us to reflect on the profound defamation of the spirit, both on individuals and communities, caused by the troubles of the last thirty years in Northern Ireland. Finally the paper on feminine spirituality causes us to reflect that many of our faith traditions have been profoundly male in expression, and what deformations has this produced?

Exploring what is meant by the word 'spirituality' in Ireland today raises profound questions as to how Christian faith and the Church relates to contemporary Irish society. Perhaps our point of departure should be inspired by Paul's missionary approach on the Areopagos (Act 17 'Well, the God whom I proclaim is in fact the one whom you already worship without knowing it.'

(v.23)). Possibly this will be the normal mode of mission in a world of many spiritualities. The search for meaning and for a transcendence beyond contemporary consumerism comes in many guises. The fundamental challenge for the Church (individual Christians, local groups/ congregations/ institutions) is the need to undergo changes that will make it more fit to engage missionally with the new spiritualities. And these new spiritualities need to be tested and met with authentic church spirituality which does not mean 'inventing' new spiritualities in the church but, perhaps, drawing on all the spiritual resources in the long and rich Christian tradition.

**David Stevens**  
*St Patrick's Day, 2004*

## **SECTION ONE**

**How are people nourished in the faith of your church?**

- **A Roman Catholic response**
- **A Church of Ireland response**
- **A Presbyterian response**
- **A Methodist response**
- **A New Church response**

# **HOW PEOPLE ARE NOURISHED IN THEIR FAITH IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND AT PRESENT**

*Seamus O'Connell and Myles Rearden cm*

1. We understand 'faith' as the total personal response to God and to religious and spiritual matters generally. Not, that is to say, simply knowledge about such things, but the way of life involved: hope and charity as well as faith. It can be briefly expressed as *following Jesus*.

## **2. In school settings**

At the moment the Church is more organized for nourishing faith in the narrower sense of providing Christian doctrine. The best programmes are, in our view, those provided in the primary school system, and the teachers are well trained to operate them. These programmes are specifically oriented towards the sacraments of First Communion & Confession (age 7/8) and Confirmation (11/12), respectively near the beginning and near the end of primary schooling. As a result, faith-formation at this level has important social aspects ('rites of passage') and important liturgical aspects. So religion is not just a classroom subject.

At secondary level, in the Republic of Ireland, nourishment in the faith has up to this been less satisfactory, at least over the past thirty or more years. However, religious knowledge is shortly to become an examination subject at this level. There are no 'rite-of-passage' type sacraments associated with this age group. As a result, what faith-formation there is comes very largely from the practical skills and gifts of school chaplains and teachers, lay and clerical. In Northern Ireland, serious examination courses in Religious Education are already taught up to both O-level and A-level: these are to a large extent biblically based, and are flexible enough to meet the preferences of various churches.

At tertiary level, in the Republic, there are several Catholic institutions preparing teachers, and one providing a course in chaplaincy (Mater Dei,

Dublin). All Hallows, Dublin, provides pastoral training for lay-people. Degree courses in theology are available at Maynooth, a number of Dublin centres (Milltown Park, All Hallows, Kimmage, Tallaght) and at other centres throughout the country: Limerick, Cork, Galway, Castlebar, Kilkenny and Waterford. In Northern Ireland, training in religious education is provided for Catholics at St Mary's University College, Belfast, and also (for graduates) at the University of Ulster, Coleraine.

### 3. Outside the school setting

By far the greatest amount of faith-nourishing (in the broad sense) takes place in the regular Church services on Sundays and some special days (e.g. Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and Christmas.) These services are to some extent interactive, in a rather ritualistic way, but the formal teaching segment of the services is not interactive and is usually short. The lectionary, i.e. the carefully selected passages of Scripture read at services, has a significant impact on hearers.

Occasions such as weddings and ordinations are not on the whole as effective in nourishing people's faith as they could be. Funerals on the other hand often are, especially when a tragic death has occurred. Pastoral ministry during illness and after death is a very significant means of faith-formation in the wide sense. At times miraculous healings take place in the course of this kind of ministry, which can have a powerful faith-formative effect at least in the immediate circle.

Articles in the general media, such as those by Breda O'Brien in the *Irish Times* are also of formative impact. Diocesan, Parish and missionary magazines, and the *Irish Catholic* also make a significant contribution to sustaining the core church membership in the faith. So do renewal programmes at diocesan, parish or national level.

There are a variety of devotional exercises such as Novenas of Grace, Parish Retreats, Divine Mercy and Charismatic Conventions, Cemetery Masses, Prayer Groups based on Taizé prayer, charismatic prayer and *Lectio Divina*, and pilgrimages to Marian and other shrines, which sustain the peoples' devotional life: sometimes they are criticised for being 'too devotional' to the exclusion of solid doctrinal study and commitment to social justice. To meet these criticisms there are a number of organizations which aim at promoting social justice, such as the Society of St Vincent de

Paul, the Knights of St Columbanus and others. Occasionally, these are criticised for being insufficiently devotional and faith-centred.

**So, in general, as we see it, people's faith is being nourished in five kinds of process in Ireland: the liturgical/sacramental, the pastoral, the schools, the devotional associations and the social justice associations. The impact of these across the generations is uneven: for instance, schools affect mainly young people, the various associations affect mainly older people.**

#### **4. Untended Needs**

We consider that several important areas are not addressed or not sufficiently addressed in Irish projects for nourishing the faith at present. These are:

- a. The actual stages of growth in the spiritual life (sometimes called the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways), with the result that people can either be expected to run before they can walk, or never to run at all.
- b. The contribution of spirituality to diminishing such serious social evils as youth suicide, substance addiction and violence.
- c. Catholics in Ireland are perhaps on the whole too little inclined to see their faith as an integral part of their whole view of the world. As a result, many cannot defend it in arguments with secularists and agnostics. Looking backwards to traditions is too common among them, rather than looking forward to a world enriched by Christian faith, hope and love.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 From your experience of school-centred events that support you in handing on your faith to your children, what have you found helpful and what improvements would you suggest?
- 2 How can parents and adult Catholics generally support the faith-formation programme in secondary schools?
- 3 At what moments in your life do you feel grateful that your children are having the faith passed on to them?

## **HOW PEOPLE ARE NOURISHED SPIRITUALLY IN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND**

*Alan McCormack*

The Church of Ireland is a member church of the Anglican Communion of churches. The arrangement of the Church of Ireland is territorial. Twelve dioceses, covering the entirety of the island of Ireland, are administered by twelve diocesan bishops.<sup>3</sup> The dioceses are in turn subdivided into a number of parishes, each with its own parish church and parish clergy. A consequence of this arrangement is that the parish unit is the primary locus of Anglican spiritual experience, the point of first and repeated contact for most Anglican Christians.

In each parish is found a church in which worship is conducted on a regular basis (normally on at least two days of the week) according to certain norms<sup>4</sup> and a clergyman or woman<sup>5</sup> whose purpose it is to conduct such worship and to tend to the pastoral needs of the local community, chiefly through visitation. The clergyman or woman is normally<sup>6</sup> the 'incumbent' of the parish and is the representative of the local diocesan bishop to whom canonical obedience is owed, and from whom some degree of pastoral guidance and oversight is expected. In ecclesial parlance, the local clergyman or woman is said to exercise 'the cure of souls' in a particular territorial area.

The Church of Ireland is a *liturgical* church.<sup>7</sup> The basic mechanism of spiritual nourishment within the Church of Ireland may then be identified with popular attendance at local occasions of liturgical prayer. In the Church of Ireland these may take the form of liturgies of the Word (usually the 'offices' of Morning and Evening Prayer, but also including the occasional services of Marriage, Burial and Confirmation) or liturgies of the Sacrament (Eucharistic or Baptismal liturgies).

The tradition of the daily office of Morning and Evening Prayer persists privately for a large number of bishops, priests and deacons and publicly in a much smaller number of parish churches, cathedrals and college chapels.

The typical member of the Church of Ireland will however encounter liturgical prayer in the context of Sunday attendance at church. Historically, the office

of 'Morning Prayer with Sermon' has been the principal Sunday liturgy in a majority of Church of Ireland churches, but an increasing number of parishes are coming to understand the sacramental liturgy of the Eucharist or the Holy Communion to form the aspirational centre of Anglican liturgical practice.

An opposite trend within the Church of Ireland is, however, to be seen in the desire to replace the principal Sunday service of Morning Prayer with the more fluid and flexible form of the 'Service of the Word'.<sup>8</sup> This has resulted from a perception that the highly structured liturgical nature of Morning Prayer is not any longer an adequate context for the promotion of prayer in contemporary parish communities.<sup>9</sup> The 'Service of the Word' format is not only very flexible but is also highly topical, inviting extreme attention to the particularities and concerns of the local church context.

It may be said that the recalibration of the principal Sunday liturgy has been effected by way of a polarization in liturgical practice – the 'flavour' of a particular parish is often obvious from how it chooses to gather for prayer on a Sunday morning. The liturgical and thus the spiritual life of the Church of Ireland has become increasingly diverse and parishes have come to respond positively to their description as 'catholic', 'evangelical' or even 'middle-of-the-road'.

Historically, all services in the Church of Ireland have been characterized by a certain formality in language, music, posture, vestment and ritual movement. The ordered reading of Scripture<sup>10</sup> and a consequent discipline in homiletic reflection has been central, together with the provision of authorized words for spoken use and communal texts for singing.<sup>11</sup>

In all of these categories the liturgical recalibration of the Church of Ireland has signalled change. In 'catholic' Church of Ireland parishes there has perhaps been a move towards the increasing elaboration and ornamentation of the standard Anglican liturgy, usually by way of music, colour and movement. In 'evangelical' Church of Ireland parishes there has been the desire to cut through the perceived barriers of the liturgical and to discover fresh ways to bring an informality and directness to worship.<sup>12</sup>

What can be observed is that the contemporary liturgical practice of the Church of Ireland is diverse and that this tendency is likely to increase and not diminish in any conceivable future.<sup>13</sup> The historical reality of a church patterned and unified by a single liturgy is gone forever and what has replaced it is the new reality of a church in which different parishes provide

different possibilities for liturgical experience and from which different Anglican Christians (at least in urban contexts) choose according to personal aesthetic or emotional inclination and not through any accident of residence.<sup>14</sup>

There is still, however, a sense of being 'Church of Ireland', though it will be parsed in different ways by different people. 'Catholic' Anglicans may consider themselves to form a 'liberal catholic alternative' to the Roman Catholic tradition of intellectual and moral direction in Ireland. 'Evangelical' Anglicans may suppose that they provide a disciplined and ordered alternative to the enthusiasm and fervour of the mission halls. 'Middle-of-the-road' Anglicans will consider that they are doing what they always have done, something noble and respectable, 'everything decently and in order'. There is still a certain pride in being a member of the Church of Ireland, still a feeling that we have something valuable to offer, something precious to bequeath.<sup>15</sup>

The Church of Ireland parish has also historically been a centre of community life. Most parish churches still have a number of 'organisations' – Mothers Unions, Young Wives Groups, Bowling Clubs, Choirs, Men's Societies, Youth clubs, Sunday School, Scouts and Squirrels, and so on, organisations that exist to provide fora for parochial involvement. Contemporary patterns of living have made the existence of most of these organized forms of activity more difficult to sustain but parishes have continued to recognize the usefulness of attempting to sustain them.

The Church of Ireland has also wished to encourage the involvement of members in the decision making of the local and national communities. Members are encouraged to serve on parish vestries, on diocesan and national synods, and on committees of the Church of Ireland. Too often, however, the Church has not been good in identifying and involving new people in these activities and there has occasionally been a sense of the moribund in the Church institutions.

The tradition of home visitation is an important part of the Church of Ireland's understanding of spiritual sustenance. Historically, the notion of the Rector or Curate visiting has been key in the discipline of our Church. The point of visiting is to promote genuine pastoral contact and therefore to enable the genuine theological encounter of the Gospel with the concerns of the local congregation. A minister who does not know the concerns and anxieties of his or her people will have little chance of breaking open for them the Word of God on a Sunday morning. Again, however, contemporary

patterns of living (together, it must be admitted, with a kind of creeping professionalisation in the notion of clerical vocation) have inhibited this traditional function.

A tradition of domestic prayer has also existed in the Church of Ireland's configuration of piety. Prayers in the home, perhaps before meals or before bed, have been a traditional accompaniment to Anglican formal prayer. Liturgical provision has existed for these, though a tradition of extemporaneous practice has also flourished.

A tradition of Bible study, either weekly or throughout the year, or in selected liturgical seasons (usually Advent and Lent) has been characteristic of certain forms of Church of Ireland piety, as has been the sacramental observance of saints' days in church.

More recently a tradition of 'retreat' and 'quiet day' has been developing in the popular spiritual experience of the Church of Ireland. This has not been confined to the 'catholic' wing of the Church but has become steadily more acceptable among consciously 'evangelical' members.

The renaissance of the 'cathedral' tradition needs also been noted. Cathedrals are the mother churches of the dioceses and principally function to provide a space for diocesan liturgical occasions like ordinations. However, they are increasingly the point of contact with non-Anglican communities. Additionally, they are increasingly being asked to play important civic and public roles in the life of the wider community. Remarkable has been the resuscitation of Choral Evensong as a liturgical format in which people who are neither Anglican, nor (in many cases) Christian, can feel welcomed and can sense something of the otherness and imperative of the Christian God. The Anglican cathedral tradition (though held in low regard by some within the Church of Ireland) now exists as an obvious public mission of our Church.

In conclusion, it may be observed that the Church of Ireland nourishes its own people principally through liturgical association and pastoral human contact. There is an increasing diversity in both the liturgical forms of our Church and in the forms of pastoral human relationship. What appears characteristic of the Church of Ireland at this time is a willingness among discrete ecclesial interests to allow diverse forms of encounter and praise to flourish, perhaps on the understanding that a pluriformity of audience requires in the end a pluriformity of response.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 What are the implications of an increasing diversity of liturgical practice in the Church of Ireland and how will it affect the spirituality of church members?
- 2 What are the implications of changes in the form of pastoral human relationship?

## **HOW DOES THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND PROVIDE FOR THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF ITS MEMBERS?**

*William Crawley*

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has nearly 300,000 members throughout Ireland, the vast majority located in Northern Ireland. The Church cares for the spiritual needs of these members principally at a congregational level. Since the Presbyterian Church is part of the Reformed family of churches, the benefits and deficits of that tradition are to be seen in the care it provides. Each congregation is divided into districts (usually 14–20 families) with elected elders responsible for the care of the families in his or her district. Thus lay members (though elders are technically 'ordained members') are empowered in service within the local church – an outworking of the Reformed emphasis on plural ministry, the 'priesthood of all believers'. The typical elements of congregational spiritual care are:

- Home visits by the minister and elders.
- Weekly church services which encourage fellowship and enable the church to worship together.
- Sermons: A central part of the Reformed understanding of spiritual growth is the teaching ministry of the pastorate. This emphasis can lead to other elements of a weekly service being overshadowed by the sermon.
- Holy Communion: Most Presbyterian congregations meet for Communion only four times a year. A few have Communion once a month. In the 16th century, John Calvin proposed to the Genevan leaders that Communion should be a weekly sacrament, but his view was overruled. Only a few Presbyterian ministers argue for weekly communion.
- Baptism, mainly of the newly born, is typically scheduled on a monthly basis, always as part of the normal Sunday morning worship with the full congregation present. Increasingly, ministers are providing "Thanksgiving" services, rather than baptisms, where the parents of a child are not professing Christians or church members.
- Weekly Bible Study: The so-called "mid-week" is often another sermon

disguised as a seminar, with no real opportunity for discussion or a question-and-answer session. In many congregations, pre-packaged courses, such as the *Alpha Course*, have been a popular addition to the church's weekly teaching programme.

- Weekly prayer meeting: Organised prayer, where extemporised prayer by church members is a central feature.
- Fellowship activities enable members to build friendships and, in theory at least, to care for each other.

A major theme of the typical approach to congregational spiritual care is that it is minister-based. The assumption is that pastoral and spiritual care revolves around the office of the minister or is entirely the responsibility of the minister. More adventurous congregations have developed congregations that are developing approaches to congregationally based spiritual care. These congregations encourage church members to see themselves as ministers alongside the ordained pastor. Some of the elements of congregationally based care:

- Pastoral care groups made up of church members who are trained within the church structures to care for other church members.
- Small groups where people can share their stories and care for one another on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis.
- Accountability structures with explicit policies ensuring both effective and responsible peer care provision.

When one looks at the typical provision for spiritual care within Presbyterian congregations, it is possible to determine what most churches *regard* as the spiritual needs of their members. At the risk of overstatement, this may come down to the following: churches think people need to read their Bible regularly, go to church regularly and pray regularly. There is little if any reflection on, for example, the bridge between church life and work life or, say, the challenges of commercialisation. A congregation might, for example, provide a *Faith in the Workplace* course to explore the ethical and spiritual challenges members will encounter in business or commercial life. It might form small groups that bring together parents to talk about the spiritual dimensions of parenting and family life. It is perhaps telling that neither initiative is common in a denomination with many members engaged in commerce, and with such a strong commitment to family life. This may well reflect a very narrow understanding of spirituality – one that tends to religious pietism and the privatisation of the spiritual.

Some observations:

- 1 Many Presbyterian congregations are strongly Evangelical in character. Within many Evangelical churches, spirituality is taken – in practice at least – to mean: (1) encountering God through Bible reading and study; (2) engaging in daily private prayer (a “morning devotional” period or “Quiet Time”); and (3) joining in fellowship with other believers. Significant Evangelical authors have challenged this three-course spirituality as a rather meagre diet – writers such as Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard and Alister McGrath – and have called the Evangelical church to explore other, more “Catholic” dimensions of spirituality: for example, the use of music, silence, imagery, poetry and art as vehicles for spiritual exploration. This shift in emphasis is reflected in some Presbyterian churches, but not many.
- 2 Presbyterian church life tends to be family-centred. The denomination counts its membership by families and is strongly focused on family life in general. This can lead to feelings of isolation by single people and others who do not comply with the traditional family ‘ideal’.
- 3 Most Presbyterian churches approach prayer meetings in the same way. An hour is set aside for prayer; members gather; someone organises topics for prayer with sections often separated by a hymn; then members (seated) extemporise prayer openly. The downside of this shopping list approach to prayer is that it tends to cater for only one type of personality; it does not provide for personalities more comfortable with, for example, silence, imagery or the use of bodily action in prayer (e.g., kneeling, use of hand gestures, etc.). Some (though few) congregations have experimented with Taizé-style gatherings with some success.
- 4 The content, shape and colour of weekly worship may well have a formative influence on how individual church members negotiate spirituality. In most cases, Presbyterian weekly services are extremely predictable affairs, with formulaic language and parsimonious liturgies. If the experience of weekly worship – where the church together encounters God – is indeed a model of spiritual encounter for individual church members, one would expect to find a rather narrow, staid perspective on matters spiritual among Presbyterian church members generally.
- 5 There is no tradition of spiritual direction – or the spiritual companion – within the Presbyterian Church. One or two ministers have explored that avenue personally, but it is not an approach to spiritual care and accountability that is typically advocated. Members may well have a suspicion of such a role since it seems to challenge the Reformed emphasis

on a direct, unmediated relationship with God (and has the distinct whiff of the confessional!). This privatised spirituality needs to be challenged root and branch within the denomination. Some (though not many) congregations encourage members to join an organised pastoral support group, which is a small group focused on friendship, learning and peer care. A number of ministers have felt threatened by such groups.

- 6 Though Presbyterian spirituality is often focused on the Bible, there is a dearth of exegetical approaches. The Bible tends to be read propositionally – like a compilation of divine facts, rules and regulations – while other ways into the meaning of a text are downplayed or ignored. How the Bible is often handled in the pulpit is a key factor in understanding this poverty of spiritual exegesis.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Is a regular diet of reading the Bible, going to church and praying enough to meet most people's spiritual needs?
- 2 Is there too much privatised spirituality? If so, what are the alternatives?
- 3 How does the church service influence people's spirituality?

## **HOW THE PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS ARE NOURISHED IN THE FAITH**

*Rosemary Lindsay*

### **Traditional Methodism**

Before the Methodists came to be recognised as a church separate from the Church of England, John Wesley was concerned for their nurture. Whilst encouraging them to attend worship and Holy Communion at their local Anglican church, he was forced to recognise that many of the new converts were previously unchurched and had no Anglican connections, and were therefore unenthusiastic about such an arrangement. Wesley initiated a system of small groups of about a dozen people, known as classes and bands, which met mid-week. Classes 'became the unit of Society membership, the training ground of lay leaders and a potent instrument of evangelism'.<sup>16</sup> Divided according to age and sex, they met for extemporaneous prayer, hymn-singing, confession of sins and testimony to the power of God. The class leader (usually a lay person) might also give an 'exhortation'. Bands were groups for the more committed – smaller, and totally confidential. The goal of these groups was the pursuit of holiness – both in one's life-style and in one's care for others.

Great emphasis was laid on Bible teaching and biblical preaching, and as numbers grew it became necessary to train preachers – 'local preachers', as they were called – some of whom were called to itinerancy by Wesley as they proved their effectiveness.

### **Present day**

The class system nowadays has largely fallen by the wayside, despite the fact that Methodism has continued to encourage people towards renewed life in Christ. Some churches continue to appoint class leaders who visit a designated group of church members, but the visits now tend to be social rather than spiritual. However, in some churches the people meet in cell groups – an arrangement very like the class meetings but with a trendier name! Many women also meet in the MWI (Methodist Women in Ireland), an

association which has developed a varied programme of worship, missionary support, social service and other topics of interest of a more general nature.

'Christian spirituality is not simply for the "interior life" or the inward person, but as much for the body as the soul, and is directed to the implementation of both the commandments of Christ, to love God and our neighbour'.<sup>17</sup> So personal faith, open to the Holy Spirit's work, needs to express itself through love and action; hence the Methodist insistence on social outreach.

However, the value of purely social gatherings as a means of helping people to 'belong' is also recognised, by the MWI and by other groups which vary from church to church.

**Methodist worship** varies enormously, from the more formal, structured Communion services suggested for the high points in the liturgical year (these are not obligatory forms of liturgy) to the simpler, largely extemporary worship which takes place on most Sundays of the year. The centrality of the pulpit in many Methodist places of worship indicates the importance placed on the expounding of the Scriptures through preaching.

Methodists have traditionally sung their theology in the hymns of Charles Wesley, some 200 of which are in the current hymn book. Successive generations of Methodists have been nourished by the content of these, despite some difficulties nowadays with the old-fashioned language. Now, in addition, modern hymns and songs make reference to scientific thinking and the longing for peace and social justice, as well as restating fundamental beliefs in a new way.

**Sunday School:** Children usually have their own time of worship and learning, appropriate to their age and stage of development. Sometimes the main Sunday service will be an All Age Service, when a special attempt is made to integrate the needs of young and old into a single act of worship with something for everyone – often by digressing in some measure from the expected Sunday morning pattern, to include more drama, visuals, new music, etc. When young children are brought for baptism, almost always in the context of the Sunday service, the congregation will be asked the question: 'Will you so maintain the common life of worship and service that this child and all the children among you may grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord?' It is thus acknowledged

that it is the collective responsibility of the people of God to nourish the children among them in the faith.

**Lay preachers**, or local preachers as they are known, are still vital to the task of supplying every place of worship on a Sunday. They are currently trained by means of a two-year course called *Faith and Worship*. It works best when studied in a group and then becomes a vehicle for the mutual nourishment of the participants. Also, lay evangelists are supplementing the falling number of ministers. Increasingly, circuits are employing full-time youth pastors to run programmes for children and young people. In addition there are currently several Youth Evangelism teams: young people who have most likely taken a year out from their studies in order to work in such churches and/or schools as may invite them.

John Wesley was so convinced of the importance of **Holy Communion** that he took it on himself to ordain some of his itinerant preachers for its administration. Acting in this spirit, the Annual Conference of 2001 sanctioned lay presidency at communion services in carefully monitored circumstances, in churches where the nearest ordained minister lives too far away for regular visits to be practical. (It is allowed at the moment in one circuit only, and will be reviewed annually.) Services of Holy Communion generally take place in Methodist churches once a month and on certain special days. The annual Covenant Service (which includes Communion) is a means of renewing the worshippers' commitment to God.

The advisability of pastoral oversight of ministers from candidature through into 'retirement' has been recognised. While this is not possible at present,

- a new post, Director of Ministry, has been created and the first Director took up her appointment in July 2004. She will be responsible for guiding those accepted for training, during both their time in college and their probationary period.
- Those in their first ten years of ministry are encouraged to attend the 'Junior Ministers' Conference' which meets annually in November for prayer, consideration of a topic of interest, and general mutual support.
- In addition, a scheme of 'accompanied self-appraisal' is to be introduced for ministers wishing to deepen their spiritual life and increase their effectiveness.
- In most of the eight districts of Irish Methodism, ministers at whatever

stage of their ministry try to meet monthly for fellowship and encouragement; as a hymn says:

*Then let us ever bear  
The blessèd end in view,  
And join, with mutual care,  
To fight our passage through;  
And kindly help each other on,  
Till all receive the starry crown.*<sup>18</sup>

A recent attempt to recognise the need to nourish individuals whose problems may have alienated them from the church is *Vows & Partings*, a little book of 'suggestions of how to pray when relationships change or end'<sup>19</sup>, which has attracted some criticism.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 What is the link between spirituality and social outreach?
- 2 How do hymns nourish spirituality?

## **NOURISHING PEOPLE IN THE FAITH – THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH, BELFAST**

*Roy Millar*

CFC is the largest in the group of churches in various parts of Northern Ireland, loosely linked for mutual support and sharing of resources but largely independent in activities. Most would have their roots in the evangelical wing of the church and taken shape as a consequence of the charismatic movement of the 70s and 80s. We would not characterise ourselves as either 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' but seek to be in open fellowship with all followers of the Lord Jesus. The comments that follow relate specifically to Christian Fellowship Belfast and would apply to a greater or lesser extent to the others.

We believe that the foundation for full participation in the life of the Church is a commitment in faith to Jesus as Saviour and Lord and we frequently offer this opportunity in public meetings, emphasising the love and grace of God. We have found that the Alpha programme has been a very effective setting in which to introduce friends and contacts to Jesus, and run this programme twice per year. Many people have come to faith or been restored to a vital relationship with God in the course of this. It also engages with another aspect that we see as central to growth in faith – a dynamic encounter with God the Holy Spirit, and this frequently happens in the context of the weekend away during the Alpha course.

We give extended time to worship in the course of our Sunday worship – usually a block of about 30 minutes at each service, much of it in a contemporary mode. We are blessed with a number of people who are gifted in leading people into worship, some of whom also write Christian songs. About once per month we have a 'Worship Watch' when the church is open over some hours for folks to come and worship together informally.

We have structured our congregation along the lines of 'Cell' (the biological rather than the judicial model!) and people are encouraged to belong to a group of about 8-15, mostly meeting weekly. This is seen as a core element and the means whereby community is fostered and into which new believers

can be introduced and be helped to grow. As you might expect, some cells work better than others in this respect.

Teaching is a central part of our programme to build up people in faith. On most Sunday mornings there will be a Bible based talk lasting about 30 minutes, often culminating in an invitation to faith in the case of the uncommitted or some other appropriate response in other cases. Usually there is the offer of prayer for healing and people are invited to respond. There is a prayer team on duty at the end of each service, trained for the purpose.

Other teaching programmes have been developed over the years and collected together with some newer ones in the past two years under the general title of 'Source'. These include a 'post Alpha' course, courses on ethics and church history, and a Bible strand with in depth study of extensive parts of the Scriptures. There are other occasional courses on marriage and training in various types of Christian service.

There is an extensive programme for children – the age structure is such that we have a large number of children and young people. There is a full time youth pastor and volunteers. We see this part of the life of the church as vitally important and try to include the children in the 'main' activities, rather than being on the sidelines. For instance, there is a youth choir that has a regular slot in leading the worship in the Sunday services.

We see outreach as having a double function. We have a desire to win people to faith and also recognise that involvement in mission promotes growth in those who participate. There are summer outreaches in Belfast. Usually we are joined by teams from other countries and the interaction with them and with the local community is mutually beneficial. We see people's faith grow as they are stretched. We have had many short term mission outreaches in various parts of the world, such as India, Africa, Spain and, recently, France. Links forged with churches in other cultures have been enriching. In addition, we have a number of 'full time' missionaries in various parts of the world. We see it as important to look outwards.

There is an ongoing local outreach called Oasis, a 'converted' pub at the corner of Templemore Avenue, where a number of members work in social outreach, work training programmes, and a second hand clothes shop.

We have found it helpful from time to time to sponsor visits by international speakers, opening this opportunity to the wider church. We believe that in the

rather insular climate of Northern Ireland that this is a valuable asset. Also for several years we have had a monthly 'Bridges Forum' to which we invite politicians of all persuasions, media people, etc. to discuss issues of local importance in our community and enter into discussion with them. This is relevant to the application of our faith. Ultimately we believe that faith is built in relationships and put a high value on fostering good relationships and the importance of 'mentoring' at a personal level from one to another.

Usually at the beginning of January we have a week of prayer and fasting so that we can reflect on our calling and seek to hear what God is saying to us as a Christian community at this time. These are very valuable periods when other church activities are set aside. It is part of our conviction that we should expect the Holy Spirit to be intimately engaged with us in strategy for his church. There are many strands to the church programme but they can so easily become ends in themselves. They are only helpful if they assist us in getting a clearer sight of God and his glory and his purposes, and this is the foundation for true faith and its increase.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 New churches put a strong emphasis on relationships and nourishing members through a cell structure of organisation. Are there lessons for more traditional churches?
- 2 What is the role of worship in a contemporary mode in nourishing spirituality?

## **SECTION TWO**

**What is going on in Ireland today that is making the word 'Spirituality' so prominent?**

**What is meant by the word?**

**Are there all sort of different meanings?**

**Do they connect with anything that Christians mean by the word?**

## THE MEANING OF SPIRITUALITY

*Myles Rearden cm*

The person who comes to my mind when I hear the word 'spirituality' is a woman I saw only once, and do not know by name. She was stoutish, middle-aged with greying hair, and could only walk with difficulty. But her expression was of someone completely at peace with herself. Adversity overcome by the inner resources of mind and heart: will this do as an initial definition of spirituality? Other images from other continents and times come equally to mind: Africans waiting in line at hospitals, or trekking for miles with their water-cans; Chinese faces enduring the weight of empires, socialist or Confucian; and the story of the old couple being evicted from their home in nineteenth-century Ireland, with the husband comforting his sobbing wife, 'Whisht, Mary, didn't our Lord suffer a lot more for us?' And then there is a verse of Sean Lucy's about the pacifist victim of a purge:

*And in that place he later died,  
Comforting many in the slaughter-place.  
Salute him, armies,  
He held on to peace.<sup>20</sup>*

Gordon Wakefield summed up this sense of spirituality when he wrote:

*The life of the Spirit means a constant pilgrimage with its heights and its depths, its wearisome pains and barren wilderness, the absence as well as the presence of God, its darkness as well as light, sensitivity both to beauty and joy and to perils and dangers, an acceptance of the world and a renunciation of it.<sup>21</sup>*

Technically, spirituality means 'a person's lived experience, as guided by the Holy Spirit, embracing the whole of human life as a symbolizing being, and challenged to accomplish something significant, both individually and socially'.<sup>22</sup> In current usage, it must be admitted, the word 'spirituality' very often means something much simpler and more negative: 'religious, but having nothing to do with any Church.' And at times, it does not even include religion, in the sense of honouring anything divine, and thus comes close to classical Buddhism. Strangely enough, classical Buddhism somewhat

resembles a Christian movement of Celtic origin, Pelagianism, the view that human perfection is accomplished by human effort alone. Original Pelagianism was a severely moralistic movement, but there are modern forms of it that are more cultural and self-indulgent than moralistic. The definition given above expresses, it is hoped, something sufficiently holistic, articulate, theological and self-transcendent to connect with what many people understand by spirituality.

It may be helpful to list some things, which, it would seem, spirituality is not, or is even completely opposed to. It seems, for example, completely opposed to secularism and the cash economy, though that as we shall see is too simplistic. More generally, spirituality seems to be opposed to hard scientific or legal facts, to be something of the heart rather than the head: that too over-simplifies. Spirituality seems to be feminine rather than, or even as opposed to, masculine. It sounds like something free-floating and intangible as distinct from the solidity of stone churches and inflexible commandments. It does not mean a sharp division between soul and body, but more a person's being integrated and together. It does not mean that the world as we know it is irrelevant, compared with the after-life. It has to do with what is good, and is opposed to what is bad; it has to do with what is beautiful or even sublime, and is opposed to what is banal; it has to do with what is true, and is opposed to what is false. Spirituality is not tough, but something delicate and easily destroyed. Yet it is willingly restored by a merciful divinity.

If these are the things the culture wants spirituality to mean, and they are compared with some of the things associated with religion either today or in living memory, it is not surprising that spirituality should be seen in contrast to religion. By the middle of the 20th century, religion in Ireland, especially Catholicism in the South, was to all appearances both an extremely powerful and highly beneficial force. It was the provider of a wide range of health and educational services, and more fundamentally the provider of the entire philosophy of life of the great majority of the people. It functioned almost as a shadow-State, although the State itself had all the authority to make and enforce laws and to raise taxes. The Church's most worrying resemblance to the state, at least in retrospect, was the extreme legalism of its moral theology, and its strong focus on externals in religious practice, like fasting and church attendance. It was to a considerable extent dominated by the fear of hell and the fear of mortal sin: though as a result there was much less crime and dishonesty than either a hundred years before or fifty years later, which made it a happy place to live and bring up children. The devotional life

of the Church was to a large extent unreflective and repetitive, rather than meditative or critical. Theology and philosophy were largely the preserve of the clergy, though pursued by them only to a limited extent. Perhaps as a result, the church – particularly the Catholic Church – was notably complacent and quite unaware of what was going on not alone outside Ireland but even within it.<sup>23</sup> If that is what religion, a highly church-centred religion, was like, then some un-churching of both spirituality and society had to be an imperative. Ironically, the un-churching process went on just when the Second Vatican Council was unveiling a deeper and more authentic form of being Church.

The process is still under way. It has reached an unexpectedly critical stage with the loss of prestige and self-confidence on the part of the organisational cadres of the churches, especially the Catholic Church, arising largely from a spate of serious scandals and unsatisfactory responses to them by church authorities. An advantage of this regrettable situation is that it gives lay people within the churches, and clergy, and people whose outlook is totally secular, no choice but to seek the roots of their spirituality elsewhere, or do without spirituality altogether.

## **Roots of new spirituality**

### *Secular roots*

Spirituality in a secular context is not a complete oxymoron. Existentialist philosophers and writers of personal self-help manuals alike recognize the need to bring to the surface one's deeper or truer self. Thomas Moore catches the sense of a secular spirituality well when he writes:

*Care of the soul ... aims not to make life problem-free, but to give ordinary life the depth and value that come with soulfulness... In care of the soul, we ourselves have the task and pleasure of organizing and shaping our lives for the good of the soul.*<sup>24</sup>

There is an honesty and a responsibility that are all the more refreshing and convincing for not being religious in their motivation. Historical examples of it are the Gaelic honour code known as *Cothrom na Féinne*, 'heart inár ngéig, glaine inár gcroí agus beart de réir ár mbraitcahair' [strength in our limbs, purity in our heart and our deeds according to our words], and the autonomous morality developed by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century which still has many advocates. In the New Testament, I Peter urges

Christians to live up to the standards set by the Roman state around them: 'Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that... they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God.' (1 Pet 2:12). This is the approach which underlies the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that 'in accord with the divine plan and will, human activity should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow women and men, as individuals and members of society, to pursue their total vocation and fulfil it'.<sup>25</sup> (GS, n.35) The official Church does not consider itself to be the sole source of moral directives, but is ready to be taught. Not only secular people, but also those who acknowledge religious teaching, need to be open to secular morality. This can at times lead to a Church calling secular society back to its own secular standards, something the Church can only do if it prizes those standards.

### *Religious roots*

At a time when the Church is less well placed to issue clarion-calls to spiritual living, all it can do is return to the roots of its own spirituality. These are the historical teaching of Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in relation to new situations. The teaching of Christ is contained in the New Testament, and indeed in the Bible as a whole. It may not be an exaggeration to say that now for the first time in the two thousand years of the Christian history is the Church in as good a position to understand the precise teaching of Christ, due to the astonishing progress made in biblical studies over the past century. In addition, gifted teachers and saints keep appearing to show how the original teaching of Christ applies in contemporary situations, the Church's function being to authenticate their message. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to produce such people, and the Spirit is not confined to the institutional bounds of the Catholic or any Church. William Wilberforce the opponent of the slave trade, and Mahatma Gandhi stand for real spirituality as much as Mother Teresa and Maximilian Kolbe.

### *Action, individual and collective*

It is often not so much the institutional Church or Churches, but individuals who seek out the roots of spirituality: institutions as a rule follow where individuals have led. What people do in the quest for spirituality comes under two headings: prayer and action. Prayer in the sense of not just asking God for enlightenment, but contemplative reflection on and dialogue with God. Contemplation leads to action. It is in action that people generally seem to

find their spiritual fulfilment. Action (often nowadays called praxis) comes from spirituality and leads to deeper and wider spirituality. This is especially the case when the action is not isolated but shared, for example, the Franciscan movement, the Reformation, Protestant and Catholic, and the modern democratic movement. Movements like those spring from imagination and courage, though the Church must always insist that love is the criterion for them to meet.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 What are the most life-giving and inspiring aspects of spirituality?
- 2 How helpful is it to consider spirituality both from a secular and a religious point of view?
- 3 Because spirituality is not just a matter of feeling or thinking, but of doing, what must we do?

## **'TEST THE SPIRITS TO SEE WHETHER THEY ARE FROM GOD' (1 John 4:18)**

*Laurence Murphy sj*

Wherever there is talk of 'spirituality' there is surely a place to reflect on what St. John meant when these words were written. This short paper is written from the perspective of one who works in a place that claims to be a Centre of Spirituality as well as being what traditionally has been called a Retreat House: people come here to pray in the hope of finding help in living their lives as Christians. The writer belongs to a group with a particular spirituality within the Roman Catholic tradition. My few comments are influenced by these factors though, hopefully, not restricted by them.

There is no need to repeat what other writers in this collection have presented. What goes on in this centre confirms much of what has been described in more general terms as happening in Ireland at the present time. People are searching for deeper meaning in their lives; dissatisfaction with a materially better standard of living brings some here; some want to learn to pray while others want guidance in finding a more nourishing way of praying. Within themselves some persons find a deep hunger for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which is not being met by traditional forms of spirituality. Confusion about the place of the institutional Church in their lives as Christians may keep some away while leading others to seek counsel. An increasing number of persons desire to regain more control over their lives as they experience the pressure of over-crowded lives and the destructive stress that it brings. Some come from Christian communities where there is less emphasis on one-to-one spiritual direction. Once a year those of other faith traditions come to share their experience of seeking the transcendent in their lives. In different ways and under different guises, Irish men and women are still seeking help in their daily lives. They may not use the word 'spirituality' but that seems to be what they are seeking.

A recent article in the *Irish Times* on the topic of life coaching is *one* example of what I mean.<sup>26</sup> The writer provides 'Six life-coaching questions':

- What do you want?
- Why do you want it?

- When do you want it?
- Who says you need to have or accomplish it?
- Where do you have to go to make it happen?
- How will you achieve it?

Though originally posed in the context of getting on in business or professional life, these, or similar questions, are what face people in a centre of spirituality. As Christians, we believe that a personal encounter with Jesus Christ is the ultimate answer to such questions. However, we recognise the need to take people where they are with *their* actual questions and to provide an atmosphere where in prayer they can meet and converse with the Lord. This corresponds to a need of contemporary persons who are satiated with words and are seeking an *experience* of God, at least at the beginning of their spiritual journey.

### **'Test the Spirits'**

What is most striking when one accompanies persons who come apart from their daily routine to seek God in prayer and reflection is that they often experience diverse influences operating in them. Tradition confirms that the desert is the place where people are 'tested' by the spirits. One influence may lead to a sense of union with God and others and this resonates in their affectivity; another influence may bring a heavy darkness where God seems irrelevant; this, too, resonates in their affectivity. Both these influences are pertinent when we speak about 'spirituality' today; not infrequently when we speak about 'spirituality' we seem to confine our attention to the more benign of these two influences. In reality, we are all open to, and at times subject to, the influence of both spirits. Is not this what St. John wrote about in his first epistle:

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)*

St. Paul writing to the Corinthians includes among the gifts given by the Spirit, the gift of 'the discernment of spirits' (1 Cor. 12:10). Much has been written in recent years about discernment of spirits. What is relevant for our purposes here is the realisation that this is one of the ways in which God seems to direct human affairs; one of the ways in which God can exercise influence on how we judge and decide.

The question inevitably arises about the authenticity of some of the manifestations of 'spirituality' in contemporary Ireland. If there is a hunger for 'spirituality', and all the evidence produced in these papers indicates that there is, there is an equally strong desire among many to know which movements come from God and can therefore be trusted. Which movements have another origin and must be treated with caution if not rejected. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in few periods of history has there been a greater need to "test the spirits" than the present time.

To contemporary ears, talk about good and evil spirits can sound naïve or primitive and can smack of the delusional. In a post-Freudian culture, caution seems warranted in speaking about such influences. What is of significance here is not so much an attempt to settle the question about the existence of good and evil created spirits, nor how best to demythologise what Scripture says about them, but to understand 'their influence on the interior movements of human minds and hearts in hidden ways, and through these on the events of human history on a bigger scale, where good and evil are written large, in splendid or hideous ways.'<sup>27</sup>

Irish Christians today are less fearful of God, are more aware of the goodness of God and the beauty of God's creation. With this sense there often comes a call to be actively involved in building up God's kingdom here on earth. However, thanks to modern means of communication we are also more sensitive to the evil that manifests itself in the wars, in the exploitation of the poor at home and abroad, coupled with the gross inequalities and injustices that exist on a massive scale in the world today.

In a more personal sense, most Christians can echo the words of St. Paul when he writes to the Romans: 'For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what *I do*.' (Rom.7: 18). Living as we do in a global village, the words of Vatican Council II have taken on new meaning for many: 'The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labours are linked with that more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another.'<sup>28</sup> While this is not the place to engage in a theological discussion of the meaning of the term 'evil spirits', we should perhaps broaden out the meaning to include 'the tendencies in our own psyches which spring from egoism and disordered sensuality and also from other individual human persons or society insofar as these are an influence for evil in our lives.'<sup>29</sup> While this is true for individual followers of Christ, it may well be true for groups of Christians and for the churches.

## A way forward

Among different good initiatives for the future of Christianity in Ireland, some seem called for at the present time.

- Continue and deepen the dialogue between Christians both at a theological level and more significantly at the level of sharing our experience of Christ in prayer; this could lead to periods of prayer together where the 'spirits' experienced today in our communities would be tested.
- Engage more seriously in a dialogue with the human sciences, which mediate an understanding of the human person to theology. These sciences are partners in dialogue with theology and they can lead to a healthy confrontation of theology with the mentality of the human and social sciences.
- In the New Ireland emerging, engage more widely in interfaith dialogue so as to learn from those of other faiths and of their search for the transcendent.

## Suggested Reading

1. David Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear, an Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2000.
2. David Lonsdale, *Dance to the Music of the Spirit, the Art of Discernment*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1992.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Are contemporary persons sated with words and seeking an *experience* of God?
- 2 How do we 'test the spirits' in regard to the various manifestations of spirituality in contemporary Ireland?
- 3 Can we continue and deepen the dialogue between Christians at the level of sharing our experience of Christ in prayer?
- 4 Can we learn from other faiths in the area of spirituality?

## **SPIRITUALITY IN A CHANGING CULTURE**

*Tom Jordan op*

### **What is going on in Ireland and its culture that is making the word 'Spirituality' so prominent?**

Ireland is experiencing many of the influences affecting the rest of the western world: economic development that brings a rising standard of living; wide availability of third level education; all-pervasive media influence, particularly electronic media (television, radio, internet, mobile phones); globalization; cheap worldwide travel; the buying power of young people; the pop music industry; the arrival of the autonomous individual person. These and other influences are changing the character and value system of civic society.

As people achieve a higher standard of living, a certain sense of dissatisfaction often follows witnessing to the fact that material achievements alone are not enough. Consequently, the human heart is wide open to whatever may appear to satisfy its needs: Transcendental Meditation, Eastern religious gurus, new religious cults, a new and vibrant concern for the planet and its wellbeing, movements associated with New Age, the cult of the body and lifestyles replacing moral and religious beliefs and defining new groups in civic society, a fascination with vampires and reincarnation etc., for example, some television programmes. One could sum it up by the phrase, 'a search for experience of the self' in and through all these different practices. The self is empty of spiritual goods, so it seeks fulfillment. Everyone feels the need to have some kind of commitment, some form of absolute good to motivate them, to be serious about something, but many are serious mostly about un-serious things. The point is that the autonomous self must set its own agenda since it cannot allow others (whether parents, priests or churches) to do it for them. In the past, the self simply absorbed its serious concerns from others. To do that now would be regarded as unauthentic.

What happened with the unprecedented economic growth of recent years (the Celtic Tiger) was that a predominantly economic ideology emerged leaving the soul empty because there was little concern with the old type spiritual values like truth, goodness and beauty. Many had lost contact with

the old set of values before they knew it. The new set is the *de facto* set of beliefs, conscious or unconscious, that guide the actions of people. It is these which need to be transformed to make them authentically human. Because the churches largely failed to do so, many are now cut off from the supernatural and seek it in spurious ways and in various versions of the good.

### **Spirituality and sensualism**

In the human person, we may distinguish the spiritual and the sensual. We are composed of spirit and matter, each needing fulfillment and the pursuit of its own specific objects. Our basic driving force is the body with its needs such as food, drink, shelter, reproduction. These activities belong to the world of necessity, so they dominate our lives. Our strongest energies go into them and they shape our consciousness, our relationships, as well as public opinion. We have to develop our sensual side because it is necessary for survival. Little energy is devoted to the spiritual. We can survive without it. There is an infinite distance between the necessary and the good. The necessary is the field of particular goods, whereas the absolute good is that which alone can satisfy the infinite desires of the human heart. It transcends all particular forms of good. We seek it in every particular good but we fail to find it or recognise it. It is the good which is the object of artistic activities such as literature, drama, music, sculpture, mime etc., but even in these we can become fascinated with particular forms and may lapse into a form of idolatry. At their best, however, they can become doors to the supernatural where the Good resides. The heart of Christian teaching is that God alone is Good. Augustine's famous line comes to mind: 'Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.'

In Ireland, the established religions have provided in the past a form of spiritual nourishment that was suitable to the particular time. But as society changed, what was on offer somehow did not meet felt needs and so people began to walk away. Once the sensual took over (the economic development etc., mentioned above), many forgot their spiritual needs and decided that the sensual would satisfy all aspects of life, even the needs of the spirit.

Among the profound changes experienced in contemporary Ireland is the shift from the central importance of community to that of the individual. The contemporary western world focuses on the individual person as central, while the notion of community is in practice being made to take a back seat. If our basic vision or outlook is individualistic, then our spirituality will be

individualistic. We have forgotten that we are radically dependent creatures at every level of our being and most of all in the pursuit of spiritual goods. We need a spiritual community with a tradition of knowledge and practices which fixes our gaze on the transcendent. The Church is one such community but has largely lost its way in nourishing a supernatural vision. The desire to define for ourselves what the good is, is the desire to be God. We are a centre of infinite love and desire which draws us out to pursue goodness. We forget that we do not create it by our choices. Rather, the good is there as the fruit of creation and we are fascinated by its appearances rather than by the reality beneath it. Our tragedy is that we live in and with shadows and appearances.

### **The word 'Spirituality'**

Spirituality is an abstract noun, which refers to the life of the spirit. It refers to that aspect or part of the human psyche, which is concerned with spiritual goods as opposed to material ones.

The word means different things to different people. When we in Dominican Publications were planning the journal of which I subsequently became editor, we spent some time searching for an appropriate name. Phrases such as 'Living Water', 'Living Flame', 'Rainbow' and others were considered. Then someone suggested, 'Why not call it what it is – Spirituality?' So we did. Since the word meant different things to different people, we hoped the title might appeal to a wide spectrum of the reading public given the contemporary interest in anything to do with the word, 'spirituality.'

It seems to me that everyone has a spirituality in the sense that there are certain goods he or she seeks in the hope of fulfilling their spiritual needs or developing the life of the spirit. What they seek in practice may be nothing more than material goods, which, of course, cannot nourish the spirit. The multiplicity of spiritualities reflects the multiplicity of possible goods, which people believe or imagine will lead to spiritual fulfillment. We must assert that there are true and false spiritualities, that is, those that do nourish the spirit of man and those that do not, and cannot. Just as prayer will not feed the human body, so certain practices cannot nourish the spirit, for example licentiousness.

Spirituality has to do with that inner core of the person (the spirit) out of which life is lived. It has to do with whatever makes us get up in the morning and moves us to do what we do. It has to do with a set of values out of which

actions come, it has to do with beliefs and practices that spring from the inner depths of the human person. Christian spirituality has to do with the embracing of the teaching of Christ, which shapes our innermost self and out of which our actions proceed. It is the life and the action of the Spirit of God at work within us.

### **Points of connection**

I think there are points of connection between spirituality and our evolving culture, the basic one being the emptiness of so much of contemporary life and the widespread hunger for the spiritual. The Christian tradition we have inherited, with its outstanding writers (mystics and theologians), practitioners of spirituality (saints), together with the major mistakes of our history, all have much to teach us today. The challenge is to show that the Christian tradition is one that can meet all the needs of the person, based as it is on the revelation of Christ.

### **The way forward for us as churches**

One of the difficulties at the moment is the fact that many people have changed their relationship to institutions. Both State and Church are seen just as service providers and any perceived failure to provide such is castigated. The State is expected to provide all for nothing. We could indeed have all our needs met to the highest standard if we paid the necessary level of taxes. The Church is also seen as a provider of self-defined needs of the autonomous individual, who ignores the Church but demands whatever he or she wants. It is to be expected that the autonomous self will have little interest in any social structure except as provider of his needs. He refuses to participate but wants all for nothing. He needs a constant education into his very real dependency on others and his need to sustain social and political structures, even if only for selfish reasons. To convince him of his deeper, spiritual needs is a major task. For some, this could well come about through the experience of adversity, such as may happen at a time of economic recession.

The rediscovery in our time of the need for social action and involvement has moved many to critique the actual evolving social and political situation in Ireland. It is now seen more clearly that unless the gospel has an impact for the better on the lives of individuals and of communities, it is not the authentic gospel. The 1971 Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome declared that 'justice is a constitutive part of the preaching of the gospel.' The Kingdom of

God demands the transformation of social and political structures so that a just society, caring particularly for the poor and the marginalised, may come about. There is significant opportunity here for collaboration between the different Christian traditions.

I think it is at the level of personal integrity that a start could be made. People are convinced by actions and not just by words. Any discrepancy between words and actions, between words and life, is soon perceived and generally dismissed, particularly by the young.

As a way forward, I suggest there are three things that can be done:

- **Friendship**

If genuine friendship exists between individuals or groups among the churches, it is unlikely that serious harm or division will occur. In rural areas of the country, where a sense of community greater than in urban areas still exists, friendships tend to be more easily fostered and strengthened. Personal friendships contribute to promoting a strong sense of community.

- **Prayer**

If individuals or groups engage in prayer together, the unity they already share by virtue of being baptised and therefore members of the Body of Christ, will be deepened. The method of reading the Scriptures together in the form of *lectio divina*, an ancient Christian tradition, could promote common prayer, leading in time to more formal liturgical prayer.

- **Service**

Since nothing is more effective for bringing people together than engagement in a common project to achieve a particular objective, such collaboration in service of others (for example, refugees and asylum seekers, drugs, the poor and the marginalised, environment issues etc.) would draw us closer together and give a common witness to the faith that is within us. Thus the Church would be seen as the sign of hope, a sacrament of salvation for all people.

## **What to do**

Many are unaware of the issues that led to division among Christians in the first place. I think it is essential to consider together at local level the historical background and context that gave rise to it. Evaluation of this

against our experience today could lead to questions like, 'What is our division saying to us today as disciples of Christ?' 'How are we to be disciples of Christ **now** in the new culture that is taking shape all round us?' We need to allow the present context to challenge us. Courage and perseverance are necessary if we are not to be deflected by those unable or unwilling to move out of entrenched positions.

We need a sustained critique of the prevailing ideology. That which is associated with the Celtic Tiger implies, i) a radical individualism, and, ii) materialism as the purpose of life. Such an ideology is the enemy of the spiritual. It's extremely difficult for the Christian mystery to get a hearing in this atmosphere. It also explains the loss of confidence in institutions which are now looked to solely to satisfy individual needs. In fact, the Celtic Tiger has supplanted them in many cases. As a consequence, institutions have lost much of their relevance and people are left spiritually empty.

It will be extremely difficult to influence public opinion for change. One way open to us is to work at the small group level; for example the family and also groups inspired by the basic community model, which has had remarkable results in some other countries. But Christian history teaches that it is the outstanding individuals in every age, that is, the saints, who in fact provided inspiration for others, and who were living witnesses to the reality of the transcendent. To sit tight and do nothing, hoping for better days, would be to fail in our calling to be disciples. We need to identify the prophets and follow the lead of the mystics and saints.

## **Suggested Reading**

1. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (ed. M. Downey, Liturgical Press, Minnesota).
2. *Seeking Christian Spirituality : a Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Ronald Rolheiser, London, Hodder & Stoughton).
3. *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (Michael Downey, Paulist Press, Mahwah, USA).
4. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press).
5. *Social Analysis in the Light of the Gospel* (Seán Healy & Brigid Reynolds).
6. *Actions Speak Louder: A Source Book for Social Ministry* (Earley & MacKenna, Dublin, Columba Press).
7. Vatican document on 'New Age', title: *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life: a Christian Reflection on the 'New Age.'* (Published February 2003).
8. *New Challenge to the Christian Community* – commentary by Louis Hughes OP on the Vatican document (see n. 7). *Spirituality*, vol. 9, May/June 2003, n. 48.

9. *The New Religious Landscape in Europe at the Dawn of the Third Millennium* Conference given at Avila to the Meeting of the IEOP (Dominican Provincials of Europe), April 2002, Fr Jean Vernet – available at:  
<http://www.op.org/international/english/Documents/Articles/vernette.htm>

### **Some useful websites**

- [www.spiritualite2000.com](http://www.spiritualite2000.com) Canadian website in French.
- [www.goodnews.ie](http://www.goodnews.ie) Daily commentary on gospel readings for liturgy. Dominicans in Cork.
- [www.catholicireland.net](http://www.catholicireland.net) Useful information on what's happening from a faith perspective in Ireland today. Includes references to a number of publications.
- [www.cori.ie/justice](http://www.cori.ie/justice) Web page of the Justice Commission of Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI). Working for the poor in Irish society. See publications, especially pre-Budget submissions made to the Irish Government.
- [www.zenith.com](http://www.zenith.com) Useful for official Vatican documents.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Is religious faith relevant in a changing culture? If so, how?
- 2 If people are seeking spiritual values in places other than the Christian tradition, what can be done to reclaim our rich spiritual tradition?
- 3 Biblical history as well as church history tells us that affluence has always posed a problem for the people of God. Can religious faith realistically live side by side today with affluence? How?
- 4 Do I have a reasonably good knowledge of the reasons that led to the Reformation? Are such reasons still valid? What are the possible consequences for us as churches today?
- 5 Am I fearful or suspicious of praying and/or working with those who are different from my tradition? Why? What can I do to address the situation?

## EXPRESSING OUR YEARNINGS

Rosemary Lindsay

### **What is meant by Spirituality?**

I like Ronald Rolheiser's definition of spirituality: your energy, your burning desire, your driving force.<sup>30</sup>

If our spirituality is an expression of our yearnings, then the form it takes will be determined by what brings us fulfilment – whether that be institutionalised religion, private meditation, active campaigning or whatever. People's yearnings could perhaps be gathered under headings such as the search for meaning, the desire to belong, and the need for hope. Ideally, these needs could be met by the local church community.<sup>31</sup> However, as Fr Simon Sleeman of Glenstal has remarked,<sup>32</sup> 'There's a tremendous hunger out there for some understanding of life that goes beyond the materialistic. . . there's also a hunger out there for tools of the spiritual craft *that people can use themselves'* (italics mine). Spirituality nowadays often means choosing your own components rather than uncritically accepting what's offered.

### **Are there different meanings, and do they connect with what we Christians mean by the word?**

Rolheiser cites three people with very different spiritualities: Janis Joplin, Mother Teresa and Diana, Princess of Wales. His definition allows for as many different spiritualities as there are individuals. Clearly, Mother Teresa's type of spirituality connects with a perceived Christian 'norm' in a way in which Janis Joplin's does not. But the channelling of energy in pursuit of some goal is the common denominator.

### **What is a distinctively Christian Spirituality?**

Presumably a distinctively Christian spirituality is one in which one's energies are focussed on goals which are in line with Christ's teaching. It would be wider than simply worship, but would to a greater or lesser extent also encompass life style and interests.

## Why is 'Spirituality' such a prominent word in our country and culture(s)?

At the Dublin District Autumn Synod of the Methodist Church, 2002, a survey was quoted which found that

- 76% of people admitted to having had some sort of spiritual experience;
- 55% saw the guidance of a higher power in the shape their lives had taken;
- 38% had experienced God through Jesus;
- 37% had a spiritual experience through prayer;
- 24% through communication with the dead;
- 25% had been aware of spiritual evil.

So varied spiritual experience is alive and well!

## Finally, some fanciful jottings

- **Television is the new pulpit.** Chat show hosts take the place of the preacher, giving the guests on the show the same kind of moral direction as the Sunday sermon, but usually without the Christian element. *Seventh Heaven* and similar series also deliver sermons of a kind! The popularity of these suggests the desire for some sort of spiritual dimension to life, but not necessarily an overtly Christian one.
- **Pubs & sporting venues are the new meeting place.** Hebrews 10:25 says 'Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, **but let us encourage one another.**' People are still meeting for mutual encouragement, but in less formal, more 'fun-filled' surroundings than churches. Sporting fans gather together to chant their mantras and praise their heroes. And perhaps pubs should become the new venue for cell groups. . . Seriously!
- **The quest for the Body Beautiful replaces the quest for holiness.** 1 Corinthians 9:27 says 'I beat my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.' Paul's physical discipline is part of his quest for, not physical, but spiritual excellence. People still need something to strive towards, but all too often these days their eyes are on secular goals. 'Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come' (1 Timothy 4:8)!

- **Drugs in some measure replace spiritual experience.** In 2 Corinthians 12 1-4, Paul tells of an unusual, ineffable spiritual experience he had. He calls it 'a revelation from the Lord.' Paul's advice is: 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit'. (Ephesians 5:18). In the 21st century we could substitute any stimulant, narcotic, hallucinogen, etc., for 'wine'. Those today seeking the ineffable (or merely the 'feel-good factor') have their choice of crack, speed, etc., but these are not generally used by them in a religious context, although drug-induced religious experience has been known for thousands of years.<sup>33</sup> There appears still to be a need for the kind of substitute experience that Paul counselled against: a physical one that does not involve God.

Thus it would appear that despite the current widespread disenchantment with the mainstream, people who no longer attend church need to fill the 'God-shaped hole' by 'worshipping' elsewhere; they turn in other directions for guidance, encouragement, fulfilment, discipline, etc, which they used to find in the church. So there is, perhaps, neither growth nor decline in Irish spirituality – simply a move sideways and a shift from Christian spirituality to the above-mentioned activities.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Are people simply worshipping elsewhere? Television? The Body Beautiful? Sport? Drugs?
- 2 'Spirituality nowadays often means choosing your own component, rather than uncritically accepting what's offered.' Is this true and if so what are the implications?

## **WHAT IS GOING ON IN IRISH CULTURE THAT IS MAKING THE WORD 'SPIRITUALITY' SO PROMINENT?**

*David Stevens*

The quotation from Ronald Rolheiser in the Introduction makes it clear that something is going on in our culture that is making the word 'spirituality' of significance.

The following points are an attempt to describe some of the things going on in Irish culture and society. They are not offered as a complete picture. They may be caricatures, or over-simplistic; some statements may contradict others.

- Decentred, discontinuous and fragmented nature of contemporary culture – a 'spiritually saturated yet opaque post-modern world' (Martyn Percy)
- The pervasiveness and power of the media, particularly television – ours is an image-centred culture.
- Globalisation: integration into the global economy and culture of McDonalds, Coca Cola and jeans; exposure to new ideas and influences; foreign travel; new information technologies. Globalisation has not only economic and social consequences, but also cultural and religious ones as well.
- Consumer capitalism has increasingly commercialised our private worlds. It has become harder to articulate the worth of things with no market value, such as emotion, spiritual struggle or personal responsibility.' (Libby Brooks)
- Shopping: a sort of religion in the age of globalisation. 'It's a new language, a new form of society, a way of community that is now central to human life in many places' (Patrizio Bertelli)
- The increasing speed of technological change.
- Economic growth has become the national priority.
- Changing work and employment patterns: more women working, less security in employment.

- The move from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society.
- A more fragmented and complex society.
- Increasing mobility; many people no longer live most of their lives in small localised communities.
- Loss of community in some places.
- Decline in many forms of social interaction, ranging from political activism to the involvement in voluntary organisation.
- Changing patterns of family life, rise in number of single parents, increase in cohabitation, large-scale marital breakdown.
- A revolution in sexual mores.
- The changing role of women; the 'gender revolution'.
- People living longer, often retiring earlier.
- The emergence of a youth-orientated culture.
- The importance of consumerism, pleasure dominance, worship of success, competitive individualism.
- Changing patterns of leisure and entertainment; the importance of sport; the rise in interest in personal fitness and well-being.
- Increasing pressures on people: to succeed; on time; in relations; in work.
- Marked intensification of social competitiveness, in the workplace, in the economy and in the education system.
- Increasing levels of educational attainment.
- Growing prosperity along with a more unequal society and the reality of the significant number of people who have been excluded from the mainstream.
- A more diverse Ireland; the presence of ethnic minorities, refugees, asylum-seekers, etc.
- The effects of violence and political division in Northern Ireland; the uneasy peace.
- A less stable and secure and more provisional and uncertain world – we are living in 'times of dislocation' (Walter Brueggemann).
- An emphasis on personal freedom and autonomy. 'At some point in the 20th century we pretty much junked security in favour of freedom' (Madeleine Bunting)
- The importance of personal relations and intimacy.

- The importance of personal authenticity; hatred of hypocrisy.
- Hunger for community among some.
- Sensitivity among some to victimised groups and to justice issues.
- An emphasis on inclusiveness and tolerance.
- Concern for the environment.
- Resistance to consumerism.
- A search for personal meaning and identity. For some people their commitment may be to searching, and not being willing to affiliate.
- A search for spirituality, but often dissociated from clearly defined belief systems or corporate loyalties. The footballer David Beckham: 'I have a sense of spirituality. I want Brooklyn christened but I don't know into what religion yet'.
- Many people's sense/reality of pain and hurt and the need for healing; 'an escalating weight of emotional distress'.
- The rise of 'therapies'. 'We all speak the language of self-esteem now'. 'Trauma' and 'stress' are endlessly talked about.
- The importance of well-being: physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.
- Move from a culture of obedience into one of experience.
- The search for new experiences, for example, drugs.
- The suspicion of authority: political, church, etc.
- The valuing of newness over tradition.
- An age of exposure and openness.
- Developing pluralism in Irish society, where there is no common understanding about values.
- Values and beliefs increasingly a matter of choice, less a matter of tradition.
- Traditional values that once were lived as public values are today being privatised.
- 'Post-modern' denial of meaning and rejection of absolutes.
- Religious activity, no longer a duty, but a leisure pursuit for many – a shift 'from obligation to consumption'.
- People shopping around for their answers to moral and religious questions – the 'pick-and-mix' society.

- People decide 'what is true for me'; we now inhabit a world of options and preferences.
- Difficulty with long-term and exclusive commitments.
- The importance of the 'here and now'.
- Increasing number of people living their lives without reference to religious beliefs.
- In an increasingly pluralistic society different (and sometimes contradictory) religious and spiritual orientations exist at the same time. There are multiple locations and forms for spirituality.
- Much spirituality is generated and conditioned by popular culture, often via the mass media. A quest for the supernatural is mostly involved. Nevertheless, we see, often in a refreshingly new way, spirituality and religion unfold in areas of music, art, film, theatre, etc.
- Decline in Mass and church attendance.
- No longer a sense of 'the all-embracing story' which gives meaning to life.
- Growing lack of connection between religious belief and everyday living.
- Privatisation of religious belief.
- Failure of churches to help people make sense of a changing world.
- Loss of transcendence; God gets drowned out in busyness; there is no ultimate meaning, etc.
- Growing sense among some people that the church is an oppressive reality, seeking to tell people how to live their lives and limit their freedom.
- Gap between those for whom the world of church remains nourishing and those for whom it has become empty and even incredible.
- Alienation (particularly of many young people) from present church patterns and practices.
- Disappearance of cultural and institutional support systems for a faith stance.
- The anger of many women with the Church.
- Decline in number of clergy and religious in the Roman Catholic Church.
- The loss of authority of the Churches over the last thirty years.
- The churches' decline in institutional influence.
- The association of churches with national identity: Britishness, Irishness.
- Sectarianism and communal division, and the association of the Churches with them.

- The role of religion as a source of conflict in Northern Ireland.
- Changes in how parishes/congregations relate to the local community.
- The rise of secular organisations providing welfare services, youth work, etc 'We have become socially dislocated, and dispossessed of former roles of significance' (George Hursberger, writing about the role of the churches in society).
- Greater contact and co-operation between churches.
- The Church as bulwark against change for some – a safe space in a rapidly changing world.
- Continuing popularity among some of certain forms of conservative religion – offering an all-encompassing world view.
- Growing diversity within mainstream churches.
- The conservative/liberal split within Northern Ireland Protestantism.
- Growing separation of church from certain groups in society, for example, urban poor.
- People's search for vibrancy of worship, spiritual depth, real commitment and community, and the challenge that this represents for existing Church cultures.
- Rise of new religious groups.
- Weakening denominational loyalties, the religious supermarket.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Which of these statements do you regard as valid?
- 2 Which do you want to disagree with?
- 3 How has society changed over the last thirty years?
- 4 How has this affected the churches?
- 5 How has the Church changed?
- 6 How has spirituality changed?

## SHIFTS TOWARDS NEW FORMS OF SPIRITUALITY

The changes going on in Irish society and culture are producing new forms of spirituality. In spite of the great variety of new forms of spirituality, there are a number of common features. The following diagram expresses some of the shift from traditional Christian faith to new spiritualities.

### Shifts towards new forms of Spirituality<sup>34</sup>

#### Traditional Christian Faith

The transcendent God – ‘God beyond’

We are sinners who need mercy

Doing our duty

God as King and Father

The preaching of the Word

Understanding/knowledge

Faith as Truth

‘The small passage’

Masculine vision

Going to Heaven

Philosophical Truth (‘We believe in...’)

Hierarchical Authority

#### New Spirituality

The Immanent God – ‘God inside’

We are wounded and need healing

Aiming at self-realization

God as friend and Spirit

The Mystery of Eucharist

Experience

Faith as Trust

‘The broad road’

Feminine receptivity

Living on Earth

Psychological Truth (‘I feel...’)

Authority based on individual experience

Not all of this ‘new’ spirituality is unchristian; some of it complements traditional Christian understanding and some of it is a rediscovery of parts of the Christian tradition. However, any spirituality should always be critiqued biblically and theologically. It should be said that these New Spirituality traits are quite common in modern societies and affect the population at large including Christians/Church members. Many in the church are alienated by hierarchical authority, for instance.

## **The way forward**

The following are offered as some clues to finding a way forward for churches in a situation where new forms of spirituality are developing in society.

New forms of spirituality in society needs to be met by authentic church spirituality. This does not mean 'inventing' new spiritualities in the Church. It may mean drawing on all the spiritual resources in the long and rich tradition. These riches may be found in a tradition other than our own. Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, New Church traditions all have their share to contribute.

The general scepticism towards institutions makes it difficult for many people to attach themselves to 'heavy' church institutions. Therefore, ways must be found in which the rooting of seekers in Christian faith can take place in 'safe spaces' where seekers are at ease in their journey as they work out whether to make a faith commitment.

Of key significance are peoples' need for authentic relationships. Journeying towards God is not an individual venture. We need companions on the Way. And this points to the importance of finding new forms of Christian community that are meaningful to present day people while being theologically and ecclesialogically legitimate. The notion of normal 'church membership' is of little or no value to many seekers.

The significance of relationships means that we need to minister to individuals. Due to the very high degree of individualisation in modern society, we must address individuals; ministering to 'crowds' is no longer enough.

We need to understand what is happening in the world of today and change and respond in appropriate ways. The openness in parts of secular society to talk about spiritual experiences needs to be responded to. We see spirituality and religion unfold in areas of music, art, film, theatre, etc and this points to the importance of images, symbols and music in the proclamation of the Gospel. The Christian story needs to be told within our culture and we need new ways of interacting with it in art and literature.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Do you recognise a shift towards new forms of spirituality?
- 2 If so, what are they? How would you describe them?
- 3 How do they relate to traditional Christian understanding?
- 4 Do **some** bring new insights to Christian faith? Or represent a recovery of old insights?
- 5 How do you make judgements and discernments about new spiritualities?

## SPIRITUALITY IN IRELAND TODAY

*Frances Bach*

There is a Welsh word, *hiraeth* (pronounced *hee-rythe*), which means *longing*. In the Welsh context it usually refers to a vague but fervent longing for a golden age in the far past, when Wales was proud and independent, plus an equally vague but fervent longing for a proud and independent golden age in the future. It tends to afflict people who have left Wales rather more than those still living there, and is probably little different from the emotions felt by exiled Russians weeping into their vodka, ancient Israelites by the waters of Babylon, and countless others.

*Hiraeth* in this nationalistic sense is a legitimate and a necessary longing, as we know well in Ireland. However, spirituality, too, is a type of longing, and perhaps forms the basis of all longing. St Augustine said, 'Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you'; it is said that we have a God-shaped space inside us that nothing else will fill; and part of the spiritual experience is that intense yearning that comes after we've felt, momentarily, the brush of angels' wings. The trouble is that, in our culture today, spiritual *hiraeth* finds itself jostling for space with so many other types of longing, some of which do a good job at displacing it.

### **Political Hiraeths**

Firstly, here in Northern Ireland there are our obvious political *hiraeths*: on one side a longing for Irish unity, and on the other side a precursor to *hiraeth*, a deep fear of losing what has been a golden age and of becoming the opposite of proud and independent. Although our tribalism has, at least in the past, contributed to the high level of churchgoing here, this political longing must affect Irish/Ulster spiritual *hiraeth* to some degree. You cannot *long fervently* for more than one thing at a time. Or can you? Is it possible to long for a 32-county Ireland and the Kingdom of Heaven with equal measure, or for a continuation of Northern Ireland in the UK, and the Kingdom of Heaven, with the same fervour? Perhaps it depends how closely you connect political and spiritual ideals, and whether the Kingdom of Heaven is of this world or the next. For myself, I cannot see how a single bombing, shooting,

kneecapping, feeling of hatred or act of discrimination on either side could forward the cause of the loving and inclusive reign of God, and therefore I am forced to conclude that at least some forms of political *hiraeth* here must dampen or displace spiritual *hiraeth*.

### **Materialist Hiraeths**

The media and advertising do an impressive job at channelling *hiraeth* away from God and into material things. The lotto; advertisements implying life will only be worth living if you drink the right beer/drive the right car; magazines like *Hello* glorying in huge wealth, exotic houses and great beauty; the pressure on even small children to have the right (expensive) clothes and toys... All this has been recently identified as 'luxury fever' – which is no more than an academic name for greed and envy. Whatever its name, it is a process by which *hiraeth* is deliberately turned away from God, and the God-shaped space cheapened and filled with material things.

Allied to materialism is a longing to improve oneself and find the key to health, happiness and eternal youth. We see it in the growing popularity of plastic surgery and botox, and the constant stream of new diets and new types of exercise which come on to the market. One might think that it has nothing to do with spirituality, until one looks at, for example, the language used in dieting – 'I've been really naughty this week' and 'Those chocolates are so tempting'. One national slimming club actually talks about the number of 'sins' it allows per week. In public libraries there are acres of self-improvement books, and the claims of these books are breathtaking. Apparently, one could achieve *anything* with the right aura, crystals, bedroom wall colour, chakra, massage, vegetables, mantra, 'autogenic healing', diluted herb essences, and so on. All it needs is a commitment of time, effort and self-discipline, and a belief in the charismatic person who started it (Where have we heard that before?). Moreover, because none of these things actually does fill that God-shaped space, it could be easy to get hooked on first one, and then another, and another.

### **Sporting Hiraeths**

So the *hiraeths* go on. What about that greatest of all male religions, sport, where longing for one's own team to win the cup is sometimes the deepest-felt emotion a man allows himself to have? It's strange how a Six Nations

fixture at Lansdowne Road can empty a church, but a church cannot empty a stand at Lansdowne Road... However, whatever the hype and the *hiraeth*, sport is at heart an innocent creature. Far more worrying is that widespread restlessness in Irish society and the affluent West generally, whereby nothing – from toasters to marriage partners – nothing is for life any more. Everything, including people, can be discarded if necessary for a newer model. This is *hiraeth* gone mad. We have an affluence and a ready access to commodities that even the richest emperor could hardly dream of in the past, and, like rich emperors, we need a constant stream of new delights to keep us from boredom.

### **Hiraeths for the Spiritual**

One might imagine that some of these *hiraeths* would blot out the *hiraeth* for spiritual things completely, and yet, although apparently church numbers continue to fall and fall (though not in my personal experience), spirituality is very popular. Thirty years ago when I came to Northern Ireland I fully expected to see it follow England, and become a place where Christianity was quaint, old-fashioned and out of fashion. It is an enormous surprise to find that, in both Northern Ireland and England, at least for the moment it is quite fashionable to be known to go to church (unless you are a teenager), and very fashionable to be known to be a spiritual person. A photograph of the singer Beck in a newspaper recently showed him in a T-shirt printed with the words, 'FREE INDEED', and, in smaller but still visible print underneath, 'Jn.8.36'. The trouble is that many people want spirituality without morality, lifelong commitment, or duty. They want a pick-and-mix spirituality, with a Christmas carol service here, a yoga weekend away there, and, for the really exclusive, an introduction to *kabbalah* to round things off (perhaps that is only natural as we play host to increasing numbers of people whose commitment to their own religion is often deeper than the average churchgoer's to Christianity). Moreover, people want spirituality to be an enhancement of their lives, not a religion or duty they submit to. *They* want to call the shots and have God follow, rather than the other way round.

### **The Hiraeths of the Poor**

However, it could be worse and it might get worse. Firstly, there are adults and children on this island whose *hiraeths* are still so basic that there must be precious little opportunity for developing one's God-shaped space – *hiraeth*

for a square meal, a roof over one's head, a human being to say hello, the next bottle, the next fix, a day without discrimination, a day without abuse or violence from a partner or parent, a day without pain or despair. It is easy to see Ireland as a society which has ever more prosperity, leisure and freedom in which to indulge its *hiraeths*, but poverty-stricken people, needy people and people at the wrong end of abuse or discrimination do not have that luxury. Of course, some heroically grow closer to God through their suffering, but for others, atheism is the only way to make decent sense of such a cruel world.

## No Hiraeths at all

Secondly, we are facing certain youth cultures which seem to be devoid of any *hiraeth* at all. When I worked in Larne a few years ago, in the central loyalist estate there were adolescent boys and young men who hung about on street corners, with no jobs but with some money in their pockets. When they were asked what their greatest ambition, their dearest dream for the future was, they said it was for a six-pack and a good video next Saturday. Further afield – but in this global village only a step or two away – the film *Thirteen*, co-written in the United States by a middle-class thirteen-year-old and an adult, shows 'that alarming numbers of younger and younger girls are endangering themselves with aberrant and self-destructive behaviour, eating disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, self-mutilation and sexual acting-out.... American teenage girls, surely the most affluent, pampered and catered-for in the history of the world, are also the most dangerously miserable'.<sup>35</sup> The longing in this case seems to have turned into anger and despair – particularly tragic at such a young age.

So there still is plenty of *hiraeth* in the land of saints and scholars, although some of it is definitely channelled away from Christ by the media, advertising, politics and so on. Moreover, spiritual *hiraeth* is no longer exclusively Christian. But the *hiraeth* is there, and the Christian churches still have a foot in the door and a commodity that people are willing to hear about, if only on their own terms. However, there are signs that some young people are growing up without any *hiraeth* at all, or with a *hiraeth* so blunted, or subverted, or underdeveloped, that they are not even conscious that it exists. With them, we will not only not have a foot in the door, but, when we come knocking, they won't even realise they have a door to open.

*Oh! Save us from the dawning of an age  
Bereft of crown of thorns ... and cross.*<sup>36</sup>

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Do you recognise these various *hieraeths*?
- 2 Are there people who are devoid of any *hiraeth* at all?

## IRELAND – SEEKING SPIRITUAL ANCHORAGE?

John J. Ó Ríordáin, CSSR

### The Christ-focus

What is a distinctively Christian Spirituality? As the word *Christian* indicates in the question, it is a spirituality focused on Christ. The Easter Vigil prayer sums it up: 'Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, alpha, and omega; all times belong to him, and all the ages; to him be glory and power, through every age and for ever. Amen.'<sup>37</sup> In other words, Christian Spirituality is based on an understanding of Jesus as central to all God's dealings with this world. In and through Jesus Christ God speaks his definitive word to humanity. Jesus is all. Paul puts it bluntly: 'No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.'<sup>38</sup> The distinctiveness of Christian Spirituality is, therefore, not in attitude or behaviour but in the animating vision, the Christ-focus.

### Ireland in transition

The question arises 'What is going on in Ireland and its culture(s) today that is making this word *spirituality* so prominent?' The human need for spirituality, common to all peoples, is particularly acute among the Celts, who, for as long as we know them, are 'unable to see and careless to know where the secular began and the religious ended.'<sup>39</sup> Accompanying our present wealth is a barren materialistic culture which leaves many starving for some form of spirituality. The purveyors of the *liberal* and *revisionist* agenda have left Ireland with a weakened identity depleted in spiritual and moral supports. For monetary reward mother Ireland has done a strip on the world stage. The result is, in the words of Dr. Desmond Fennell, 'that as the distinctive Ireland of modern times – rural, catholic, poor, struggling for freedom, anti-imperialist, restoring its Gaelic language – passes away, a blank space is replacing it culturally speaking on the international scene.'<sup>40</sup>

Many people are not finding adequate spiritual nourishment in their traditional churches because over-institutionalization is devouring the faith. We, the leaders, are no longer speaking the language of the people of God nor

are they understanding us. Over-institutional religion tends to want control, to tidy up. It weakens the full force of the Gospel which is catholic in the sense of all-embracing by nature. The consumerist culture which is inimical to the Gospel and anything but all-embracing is, by and large, happily adopted by the churches. People are hungry for spirituality because the focus has shifted from Christ the message to the weaknesses of institutional figures who bear the message.

Yet, the Holy Spirit is ever active in the world, in the hearts of people,

*...in the bits and pieces of Everyday –  
A kiss here and a laugh again, and sometimes tears.<sup>41</sup>*

Sadly all too often 'tears.' Ordinary people know a lot about pain, about 'the bitter riddle of suffering.'<sup>42</sup> They are not shielded from its harshness and God is their only hope. The activity of the Spirit needs, therefore, to be adequately recognized and articulated in a clear and systematic way. The human cycle of birth, puberty, marriage, funerals; and the seasonal cycle – Brigid, May Day, Harvest, and *Samhain* are, in particular, likely to evoke a spiritual response. The culture and the *story* of a people may also manifest the peculiar way in which the Spirit is moving. There are echoes of this in Péguy:

*...When those French are no longer there,  
some things I do will have no one to understand them any more.<sup>43</sup>*

### **The term Spirituality**

While the term *Spirituality* can mean all kinds of things, in general it can be said to represent the non-material side of human life, in a vague way, the *soul*. With the abandonment of many traditional expressions of spirituality there is a phenomenal mushrooming of what we might call *replacement therapies*, replacement *spiritualities*, offering to fill the vacuum, thus confirming Chesterton's oft quoted words to the effect that people who stop believing in something will believe in anything.

Nevertheless, these replacement *spiritualities/therapies* are not to be dismissed out of hand. Some of them at least, grapple with the intangible, the unseen and particularly with the search for meaning, both short-term and ultimate. The various meanings attached to *spirituality* today often connect with values enunciated by Christ in the Gospel, e.g. works of service, works of justice, respect for the person as well as all unselfish and unconditional loving; and even if none of these are present there is still the matter of ultimate

meaning that won't go away. It is our privilege as church leaders to identify and articulate the connections with a view to enriching human lives with our vision of Christ – through whom, with whom and in whom every communication passes to and from the Father and in whom we hope to find that 'rest' of which Augustine wrote so beautifully.

## Hurt and Healing

Even though we do not have in Ireland a militant atheism, we have in Houtepen's words, a growing '*agnosis or state of unknowing*.'<sup>44</sup> Houtepen sets out to explore 'the complex roots of the taking leave of God'<sup>45</sup> and distinguishes four forms of agnosis: Trivial, Aporetic, Vindictive, Rational. Perhaps the third category, that of *Vindictive*, characterises much of the Irish kind of 'taking leave of God,' notably in the bland, lifeless, consumerism often identified as a *Dublin 4 culture*, and what Desmond Fennell speaks of as 'the rampant anti-catholicism that you find in the Dublin media.'<sup>46</sup> It is especially among these elements that one is liable to find that peculiarly Irish phenomenon of resentful people leaving the Catholic Church but continuing to hang around outside, lobbing stones on the roof just to make sure that those inside won't forget that they are there.<sup>47</sup>

The resentment of *Church* and all that goes with it is compounded by the discovery of having bought into a nothingness. Any attempt to connect with such people may be facilitated by the Church's renunciation of 'images of God which have marred the pleasure of human life associating God with guilt and shame.'<sup>48</sup> There is need for a psychological healing response and a doctrinal and theological education. However, since the issue of spirituality takes us into the realm of mystery, more than an intellectual, sociological, or psychological solution is required. It is only in the realm of contemplation that some things make sense.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 'Many people are not finding adequate spiritual nourishment in their traditional, churches because over-institutionalisation is devouring the faith'. Is this true? If so, what is to be done?

- 2 'With the abandonment of many traditional expressions of spirituality there is a phenomenal mushrooming of what we might call replacement therapies, replacement spiritualities, offering to fill the vacuum.' How do we view these therapies and spiritualities?
- 3 How do we reconnect with people who are profoundly resentful of the church?

## **SPIRITUALITY IN IRELAND: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

*Susan Lecky Williams*

Though this is only a provisional conceptual framework, I feel it necessary to devise some sort of understanding of contemporary spirituality which is adequately comprehensive before even beginning to contemplate a response to the present situation in Ireland. The broad brush strokes are no doubt risibly general, yet I need to set some contextual foundation for this discussion. Further reading would no doubt suggest a more adequate formulation, but for the moment this will have to do.

If we can think of spirituality on three levels:

1. as a way of **acting** which transcends an ethics based on the natural;
2. as a way of **knowing** which transcends what we can know empirically through the senses; and
3. as a way of **being** which transcends that experience which is available to us solely in the physical realm.

Christian spirituality places Jesus at the centre, as 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14:6), transforming the follower's ethics, epistemology and experience. This means at least the following three things:

1. The Sermon on the Mount gives us a radical new law that fulfils yet transcends the old law. So, for example, our **Love** should be 'supernatural', loving our enemies, so that we may be 'perfect as [our] heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matthew 5:48)
2. The **Truth** is not something we can simply encounter through our senses but must be revealed to us, and not just through words and teaching, but through a Person, Jesus. Through Jesus, our worldview of the present is radically transformed, by orienting ourselves in the whole eternal story of God's work of redemption.
3. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection make true intimacy with God a real possibility for us, a spiritual experience of **Life** which has no equal.

## **Modernity and the Transcendent**

Modernity has left no real place for the transcendent.

1. Ethics are determined by an understanding of persons minus the spiritual; biological determinism claims that our moral choices are defined solely by the way our bodies are made. Life which lacks any spiritual roots loses any source of connection with others or with God; the natural search for autonomy results in radical individualism. Ultimately others become simply the means for attaining the individual's own objectives, with ethics driven by egotistical pragmatism.
2. An epistemology which ignores the transcendent will end up locked in different forms of rationalism, empiricism, positivism, or materialism.
3. Life experience devoid of the transcendent will degenerate into sensuality. Mind/body dualism alienates the spiritual side of life, while a monistic materialism demands the denial of spiritual needs.

## **Post-modernity**

Post-modern cultural trends would kick against these modernistic tendencies. Spirituality in a post-modern world is often an expression of longing for:

1. an experience of unity and connectedness in relationships;
2. exploration of knowledge beyond what is apprehensible to the senses; and
3. an alternative consciousness, unfettered by the limitations of materiality.

But post-modernity would follow modernity's lead in the rejection of the Author with crucial consequences for society.

1. Without His authority, there is no guide for behaviour; the effect is much as it was in Israel, when they 'had no king; everyone did as he saw fit' (Judges 21:25). Because there is no ethical consensus, the reality is that relationships in a society influenced by post-modern principles break down regularly, whether on the family or societal level.
2. The rejection of any authoritative criteria for determining what is true means that all things are equally true, so that in the end nothing is true. Having made the individual the ultimate arbiter of meaning and value, the whole post-modern project has obliterated the foundation of genuine meaning and value. And, with no arbiter of truth, people are especially susceptible to the typical human disposition for illusion. Like the children of Israel, people today say: 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us

pleasant things, prophesy illusions.' (Isaiah 30:10) The height of credulousness among the unbelieving is incredible.

3. Without the discipline of any overarching authority, the search for an alternative consciousness is often either dangerous (i.e., drugs) or frankly crazy (i.e., interpreting dreams as real encounters on some astral plane), or both.

Increased moral autonomy has led to brokenness on a massive societal scale, while social fragmentation and spiritual alienation deprive the wounded of the very connectedness and commitment which can bring healing. Bereft of any meaningful overarching universal truth, people have no way to construct a coherent worldview, nor then any sound or lasting basis for making fundamental life choices. And the Church has too often bought into unbiblical choices which stripped it of the capacity to speak to these fundamental needs for moral and cognitive guidance. And it sometimes even barred the way to spiritual experiences of intimacy and transcendence.

### **Modernity and the churches**

The mindset of modernity has influenced the ethos of the Church in many ways. When social and personal ethics are un-tethered from their spiritual moorings, then the moral standards of church members and the quality of their relationships begin to look the same as those outside. Knowledge, even about spiritual things, can be heavily ratio-centric, ignoring the mystery of the sacred and the limits of human constructions of truth. The mind-body dualism which is so often a hallmark of modernism has put feelings, with the body, outside what are considered to be the more central mind/spirit concerns of the Church, so that worship is usually more an affair of the head than the heart. Reactions to these trends in Protestantism have often resulted in fragmentation of the Church. Who can blame folks for looking for a richness of experience elsewhere?

Like other western cultures, Ireland is a battleground of all these cultural cross-currents. But add to these trends the fact that many Irish churches have never abandoned a more dogmatic approach to faith throughout the course of the 20th century when other western churches had long since discarded it in favour of approaches to faith which rely more on reason. This dogmatism has been coupled with an inherent authoritarianism which tells people what to think, but fails to help them learn how to think, so that its collapse has left

people unable to make critical judgments, vulnerable to even the most specious truth claims. But even worse, those still within church communities are often disabled in their obedience to Jesus, only able to make superficial judgments, when in fact Jesus upbraided the Jews for this, saying: 'Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgement.' (John 7:26). This lack of critical judgment makes our witness a travesty of the profound spirituality that Jesus not only intended, but actually made possible through the gift of the Spirit.

When you combine this heady mix of ingredients with the fact that Ireland has suddenly emerged on the world scene and collided not only with post-modernity, but also with a plurality of cultures, many of which have recently set up home here, all at a time when the Catholic Church's grip on Irish culture has been cut loose, we can get some sense of the multitude of components which factor into what is happening now in contemporary Irish culture. But on top of all this, the very particular brokenness left in the wake of thirty years of the Troubles, along with centuries of social and political precursors – with all the devastating emotional and psychological needs of a traumatised community – contributes yet another set of ingredients to Irish culture in the 21st century. The point of all this is that these cultural components give rise to profound human needs. Has the Church even bothered to look at the needs of people in Ireland today? By most accounts, it just doesn't look like it.

### **Modernity's critique of the churches**

Given this complex mesh, the body of Christ in Ireland needs to recognize and avow those strands of a contemporary critique which constitute a valid rebuke to our faithlessness in Jesus.

- If spiritual gurus are better than the Church in seeing and responding to the needs of people, we should be ashamed, not only of the fact that we are failing them, but that we are failing Jesus, whom we are meant to image, and who would certainly not fail in this respect. His love was real, oriented perfectly to the needs of people; first and foremost was his concern for our greatest need, that we 'were far off' – 'having no hope and without God in the world' (Eph. 2:12f). But his commitment to the bigger picture did not blind him to a whole host of immediate needs, ranging from the physical to the emotional and spiritual (i.e., food, comfort, prayer).
- The Church has often been more interested in its own needs as an

institution than the needs of its members. It has often been guilty of using people to save the institution, rather than using the institution to save people. This is the opposite of the love of Jesus which makes the individual an end in herself, not a means to an end. How can the Church teach the good news of his saving love if in fact it is acting out something quite different? This lack of congruence makes the authority vested in the Church inherently untrustworthy. For people today who find authority philosophically repugnant, this additional difficulty of a broken trust compounds their problem with the authority of the Church. This makes the need to win trust all the more urgent. And it is only in the context of local relationships that such a trust can be authentically formed.

- Just as in Jesus' day, when the people 'were like sheep without a shepherd', there is a great need for authority today; however, providing that authority is not a matter of imposing an unwanted authority on people. And it is not just any sort of authority which people need. They don't need authoritarianism, like the 'rulers of the Gentiles' who 'lord it over them' (Mt. 20:25), but an authority like the Good Shepherd's, who lays down his life, and authorises us to do the same. His authority wonderfully engenders the authority within us to follow in his footsteps. 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' (John 13:35) The textual note for John 13:31-35 in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (Revised Standard Version)<sup>49</sup> says that: 'The death that Judas has gone to arrange will *glorify* (reveal the essence of) both Father and Son as holy love. The disciples are now the organ of this love.' But people must see the reality of that love for themselves. Only then will the authority of Jesus meant to be represented by the Church be considered trustworthy. This loving authority lays its life down, not willy-nilly just to prove a point, but specifically to target the deepest needs of those it seeks to love.

To what extent is contemporary cynicism about the Church and the Gospel the result of the Church's disobedience to His call, and its failing to be 'the organ of this love'? Where is it the result of a misjudgement about the needs of our communities, and a failure to attend to the needs that really burden people? The Church must labour to know these real needs, for they are the very ones that can lead people back to the truth whose authority they so strenuously reject. The circumstances which people feel have made faith in God impossible can be the very ones which He can use to speak personally to them, if only we create a context in which that speaking can be heard.

*So it is in the actuality of life when it is God that preaches by*

*means of circumstances to awaken... no orator has the power which providence has to lay hold of a man, to cast him off into the power of circumstance, to let the desperation and trials and alarms of it preach seriously to him for awakening...<sup>50</sup>*

## **The church and works of love**

Can the church be there, not to dim the light to make it more acceptable, but to make it shine all the brighter in works of love 'that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' (Mt. 5:16) But who but the neighbour of the needy could even know of the very needs which cry out for the acts of love? Therefore, our responses in the Church must be able to reach to the local level, where their reality can break through the illusions with which people fill their lives. And that calls for a whole multitude, whereas the Church has focused on the mobilization of only those individuals who would stand in the pulpit or at the altar.

Ultimately we need to ask: **how do we create structures which can allow disciples to interface with the needy in Ireland?** We need to focus on how to heal, train and equip people to create teams, which can make sure that their own needs are met (needs for intimate relationship through prayer and fellowship – a transformed experience, governed by the authority of truth through Bible reading and study – a transformed epistemology) at the same time that they commit themselves to the meeting of the needs of others (through laying down their lives – a transformed ethic). We must devote ourselves to learning how to enable this ministry so that church leadership can work as a resource to the wider membership in this project of getting all hands on deck. Too long the ordained ministry has been self-focused, conscious only of its own ministry. Others are often considered useless compared to the ones who are ordained and supposedly carry out the real work of the church. In fact, the clergy should be growing to such a maturity as to be capable of generating many other ministries to do the colossal work of Jesus.

*Therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case*

*the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves [or our institutions], but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (II Corinthians 4:1-11, RSV).*

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Does modernity have no place for the transcendent?
- 2 Is a post-modern culture which allows some room for the spiritual really any better?
- 3 How has modernity influenced the ethos of the churches?
- 4 Does modernity have a valid critique of the churches? If so, how do we respond?

## **SECTION THREE**

### **What is the Way Forward for us as Churches?**

## **A CATHOLIC VIEW OF HOW SPIRITUALITY MAY BE DEVELOPED**

*Myles Rearden cm and Seamus O'Connell*

The two phases of the Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced characteristic spiritual practices that marked the Christian life of the following four centuries. The new situation now emerging in the history of Christianity will certainly find expression in its own characteristic spirituality. Among the forms this spirituality might well take are, we suggest, the following:

### **Listening for the Lord's Voice in the Word**

People approach the Scriptures with many motivations: some seek direct guidance, some read them as a witness to a past civilisation, some desire to hear what God said or is saying, some seek inspiration, some open the Bible to seek proof of a particular dogma or doctrine. The American biblical scholar, Sandra Schneiders makes an initial distinction between reading two types of reading: reading for *information* and reading for transformation.

*One can read the text primarily for information or in view of transformation, that is to be intellectually enlightened or to be personally converted. The two objectives are intimately related, but they are not identical. [In reading for transformation] the objective is to go beyond simply discovering what the text says to asking if what it says is true, and if so in what sense, and what the personal consequences for the readers and others might be.<sup>51</sup>*

The development of a spirituality in Ireland or anywhere else is the work of the Spirit. In responding to that work, it is possible to discern a call and a direction: there is a clear call that the Scriptures be given to all people and that they be offered as a word that inspires, consoles and offers not only direction on life's journey, but also food for that journey. That this is essential can be seen from the Pontifical Biblical Commission declaration in 1993 that

*the risk of error [in the actualisation of the Scriptures] does not constitute a valid objection against what is a necessary task: that*

*of bringing the message of the Bible to the ears and hearts of people of our own time.*<sup>52</sup>

Over the past 60 years, the bringing of the word of God 'to the ears and hearts of people of our own time' has become a priority within the Catholic approach to Christian living. Without this foundational perspective within the Catholic Church, any attempt at the development of a spirituality will be stunted, unbalanced and turned in on itself. Ultimately, it will not be catholic, in the truest sense of the word: open, inclusive, welcoming – as IS Jesus.

But how can this happen? The experience of the past 35 years – not just in Ireland, but in continental Europe and in North America, and across the churches – has shown us the limits of what might be termed 'information based' faith formation. The development of a biblically nourished spirituality will only happen when people have a first hand experience of the Scriptures as a life-giving Word. This contains a double challenge:

- 1 the challenge of a way of reading (opening) the Word.
- 2 the challenge of permitting large numbers of people to have contact with the Word.

The first challenge calls Christians across the churches to be at the service of everybody coming 'face-to-face' with the Word. We might remember the hard won experience of Cardinal Carlo Martini, the retired Archbishop of Milan. Speaking of the success of his 'School of the Word' he can write,

*The secret of the success of this venture lies in the fact that we do not offer the young people a catechism lesson or even a homily but rather the necessary means for them to put themselves face to face with the text.*<sup>53</sup>

There is here an essential simplicity, one which is also referred to elsewhere:

*One day I began reading the psalms aloud to myself, softly and slowly, listening to the words more than saying them. Gradually I found myself, as it were, walking into the psalms. There was not meditation or reflection, just movement into. The psalms began to reveal something through the words and yet beyond them. I experienced a psalm.*<sup>54</sup>

The call of a biblically nourished spirituality has been emerging in the Catholic Church since the 1960s. The 1996 encyclical *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* can ask,

*To what extent has the Word of God become more fully the soul of theology and the inspiration of the whole of Christian living, as Dei Verbum taught? (TMA §36)*

Challenges of leadership and guidance notwithstanding, it is in reading and hearing the Scriptures together as well as privately, but most of all together, that the word of God will inspire and renew our Christian living. The key lies in reading together. From a Catholic perspective, that reading and hearing together most importantly takes place within a liturgical context, within the context of worship. It is there that we turn next.

### **Worshipping an ever-present Lord 'in Spirit and in Truth' within each church community and between the churches.**

Communal worship is a key dimension of Christian living. We remember the words of Jesus: 'where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' (Matt 18:20) When Christians gather for worship and when that worship finds expression in language, gestures, rituals and symbols which honour and respect not only the participants, but also the Eternal Word who came to dwell among us (cf. John 1:14), they are called to a new way of living and nourished to live in a new way. There has been a long emphasis in Catholic theology that in the Liturgy, we see the face of the Lord. In opening this way from a Catholic perspective, we keep in mind the following insight of Gregory Manly and Annliese Reinhard:

*A person will experience liturgy through responding to the rite as symbol, and only through responding to it as SYMBOL. If the response to the rite is not a response-to-a-symbol, it will not be a liturgical experience, although it may be an experience of a different type.<sup>55</sup>*

Liturgy becomes a pillar of one's spirituality when the symbols speak to the person or to a group of people (e.g., a family, a group in a particular need, a community that seeks to grow in service of each other and of their neighbours). From a Catholic perspective, this is the greatest challenge in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty first century: to discover and re-discover symbols that will evoke a response to the life-giving, healing, consoling, welcoming and prophetic presence of Christ among all his people. He is the one who gathers all the nations into the peace of the kingdom and who establishes that his Father's house is a house of prayer for all nations

(cf. Mk 11:17). As in him the Father does 'a new thing' (cf. Isa 43:19), so it is incumbent that our ways of worship, our praise, our thanksgiving and our intercession be given an expression which permits more people on this island to hear the wonderful words, 'hurry, come down for I MUST stay at your house TODAY.' (cf. Luke 19:5).

While there is an urgency in this challenge, there is also a profound need deeply to search among people for what resonates with them. If 'the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God' (1 Cor 2:10), then our search will be at the service of what will enable people to respond to the call of the Spirit. It is also in this context that we look at the our reading of and listening to the word of God. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) the Church could teach that,

*The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum) § 21*

And could continue on to request that 'easy access to Sacred Scripture is to be provided for all the Christian faithful.' (*Dei Verbum* §22). In a Catholic context, 'easy access' is primarily symbolic and liturgical, not intellectual. This is not to devalue the value or importance of the critical study of Scriptures, but the critical study of Scripture might best be understood as deepening hunger that flows from the 'table of God's word.' With this in mind, communal encounters in which our faith is celebrated, Funerals, Baptisms, Marriages, etc. might be occasions when the work of God is well proclaimed, in good translation and from worthy books. A such occasional contact with the word will be ever more frequent for more and more people, it is all the more important that Scripture passages be well chosen and that a wide variety of texts be used, bearing in mind the riches of the lesser known biblical books (e.g, the Wisdom literature, and the great story of Israel from Joshua to David).

Is it here that the different churches might be of service to each other and of witness to all as we tell of 'how our hearts burn[ed] within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?' (Luke 24:32)

## **The Global Movements**

It is characteristic of Catholicism to combine a high degree of centralism (the Papacy) with international movements that embody the ideals of charismatic individuals. An Irish example is the Legion of Mary, founded in the early 20th century by Frank Duff. Another example strongly represented in Ireland is the Society of St Vincent de Paul, founded a century earlier in France by Frederic Ozanam and a group of companions. These movements resemble much earlier movements in the Church, such as monasticism, the Franciscan movement, the Jesuit or Ignatian movement, and the less organized but very influential Marian movement. Those examples show how ideas that originate locally can take wing and have great influence on a wide scale, and also how long-lasting they can be.

In the aftermath of Vatican Two, a quite large number of movements sprang up. Some of the better known are L'Arche, based on Jean Vanier's spirituality of community life with handicapped people, the Focolare Movement, based on a lay Marian spirituality of holiness in secular life, and the Charismatic Renewal, which is basically a prayer-movement, to mention only three. They have been carriers of exciting ideas and of challenges. Pope John Paul II has welcomed them as 'among the gifts of the Spirit to our time' and 'a source of hope for the Church' and humanity.<sup>56</sup>

This kind of movement is most beneficial when it interacts positively with local dioceses and parishes. For example a small local group of people living out of the theologically profound literature and experience of the Focolare Movement can model well-informed Catholic living for many who do not belong to the movement. In the same way, local branches of the Society of St Vincent de Paul represent ideals of social justice that affect how people in general think, live and even vote.

The movements usually spread by their own dynamic, though they can meet resistance on the ground, especially when imprudence on one side clashes with unwillingness to change on the other. When they manage to present themselves well, however, 'the movements represent a concrete realization... of that idea of communion that lies at the heart of Vatican Two's vision of the Church.'<sup>57</sup> They stand for the fullest Cupertino of old and young, of priests and people, of well-off and less well-off, in the community, and must surely have something to contribute to the future development of spirituality in practice.

## **Shared visions of the churches and the faiths**

Probably very few people think that the spirituality of the future will be other than universal. Despite the fact that humanity's centuries-old conditioning as explorers makes some people wonder if there are beings like us in other worlds, the underlying conviction of the present seems to be that we humans are a single species, one clan or even a global village. It is we ourselves who must work out our salvation. Christian tradition has always seen things that way, up to a point. It was and is the task of the Church to bring the Christian message to everyone. But only now is the corollary of that principle coming to light, namely, that the message brought will undergo subtle or even dramatic transformation on reaching other cultures. The gospel, in other words, is only complete when it absorbs the perspectives of those hearing it for the first time, without losing what it received from Christ. Vatican II recognised that the Church could 'only by degrees touch and penetrate nations, and thus take them up into full catholicity'.<sup>58</sup> Anyone who has worked as a missionary in Africa knows that he or she has only been brought 'into full catholicity' by meeting the patience, the warmth and the family spirit inherited from their ancestors by people who only lately heard the gospel. Missionaries in India and China have learned much from the sense of transcendence of oriental religions, which enables them to look with new eyes on the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Resurrection and the Trinity, which they teach.

This has always been the case. When Christianity reached Antioch and then Rome, in its early decades, it began to take on new forms, and, centuries later, on reaching the Celtic fringe of Europe it did the same again, while remaining true to itself. It is true that more recent missionary work has not infrequently gone hand in hand with imperialism, cultural and economic, and missionaries have at times failed to learn as much as they taught. That is not today's perspective. 'Christ', as Vatican II teaches, 'is the source and model of that renewed humanity, penetrated with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire. Christ, and the Church which bears witness to Him by preaching the gospel, transcend every particularity of race of nation and therefore cannot be considered foreign anywhere or to anybody.'<sup>59</sup> The converse is equally sublime: Christianity is the fulfilment of every culture and every human aspiration, not its destruction. When Christianity puts on the clothes of a new culture, it discovers something of itself, perhaps for the first time, without forgetting anything essential to itself.

This process can as easily get under way when foreigners come as immigrants to a Christian country, as when Christian missionaries go to theirs. When it does get under way, it is to be expected that another process already underway in all Christian countries will move faster: the realisation that what look like deep divisions within Christianity, for example between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Christianity, are more to do with culture and history than with faith. In other words, they can be accommodated with no huge difficulty. It would be surprising if a great many of the differences and even conflicts between churches could not be made manageable by such considerations. Not but that it would be naïve to think they could resolve every difficulty: there will always be an unbridgeable chasm between what is and what is not Catholic Christianity. Still, the lines can then be drawn where the difficulties really lie.

Perhaps it is the fate of spirituality to dream of things barely realisable. But a religiously united human race is surely a dream that must be dreamt. It is Christ's own dream.

## **Discipline**

Every major undertaking of the kind that can become a virtual religion involves discipline. Sport, business, scientific research, and professions like medicine, teaching and agriculture stretch people to the limit. Perhaps it is this self-transcendent drive that allows them to substitute for religion in many cases. Certainly, religion has a strongly ascetical side: for example, the emotional moderation of Buddhism, Hindu vegetarianism, the dignified restraint of Islamic worship, and Christian equating of others' welfare with one's own. In addition, there are forms of religiously motivated self-denial that are essentially tokens of discipline, though significant tokens: for example, crosses on the forehead on Ash Wednesday or making the three-day fast at Lough Derg. Genuine religious asceticism, when it is more than a token, is, it can be said, a form of 'secular spirituality', adapted for the purposes of a particular creed, and serving a social and economic purpose.

Religious asceticism is often not only secular, but revolutionary. The asceticism or self-discipline the present and the immediate future seem to require have to do with making people and resources available for major undertakings of a revolutionary kind. The revolution in question is somewhat Marxist inasmuch as it involves turning capitalism on its head. In particular, it means closing down the Orwellian consumerism demanded by the creation

of enormous wealth and its confinement in a few hands. Such a revolution would be only somewhat Marxist, however, as it need not be either collectivist or atheistic. There is no reason why it should not be entirely Christian, or Islamic, or Judaic, to mention only two other religions, inasmuch as it would advocate a certain frugality so as to fulfil the universal moral principle of loving one's fellow human beings. Pride in service and in workmanship accords better with many, if not all of the great religions, than does the mercenary motive.

Christianity, and Catholicism in particular, holds a view of sexuality that, while not prudish, is stringent. It considers that sexuality for all its importance is not quite central to human life.<sup>60</sup> This view is based on the doctrines that God not only lived but still lives in a fully human body, and that sharing God's eternal life is the destiny of the human race. In the light of these doctrines, the Christian principles of confining sexual activity to life-long marriage, acknowledging its link with procreation, and recognising celibacy as a worthy spiritual commitment, are meaningful and viable. They involve a continence during youth and outside marriage that leaves people free to choose as adults between the married and the single life. Celibacy (which would need to be healthy and more sanely monitored than sometimes in the past) makes people of both genders and all orientations available for total commitment to missionary, pastoral, cultural and other social ventures that are as satisfying as they are useful: which are also possible for married people, but with more limited mobility and different financial needs. It is difficult to see the present West surviving without the retrieval of that kind of discipline. For this reason, spirituality can be seen as the key to the survival of the West.

## **Suggested Reading**

### **Listening for the Lord's Voice in the Word**

Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Book that Reads Me: A Handbook for Bible Study Enablers*. Geneva: WCC, 1995.

Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word. An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1998.

Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, Ligouri: Triumph Books, 1996.

Carlos Mesters, *Defenseless Flower. A New Reading of the Bible*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991.

Carlos Mesters, *God, Where Are You? Rediscovering the Bible*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995.

Kenneth Hagen (ed.) *The Bible in the Churches. How Various Christians Interpret the Scriptures*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 31998.

Miguel A. De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002.

**Worshipping an Ever-Present Lord 'in Spirit and in Truth' Within Each Church Community and Between the Churches.**

Fritz West, *Scripture and Memory. The Ecumenical Hermeneutic of the Three-Year Lectionaries*, Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997.

Gregory Manly and Anliese Reinhard, *The Art of Praying Liturgy*, Spectrum: Melbourne, 1984.

Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things. A Liturgical Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.

Carlo Maria Martini, al. *La Preghiera de Chi non Crede (The Prayer of the Non-Believer)*, Milan: Mondadori, 1994.

Werner Hahne, *De Arte Celebrandi oder Von der Kunst Gottesdienst zu feiern. Entwurf einer Fundamentalliturgik*. Freiburg: Herder 2 1991.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 What difference does it make when the word of God is the inspiration of all we seek to do?
- 2 When have you found yourself consoled and nourished by a liturgy or a service that was deeper than words?
- 3 How can international religious movements best help the spiritual growth of the country and of our locality in particular?
- 4 Can Catholic spirituality be enriched by openness to the perspectives of other churches and other faiths? Could such openness involve some risks, and if so how can they be minimised?
- 5 What forms of discipline, whether traditional or new, are needed as part of Catholic practice in the 21st century?

## THE WAY FORWARD

Frances Bach

'The Way Forward' and its parallel title, 'How should the Churches respond?', both suggest *doing* things. Perhaps *doing* is not the place to start. Perhaps *being* comes first.

### The visibility of faith in persons

I had the enormous privilege of knowing one of the great Christians of the last century, Leonard Cheshire. We first met during the summer holidays when I was eleven. He teased me that he was about to set me sums, the joke went on for days, and I was singularly unimpressed. The next time our paths crossed properly, I was seventeen. On a rare trip to see family in the east of England, I visited the Cheshires, and, although Leonard should have been getting ready for a trip to India, he sat and talked to me as if he had all the time in the world. He confided in me about how bad he felt that day, because he'd told a young man that the idea he had was impracticable – 'I should have let him try it, and see for himself that it would fail.' We put the world to rights, we argued a bit, we talked and talked – and this time I was deeply impressed. He had a deep reservoir of stillness and peace within him that I'd never come across before, and that first 'grown-up' meeting with him has stayed with me all my life. He had his faults, of course, but in him I saw what a spiritual person could be; I longed to be like him; I still long to be like him; and Leonard is at least a quarter of why I am ordained. My being Anglican and his being Catholic was, and is, completely irrelevant.

Also completely irrelevant to me when I was seventeen was Leonard's work. By that time, he had opened numerous Cheshire Homes (there were 270 worldwide when he died), but that was not what impressed me. It was not what he *did*, but what he *was*, that was important. However, as far as I could see, what he *was* led to what he *did*. Without his capacity for deep spirituality – which grew and grew over the years – he would not have been called to his life's work, and nor would he have achieved it. So *being* led to *doing*, and the two together made a deep impression on many, many people. As in the life of

Mother Teresa, that combination of great work and great spirituality must have made even the most church-weary observer feel that Christianity had a future. But neither Mother Teresa nor Leonard lived their lives that way in order to impress people who might otherwise have turned to Buddhism or horoscopes. They lived their lives that way because Christ was worth it. In the same way, as Christians in 21st century Ireland, our first and greatest duty is to live the authentically, whole-heartedly, sacrificially Christian life, both *being* and *doing* – and not to wonder whether or not that is the way to attract more people to church.

### **Institutional and personal failure**

There is, of course, much fine tuning to be done. As churches and individuals we have failings, and certain of those failings have been a huge turn-off for people less committed than ourselves. We are seen as the guardians and teachers of morality – so when priests/clergy/ministers/key lay people abscond with the money or do dire things to little boys, the general public rightly comes down on us like a ton of bricks. Everything grubby, everything less than truly Christian, is a turn-off to someone, somewhere. Our sectarianism, past or present, personal or institutionalised, is a turn-off. Our institutional wealth, and the fact that we are always asking for more, and the fact that many clergy live in houses bigger than most of their congregation's, with no worry about redundancy or where the next meal is coming from, is a turn-off. Our perceived place in society, hobnobbing with the powerful and sitting on High Table, is a turn-off (On this subject, the excellent and salutary *Scattering the Proud* by Sean O'Conaill<sup>61</sup> suggests the Church actually lost the plot around 324 AD). Sometimes our ideas of ethical finance, ecology, employment practice and so on fall far behind the best of the secular world, and that is yet another turn-off. Outsiders know only too well what Christians and the Church should be. In fact, they seem to know it rather better than we do and they do not like it when we do not measure up.

### **Spirituality, morality and risk**

Much of this might seem as if it is to do with morality rather than spirituality, and therefore not within the remit of the Working Party – but, as the Church preaches that there is no spirituality without morality, the two are too closely connected to be taken apart. And if, to a far greater extent, we could get the two *right*, people looking for a spiritual dimension in their lives would be far more likely to look to us for guidance.

As to what such people are looking for, it seems to differ from traditional spirituality and concomitant morality in three ways: they want something new (if it reminds them of Sunday School, or sitting in church feeling bored as a child, they will reject it); they want it personalised and individual; and they would prefer the option of it being short-term. At first glance, this might seem quite a problem. For instance, all of us think of spirituality as old, whether we look back to apostolic times, the Patrician age, the Reformation or 19th century Ultramontanism<sup>62</sup> And yet, to grow properly, we all have to branch out into what, for us as individuals, is the new spirituality of other denominations and other periods. I might be a model Anglican if I kept to the Caroline Divines<sup>63</sup>, but my soul would be much the poorer if I did not explore the spiritual classics of other traditions. Thus, if someone wants a spirituality which does not remind them of the childhood Christianity they rejected, there is no reason why they should not be guided to something new that suits them better – which, by the way, is how Leonard Cheshire began.

Secondly, people want a personalised and individual spirituality and morality, rather than the conformity we expect of them. And why not? Jesus Christ and John the Baptist both preached in general terms, but seemed to hand out more personalised spiritual direction or moral teaching to individuals. Moreover, as we have already seen, sometimes secular society's morals are better than the Church's, anyway. Thirdly, if people feel they cannot sign up to life-long single-minded Christianity any longer, that is not so terrible. Christ did not seem to expect everyone he met to follow him lifelong 'in the way'. Sometimes he just healed them, and left it at that. So, for instance, we might guide someone to spend a year out as a religious novice, or live with the homeless or travellers, or be engaged on an interchurch project, when an appropriate time in his/her life came along (people are now taking a gap year in their late twenties or early thirties, for example, and there is a growing interest in doing something different in the first year of retirement). Between all the churches and groups engaged in this Working Party, there would be plenty of ideas and possibilities.

At the same time, perhaps some of our ordained members or religious might come down from the comfortable, middle-class life of the career Christian and live – if only, *ahem*, for a year or two – the eremitical or mendicant life, in visible and real poverty. It would need great spiritual reserves to do that, but taking our *being* and *doing* out into a new context would shake us up considerably, and, at the same time, might well draw new people towards Christ. Those of us who have lived on bleak housing estates as part of our

ministry know what a powerful and positive message is given out when clergy/religious choose not to live in the usual comfortable, large and rather stand-offish houses. What would the message be if sometimes they hardly lived in a house at all?

Lastly, whatever our churches do as a result of this study, may it be done as an interchurch venture. In the past, we have got away with ignorance, mistrust, name-calling, pretending the other side didn't exist, pretending the other side didn't count, pretending there wasn't a problem, and even allowing ourselves to turn a blind eye to violence and hate the enemy. And yet, within our own communities we were held in enormous reverence and respect. We did not always deserve that respect and reverence, and it is about time we earned it, even if it means taking major risks. No doubt we all take minor risks, and no doubt there are very good, logical and sensible reasons why we should not take major ones and rock the boat. But that's not the way to impress anyone, and it's not the way forward.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 How is spirituality related to morality?
- 2 Are people looking for something new rather than traditional church spirituality?
- 3 Do people now want a personalised and individual spirituality, rather than some standardised 'package'?
- 4 Should we expect people today to 'sign up to life-long single-minded Christianity'? Might there be an argument for 'try it and see'?

## WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD FOR USE IN THE CHURCHES?

Rosemary Lindsay

Within the past year a Covenant has been signed between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland. A lot of reservations were expressed by those who feared that any rapprochement heralded the end of 'church' as they understood it. What in fact the Covenant did was ratify different informal arrangements which already existed locally around the country. One example of this is the Church of Ireland parish where a Methodist minister has for some time had permission regularly to celebrate Holy Communion according to the Methodist Service Book. Local clergy and congregations are now being encouraged to explore ways of working and worshipping together, thereby learning from each other and enriching each other.

Christians are much criticised for their divisions. While recognising that there are variations of belief and practice even within individual Christian traditions, and that we must probably agree to disagree on a number of issues, there are a couple of things that maybe should be said:

- 1 Jesus prayed that His followers should be one as He is one with the Father** (John 17:22). Father and Son are clearly not identical in their oneness. No more need we be.
- 2 Paul talks about being *like-minded, having the same love, one in spirit and purpose*** (Phil 2:2). This is a goal which seems to me to reflect the oneness of the Godhead, and which should be attainable. *Doing justice, loving mercy, walking humbly...* (Micah 6:8) – this is what the Lord requires. Can't we do all of this together?

### The Way Forward?

- 1 Working together.** I've been impressed by reports from Bray, Co Wicklow, where Presbyterians and Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Methodists have participated in town-wide Alpha courses. Several have been run at this stage. A spin-off from these has been ecumenical cell groups. There are also annual celebrations held under the banner of 'Bray Churches Together'. All those who made enquiries following the Power To Change campaign in 2002 were visited by a Protestant and a Roman Catholic together, by way of stressing their joint commitment to the venture. It should also be

possible to combine the work (eg) of justice & peace groups, do fund-raising together, etc – anything in which we can present a united front and avoid being insular!

**2 Removing the 'cringe' factor.** Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek church in the US, at a seminar held in Dublin in May 2003, encouraged those of us present to take a long, hard look at what we do in church and ask ourselves how unchurched people may react to it. He remembered taking a friend to church as a young man, and being asked: 'How can someone as normal as you be part of something that abnormal?' How off-putting might our liturgy and our language be? At the Church of Ireland General Synod 2003, one of the bishops referred to liturgy as 'a weapon for mission'. Language therefore is crucial – there needs to be something a seeker can connect with. I've recently come across *The sTReeT biBLe* by Rob Lacey:<sup>64</sup> all the familiar stories (and no genealogies!) paraphrased in 'MTV language'. Not a traditional understanding of 'The Holy Bible' by any means but a riveting read and could be a great introduction to God's story for someone who gets bogged down in the unedited version!

**3 Wrestling in prayer.** In my experience, shared prayer is the exception rather than the rule – even among clergy. Every so often I'm challenged to suggest it – but it never seems to meet with great enthusiasm. I still think it's important – not just the few formal times of meeting for prayer (such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity) but regular, honest, informal, interdenominational struggle together before the Lord.

**4 Recognising that we're not perfect.** Whilst in all of the above we would be trying to present a positive image to the world, we should at the same time **be open to constructive criticism** both from outside or (sometimes harder to take) within our ranks, and **flexible enough to make the necessary adjustments**, provided we aren't compromising the essential elements of our faith. (That's our **faith** – not our traditions!)

It could be important to remember that when Jesus called and commissioned His first disciples, they were to go fishing for people who would follow **Jesus**, not Methodism, Anglicanism, etc. The commission hasn't changed, even though the Church may have.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 How off-putting is our liturgy and our language?
- 2 What can we learn from each other in the area of spirituality?

## **SECTION FOUR**

### **Particular Explorations**

## A NOTE ON CELTIC SPIRITUALITY

John J. Ó Ríordáin, CSSR

### The Celts

Since Celtic roots go back into prehistoric times there is no documentation either of their beginnings or formative stages. Archaeological and linguistic evidence establishes the Celts as Indo-Europeans. Chronologically they emerge as a distinctive grouping in the late Bronze Age, about 1,000 BC, and with the dawn of history we find them strong on the Rhine and Central Europe, roughly the territory covered by modern day Switzerland, Austria, South Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Their language shares a common ancestry with most other European languages. About the 5th century BC they moved out in all directions – Italy, Turkey (Galatia), France (Gauls), Spain (Galitia), Ireland (Gaels) and Britain. The emergence of the Roman Empire led to the demise of Celtic culture on the Continent and the arrival of the Romans in Britain in the 1st century BC and the arrival of the *English* five or six centuries later squeezed the British Celts into the Mountains of Wales, into Devon and Cornwall and ultimately across the Channel into north-western France. (The name *Brittany* derives from the old name for Wales). By the time St. Patrick came to Ireland, the country had already enjoyed seven or eight hundred years of uninterrupted Celtic culture.

### Values and creed

Greek and Roman commentators from about the 7th century BC describe the Celts as a people with a strong religious sense who believed in life after death, bonded well with the living and the dead, favoured simplicity of life. They were not materialistic, nor were they interested in bureaucracy and centralised administration. Other characteristics mentioned include a fine spirit of hospitality and an appreciation of the aesthetic. The Celts were rural folk living close to nature and in harmony with it. In terms of religion, they had many gods and goddesses – the names of more than four hundred survive – and had a priestly class known as druids. These druids met in oak groves, at river-sources and in high places but of their rituals little is known.

## The uniqueness of Ireland

Except in Ireland and pockets of Celtic Britain, notably Wales, little more than snatches of information survive from these people who once dominated Europe. The uniqueness of Ireland's heritage lies in a number of factors: over a thousand years of undisturbed Celtic culture prior to the Viking Invasion, the peaceful transition to Christianity in or about the 5th century, the openness of monastic scribes to recording pagan lore together with the mediation of all things *Celtic* through the Gaelic language and Christian tradition down to the 17th century and beyond.

## Integrating Christianity

It is only reasonable to suppose that the newly arrived Celts in Ireland married the local bronze-age and stone age women so that Celtic Christianity in Ireland must surely incorporate influences of these earlier inhabitants – a *Celto-Megalithic* spirituality? The distinctive Irish Christian spirituality that emerged incorporated earlier natural characteristics enriching them with the Gospel vision. So, for example, personal relationships expanded beyond the boundaries of this world to include relationships with the Holy Trinity, with Christ crucified, with Mary, the Saints and the Angels. Hospitality expanded into the fulfilment of St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25 which presents the final Judgement in terms of treatment of the neighbour. The Celtic love of paradox allowed people to sit comfortably with membership of a Church which was both local and universal. The Celtic celebration of the dead at the beginning of November (*Samhain*) underlay the emergence of the Christian Feasts of *All Saints and All Souls*. The propensity to wander over land and sea (*Iomramh*) became pilgrimage. Then there was that altogether special pilgrimage, becoming a pilgrim for Christ's sake, which meant going into voluntary and life-long exile for the sake of the Gospel – the greatest sacrifice short of shedding one's blood, the *white martyrdom*. What were probably pagan runic patterns found a new rhythm and meaning in the many protection prayers that emerged in the Irish Christian tradition, the most notable of which is *St. Patrick's Breast-plate*.

Speaking in Iona on the feast of St Colmcille, 1908, George Cosgrave said that the Early Christian Celts showed

*a remarkable confidence in nature as a sphere which belongs to Christ by right, but waits for them to claim and hold for him in deed... Nature could never become for them God's rival, or claim the heart in place of God, for nature they recognized as the very kindness and love of God himself to men.*<sup>65</sup>

The unity and connectedness of all things in nature gave meaning to daily routine. As Patrick Kavanagh said of his mother 'among your earthiest words the angels stray.'<sup>66</sup> A person may be doing the most ordinary things in the daily round of life, throwing bales to the cattle, ploughing the fields, washing the dishes, feeding the cat and another world, another dimension permeates and encompasses it all.

In the folkloric tradition, Finn McCool's hospitality was legendary,

*Turn brown leaves to gold  
on an autumn day;  
turn white waves to silver  
Finn would give all away.*<sup>67</sup>

A 9th century manuscript gloss adds the Christian insight, 'If there be a guest in your house and you deny him anything it is not the guest that you deny but Jesus, Mary's Son.'<sup>68</sup>

### **The Core of the Celtic tradition**

Naturally, the core of the Irish spiritual tradition is the Word and Sacrament, the Bible and Eucharist. Survivals in manuscript, metallurgy and stone testify to their centrality. Witness the *Book of Kells*, the *Book of Durrow*, the *Book of Dimma*. Witness the Ardagh Chalice, the Doirenabhflan Chalice, the Cross of Cong. Witness the great High Crosses of the Barrow Valley, of Clonmacnoise and of Monasterboice. What do they tell us? That no human effort or skill or artistry is to be spared in relation to reverencing Word and Sacrament.

The warmth of relationship with the Holy Trinity is an outstanding characteristic of the Irish Christian tradition. The Father, the *Rí na nUille*, the King of the Elements, was indeed the creator of the universe, but that same God is also close by, as the proverb says, '*is goire cabhar Dé ná an doras*,' 'the help of God is nearer than the door.' As early as the seventh or early eighth century, a mature devotion to Christ and Mary is evident. The warm intimate term *Mary's Son* is the favourite term used in reference to Jesus. 'Early Irish Religious Poetry,' writes Alfred Percival Graves, 'is remarkable, not only for its fine metrical form, but for its cheerful spirituality, its open-air freshness and for its occasional touches of kindly humour.'<sup>69</sup> And yet, there is a shade of melancholy, as Yeats saw in Paddy Flynn's eyes: 'He was indeed always cheerful, though I thought I could see in his eyes a melancholy which was wellnigh a portion of their joy.'<sup>70</sup> Perhaps it is that sense of cheerfulness and

good humour that generally saves us from extremes either to the right or left. And finally, the Celtic Irish may be characterised as people of the night and the half-light – once late evening comes the day really gets under way!

In the Ireland of the late 18th and the 19th century the Catholic Church in Ireland underwent a transition from the traditional spirituality to a more Continental kind. Because of the decline in the use of the Irish language the new spirituality was communicated through the medium of the English language and culture, a culture that was puritanical since the Cromwellian period in the 17th century. The new spirituality had its pluses but it does not sit as comfortably with the people as the older spiritual tradition which had evolved from roots beyond the dawn of history. A little Irish prayer-poem collected by Dr. Douglas Hyde sums up the freshness of the Celtic way, a freshness that is somehow lacking in our present religious expression:

*A Fragrant prayer upon the air  
My child taught me  
Awaken there, the morn is fair,  
The birds sing free.  
Now dawns the day, awake and pray  
And bend the knee.  
The lamb who lay beneath the clay  
Was slain for thee.<sup>71</sup>*

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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Can Celtic spirituality speak to all Christian traditions in Ireland?

## FEMININE SPIRITUALITY

*Frances Bach*

*Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth, peace, goodwill to all men.  
But not women. Tee, hee, hee.*

Girl playing in the street, Larne, Co Antrim, 1999

I have been asked to write a paper on feminine – as opposed to feminist – spirituality. Is there such a thing? The papers contributed by the three female members of this Working Party show that different women approach the subject in very different ways. The best I can do is describe *my* spirituality, and hope it describes other women's as well. It may not, because, firstly, Anglicans are largely left to work out their own spirituality. We are expected to have a prayer life, but we make of it what we will. I know, for instance, that some women – and men – find it much easier to relate to God the Son than God the Father, because they can imagine Jesus, but they cannot imagine the Creator. Secondly, I belong to the first generation of female clergy. We have no role-models to turn to and are remarkably free to make the job and the spirituality individually our own, in a way that future generations will probably not be.

### **The Otherness of God**

The single greatest difference between men's spirituality and my own must be that, for me, God is completely Other. I was brought up to believe in God the Father. Fatherhood is completely alien to all my experiences. There will never be a day when I look at myself as a parent and think, 'Now I understand what "God the Father" means.' I cannot feel part of God the Father, and I cannot imagine what it must be like to identify with Him. I do remember experiencing intense and wonderfully self-giving love for my babies, and realising that God must love in that maternal way – otherwise I would have something he did not, which would mean logically that he was not God. However, for me the Motherness of God will never be equal to the Fatherness, which means God will always be full of mystery.

Moreover, growing up, I learnt in church to think of myself as a 'son of God' (who, by the way, made man, not woman, in his own image). To me that meant as much as if I had been called a camel of God. I have no experience of being anyone's son. Unless you explain the term, it has little meaning for women – and, as the girl playing in the street in Larne showed, language has to mean what it says, without explanation, or someone, somewhere, will misunderstand it. These days I try to think of myself as a 'daughter of God', but it seems too close a relationship, too much of a luxury, and I shy away from it. 'Child of God' is all right, though rather impersonal – but, luckily, there comes a time in one's spiritual journey when language is inadequate anyway. If anything, I am a very small pet dog of God, utterly loved, utterly cherished, probably not understanding him at all, but trotting adoringly behind Him and trying – quite often – to do his will.

### **God the Creator**

If those gender-heavy images kept me at arm's length from God, the phrase 'God the creator' helps redress the balance. Motherhood means that every woman has the potential for creation. God created in the vastness of the universe; we do so in the little space of the womb – not from nothing, but from precious little. For all its pain, there is nothing so magical as giving birth. To be *so much* the agent of a new life is awe-inspiring. Moreover, motherhood gives me a deep sense of being in tune with God's universe, as my body has done what it was created to do. There is an enormous feeling of fulfilment. In fact, when I was a mother, had a university degree or two and got ordained, I realised I had nothing left to prove in body, mind or soul – improve, yes, but prove, no. Does motherhood take the edge off a woman's spirituality? Do we search less? Perhaps. Or perhaps women search for God as much as men do because, whatever the shape and state of our bodies, all our souls are God-shaped.

Women are probably less keen than men on shaping God and the world into hierarchies. I find the minutiae of whether someone is higher than someone else in an office, the Church, or the Trinity of very limited interest. I also relate to a Trinitarian model in which there is some sort of democracy of infinite power and love better than I do to the strictly hierarchical one I seemed to learn about in church. Here, God the Father had mighty power and God the Son a great deal of love, but God the Holy Spirit hardly featured, except at Baptism or Confirmation. On this question of hierarchy, I am told that men

tend to preach about God's authority, whereas women preach more about God's love, which might confirm my point.

## **Mary**

Coming down the hierarchy, the person I identify with more and more is the mother-figure of the Christian story. For members of the Reformed and Protestant churches, Mary is not a human being of impossible perfection. She is not Queen of Heaven. If we ever do take a proper look at her in the Bible, we find a real, flesh-and-blood woman who went through hell and high water for her beloved Son. Pregnant outside wedlock, she probably could not face her parents, and chose another, older and more sympathetic female relative to tell. Nine months later, she walked or rode uncomfortably the seventy-odd miles to Bethlehem. The exercise probably started her labour. When she arrived she could not get a bed. Later, she had to take her baby to a foreign country for a time. When he was twelve, he went missing for three days, and, when she found him, the stress told and she shouted at him. His chosen career brought far more humiliation and danger than it did accolades. Finally, she watched him die a painful death he did not deserve. Poor, poor Mary – and thank God that, whatever the worst a mother has to suffer, Mary probably went through it first. Moreover, she was not just a passive sufferer. She could consider the implications and make a snap decision (the Annunciation), and spend time puzzling over events (Jesus going missing). Some of this is much clearer in the original Greek than it is in English translations. However, whatever the language, Mary had a body and a soul, and the fact that she had a mind, too, could make her an excellent spiritual role-model for twenty-first century Protestant women.

## **Two practical points about Spirituality**

Finally, two practical points. Firstly, feminine spirituality often has to fit in with the needs of other people. It rarely comes first. I believe that women, far more than men, have to miss church when babies are sick or parents need care. Also, some of the Church's traditions are very difficult for women to keep. Every December I wonder how a working woman, with an extra-heavy pre-Christmas workload, a family Christmas to prepare, and all those cards and presents to buy and send off, can possibly give Advent the attention it deserves. We could manage so much more easily if we could overhaul our souls *after* Christmas, in the light of Christ's already having come, but still looking forward towards his Second Coming.

Secondly, it may surprise some people to learn that, on the Reformed and Protestant side of things, sometimes sexuality and spirituality actually *mix*. It is all right to fancy the unmarried curate if you are unmarried, too (and of the opposite sex), because traditionally the clergy choose their spouses from the congregation and, who knows, this time it could be you. That said, when John and I fell in love, I found it fairly strange to go to Holy Communion when he was the celebrant, even though our relationship had the Church's blessing. In fact, people are beginning to wonder whether the churches need to put the clergy/laity relationship on a more professional footing, like that of doctors and patients, so clergy just might have to look outside the congregation for their partners in future, difficult though that would be.

Probably what I have written unwittingly is as revealing as what I meant to write. The spirituality I have described is personal and individual. Physicality, practicality and female experience play a substantial part. I have to work to make sense of, and relate to, God, because the traditional language used in spirituality does not always fit.

But I end as I began, with the girl in the street. My guess is that, when I came across her, she was eight or nine years old. That was a very young age to notice that there is a problem with Christian language, and I so hope that she is not put off by it. I so hope that she goes on to learn that, whatever the language, whatever the imagery with which humans limit God and each other, the great, mysterious and Holy Trinity – beyond and above all human language and limits – creates, loves, preserves, redeems and empowers us equally, male and female.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 Many of our faith traditions have been profoundly male in expression. What consequences has that had?

## THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON SPIRITUALITY

*Susan Lecky Williams*

I have decided simply to look at the impact of trauma on spirituality more generally, and then to leave it to those who have lived in the province for a longer time to speak to its more particular indications in Northern Ireland. I myself am aware of many ways in which trauma may have affected religious life in Northern Ireland, but for the moment there is enough to say about the more typical impact of trauma on spirituality for a short paper such as this.

To begin, we must consider which use of the word spirituality we'll be dealing with. Because we have moved in our discussions from one meaning to another, I will also be adopting slightly different meanings of 'spirituality', but will attempt to locate the particular usage I adopt for each of the several implications of trauma.

The second presupposition that must be addressed here (because trauma is at its core a neuro-physiological phenomenon) is this: to what extent is our spirituality embodied? For those who are of the dualistic opinion that spirituality is separate from the workings of the brain, my thoughts may cause some difficulty. Yet there is no reason to see an 'embodied spirituality' as an excuse for a monistic position; in fact the term itself implies a sort of dualism, though it is a dualism that is unified within one body. The implications of this for trauma are significant, since our spiritual awareness is entirely dependent on neuro-physiological capacities which are at least to some extent affected by trauma. Obviously, if one were pronounced brain dead, there would be no spiritual awareness at all, however much one's spiritual status in terms of eternity might be guaranteed. It therefore makes sense to claim that brain changes could affect our spirituality.

It should also be understood that I will be thinking in terms of the worst case scenario, that is, of those acutely traumatised. We can assume some aspects of this traumatising to apply to those at the epicentre of a traumatic event, and then for paler shades of these effects to be seen further away from that traumatic core in what is commonly known as *secondary trauma*. Rather than move through the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress, I will orient traumatic impact on spirituality under two main subject headings: the **traumatic loss of safety** and the **traumatic loss of control**.

## **The Traumatic Loss of Safety**

When any of us experiences an acutely traumatic threat to our sense of safety, every other concern in our lives is shifted to a secondary, peripheral place initially outside conscious awareness. Our attention is focused solely on the sphere of survival. This terror associated with trauma is associated with an autonomic nervous system takeover that has many longer term implications for our mental function:

- **Hypervigilance** – we become jumpy and tense, ever prepared for another assault. Our spiritual way of being (that is, the fruit of the Spirit as peace) gets squeezed out by this dominating concern for survival. This state of tension is on its own exhausting, but can lead to sleeplessness creating a feedback loop that triggers spiralling anxiety and irritability. These symptoms of trauma further erode the sense of a spiritual dimension to life, since love is another fruit of the Spirit, and irritability and impatience are, according to I Corinthians, taken to be evidence of its absence.
- **Loss of concentration** – because one is alert to the possibility of another threat, it becomes difficult to focus on anything else for a long time. Because of this, spiritual disciplines such as prayer and meditation are hijacked by this underlying preoccupation with threat. With half an eye on the door, spiritual intimacy is inevitably limited. Also, it becomes difficult to think through any issue at any great depth. This affects the whole area of spirituality as a way of seeing the world, which is achieved only after one has properly processed information about the world on a more material level. Any difficulties raised in the first level of processing (What is it? What must I do about it?), make it difficult to go on to a further level where more transcendent aspects of reality would be processed.
- **Loss of trust** – when one is dropped from a position of safety and has no real comprehension of how or exactly why that happened, it can be extremely difficult to truly trust again. Each miniscule step toward trusting is taken with trepidation. The least evidence of uncertainty will collapse the process only to have to start all over again. This is first and foremost a sticking point in the individual's relationship with God. Though appearances may suggest that the faith is intact, since doctrinal belief may be rigidly espoused, the link of trust that makes spiritual growth possible may have, in reality, been broken. Furthermore, the horizontal impact of this loss of trust on human relationships could be a major factor in the privatisation of spirituality that impoverishes corporate spiritual

experience. This global loss of trust extends, thirdly, to a loss of trust in our own ability to make judgements, particularly about trustworthiness. Many of the fundamental beliefs about ourselves and the world (many of them, perhaps, illusory) which we had previously trusted to be true may have been shattered by the acute experience of trauma. Some of these may have been foundational to many other beliefs which may give way when the infrastructure gives way. The mental chaos when this conceptual infrastructure breaks down makes it very difficult to make spiritual judgements, since these depend on well-developed mental representations of (what was believed to have been) reality.

### **Traumatic Loss of Control**

The takeover by autonomic nervous systems means that the individual is suddenly dominated by involuntary forces from within over which she has no control. These survival-oriented systems are very primitive in fact, they are similar to the neuro-systems found in higher mammals. When the individual is functioning on this level, the cognitive processes associated with the cerebral hemispheres are less in evidence. For instance, fighter pilots under threat have been known to resort to default mental operations, such as intuition and a sense of balance, rather than reading their instruments, which can be fatal. In terms of faith, it can mean that we resort to very primitive and magical beliefs about God which lack the spiritual discernment of the more mature, critical faith. Furthermore, this takeover by more primitive systems challenges the individual's role of authority over internal functions which are highly personal and therefore bound up with his identity.

This autonomic takeover ultimately results in a global helplessness within the person's internal world, which is at least as terrifying as the traumatic helplessness with respect to her external world. The cognitive level of emotional awareness associated with a state of utter helplessness is akin to the level of emotional awareness in the newborn.<sup>72</sup> At this level, a person has only a physical experience of emotions. Emotion can be reduced simply to a pain somewhere in the body. All information about the person's emotions is being conveyed outward to others (as when a child cries), rather than inward through intrapersonal mechanisms to the self.

MRI brain scans of trauma victims shows that the Broca's area (which is responsible for translating subjective experience into verbal communication) is 'switched off' when the individual recalls and thereby re-enters traumatic

memories. The implications of this for the person are legion. As far as the emotions are concerned, the individual has no way of understanding them and thereby taking an upper hand, or what I prefer to call a position of authority, over them. Whereas normal adults have long since taken over the authority of their emotions from their mothers (this happens gradually from birth to adulthood with developmental gains which equip us for this mastery), the traumatised may very suddenly lose this ability, with its attendant sense of personal competence and authority. This loss of higher order functions in coping with the onslaught of overwhelming emotions is perhaps part of the reason why the emotional system typically shuts down altogether, leaving the traumatised person feeling numb and detached in even the most intimate of relationships.

The silencing of one's emotional information has wider implications for the making of moral judgements. We often think of emotions as entirely irrational, yet many of our rational functions are based on emotional information conveyed to us from within. For instance, we might know that an act is reprehensible when our feelings of empathy are affected by the plight of the victim. Our feelings of anxiety around someone can alert us to their untrustworthiness, long before we have made a more considered judgement about their character. And we may feel ashamed or guilty before we realise what it is that we have done that might have made us feel that way. Even in terms of what we value or disvalue, our feelings often lead us to the good, or away from the not good enough, when we don't have time to think it through fully.

What are some of the spiritual implications of this emotional dysfunction? Firstly, the person comes to the Lord as incredibly needy. The usual coping mechanisms for dealing with powerful emotions have been pulled from under her feet. This is one aspect of trauma that may enhance the spiritual life. There is a poverty of spirit which is a hopeful place to begin. But if healing does not come out of that poverty, how can the individual hope to pray meaningfully about feelings as the psalmist does? And if one feels 'dead' inside toward everyone, including God, and that deadness is unconsciously preferable to the intense pain of traumatic emotions, how does one have a truly spiritual experience of the love of God (Romans 5 :5)? All the emotional rewards for the spiritual life become unattainable. The absence of spiritual experience can make the spiritual disciplines too much like hard work. It is therefore not at all unusual to see trauma victims give up on their quiet times with the Lord.

And there is more fallout here for the fruit of the Spirit, since self-control is meant to flower in the spiritual person. But the lack of authority over emotions means that they can be just as tyrannous with the traumatised as they are with the toddler we find kicking and screaming on the floor of Tesco's. This lack of authority over the emotions leads to an emotional instability which also makes the fruit of faithfulness unlikely to flower. When all these indications of spirituality are stripped away from someone, they can feel deep spiritual shame. Though there are many less noble reasons for hypocrisy, spiritual shame in the face of intense suffering is one; and it can lead to a double life with a superficial church life masking the felt absence of genuine spirituality.

The need to recoup this overall loss of control and the overarching sense of personal authority can express itself in a myriad of ways which can then go on to strangle the spiritual life of a whole community. Controlling relationships in churches leave little room for the work of the Spirit. Also, endeavours which promise a more exquisite sense of control will be favoured over those which cannot make such a promise. Materialism would therefore be more appealing than spirituality, which tends to reward those who are able to let go.

## **Secondary Trauma**

Those who listen to the experiences of the acutely traumatized can suffer secondary trauma from that close proximity. It is therefore unsurprising that people naturally protect themselves from secondary trauma by walling off trauma's most helpless victims. This can mean that the instances in which the church should be most caring could become gaping holes in the witness of the body of Christ, mocking the integrity of a union that is meant to be there to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. If spirituality can also be understood more corporately, this is then one more way in which spirituality is impacted by trauma.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1 What impact has 30 years of violence in Northern Ireland had on people's spirituality? On victims? On their families? On the general population?
- 2 What would a spirituality of reconciliation look like?

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- 1 Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality: Guidelines for a Christian Spirituality for the Twenty-first Century*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1998, p. 5.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 3 The twelve dioceses are the current result of an historical process that involved thirty two actual dioceses. On the general organization of the Church of Ireland see JLB Deane, *A Church of Ireland Handbook*, APCK, Dublin 1982.
- 4 These norms are established by *The Constitution of the Church of Ireland* and administered through various forms of oversight.
- 5 The Church of Ireland was the first Anglican church in the British isles to admit women to the priesthood. There is no bar on the election of women to the episcopate though the first such election has yet to be made.
- 6 A number of 'Priests-in-charge' and 'Diocesan curates' exist in the Church, often in rural areas, who do not enjoy the same status as 'incumbents'.
- 7 This has been true *ab initio*. For several centuries the liturgies of the (periodically yet conservatively revised) *Book of Common Prayer* (1549, 1552, 1662, 1878, 1926) were used. A new set appeared in *The Alternative Prayer Book* (1984) which met with some degree of resistance. This was partnered in 1987 with *Alternative Occasional Services* that provided new forms for marriages and funerals. Another new pattern, *The Book of Common Prayer* will appear in 2004 to the suppression of all others.
- 8 *The Service of the Word* developed in the Church of England, a related Anglican church, as something akin to a 'menu' of the elements that a non-sacramental liturgy needed to have if it was to be considered 'Anglican'. When this idea was received by the Church of Ireland the Liturgical Advisory Committee (LAC) produced four authorized 'Services of the Word' which were immediately and popularly received by the church at large.
- 9 The old if resonant language of the *Book of Common Prayer* is felt by many to be a real barrier to congregational participation, while even *The Alternative Prayer Book* service is often felt to be wordy and uninteresting.
- 10 Initially in the lectionary provided by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, then through a thematic lectionary adopted in *The Alternative Prayer Book* in 1984 and now through the *Revised Common Lectionary* (experimentally used from Advent 1995).
- 11 The Church of Ireland has privileged common singing and a number of hymnbooks have been authorized – the *Church Hymnal* (fourth edition, 1960) has lasted for a number of years, was supplemented by Irish Church Praise in 1990 and has recently been replaced by the *Church Hymnal* (fifth edition, 2000). For more detailed comments see my 'In Tune with Heaven? The Church Hymnal Fifth Edition' in *Search*, Winter 2001, pp. 109–118.
- 12 Occasionally in both groups it has been a case of seeing what can be 'got away with'. The use of incense in the catholic arena (prohibited by ecclesiastical law) balanced by the

- evangelical celebration of divine worship in a lounge suit (similarly discountenanced by law).
- 13 The publication of a new *Book of Common Prayer* in 2004 will not deliver the liturgical standardization of the sixteenth century. In the new book 'commonality' purposes something rather different!
  - 14 In city contexts the idea of the 'local' church has been made irretrievably problematic. In the countryside however the only option may remain the local parish church.
  - 15 There is also (of course) a strong sense in which the political situation obtaining in the island has provided different stimuli to the self-understanding of the Church of Ireland in the separate political jurisdictions. It might be suggested that in Ireland members of the Church of Ireland see themselves as 'not-Roman Catholics – yet perhaps open to the use of the term 'catholic'. In Northern Ireland while they resist to the last the descriptive use of the term catholic, they also see themselves rather importantly as 'not-Presbyterians', they define themselves in contradistinction to the numerically very strong and sometimes rather threatening Presbyterian Church. In Northern Ireland members of the Church of Ireland are 'protestant' but in a different way from all the rest – they have bishops, priests and deacons.
  - 16 Rupert E Davies, *Methodist*, Epworth, p. 63.
  - 17 *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, SCM, p. 362.
  - 18 Charles Wesley, *Hymns & Psalm* 374.
  - 19 Available from Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough.
  - 20 *Unfinished Sequence*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin, 1979, p.14.
  - 21 *Groundwork of Christian Spirituality*, Epworth Press, Peterborough, 2001, p. 6.
  - 22 Cf. 'Christian Spirituality', in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1993, p. 932.
  - 23 Louise Fuller has described all this in telling detail in her *Irish Catholicism since 1950, the Undoing of a Culture*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 2002; see also Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, Veritas, Dublin, 2003.
  - 24 *Care of the Soul*, London, 1992, p. 4.
  - 25 *Gaudium et Spes*, The Church in the Modern World, p. 35.
  - 26 Roisin Ingle, 'Who Needs Life Coaching?', *Irish Times*, October 14, 2003.
  - 27 Jules Toner, S.J., *A Commentary on St. Ignatius' Rules for the Discernment of Spirits: A Guide to Principles and Practice*, p. 261, St. Louis, MO. Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989.
  - 28 The Documents of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, No 10.
  - 29 Jules Toner, S.J., Discernment in the Spiritual Exercises, in *A New Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.
  - 30 Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1998, pp6ff.
  - 31 See Robert L Randall, *What People Expect from Church*, Abingdon Press, 1992.
  - 32 This was an interview in the Saturday supplement of *The Irish Independent*, some time during 2002!

- 33 David M Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*, John Wiley & Sons, 1991, p. 82.
- 34 see *International Review of Mission*, January 2003, p. 103.
- 35 *The Sunday Times*, 31 August 2003.
- 36 from *Tydi a Roddaist* by T.Rowland Hughes, trans. Meinir Pritchard, Aureus Publishing; first published 1952.
- 37 *The Roman Missal*, Liturgical Books, Dublin, 1974, p. 188.
- 38 I Cor. 3.11.
- 39 Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. I, Morman Maclean, Edinburgh, 1928, p. xxxiii.
- 40 Desmond Fennell, 'The Sunday Show', RTE Radio 1, 21 September 2003.
- 41 Kavanagh, Patrick. 'The Great Hunger' in *The Complete Poems*, Goldsmith Press. Newbridge, Co. Kildare, 1984, p. 88.
- 42 Anton Houtepen, 'God: an open question', *Continuum*, London/N.Y., 2002, p. 32.
- 43 Charles Peguy "Les Sept contre Paris", quoted in *Penguin Book of French Verse*, Anthony Hartley et al. eds, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1977.
- 44 Houtepen, op cit., p. 32.
- 45 ibid., chapter I, pp. 12ff.
- 46 Desmond Fennell, op. cit.
- 47 vide: John J Ó Ríordáin, *Irish Catholic Spirituality*, Columba Press, Dublin, 1998, p. 10.
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- 49 Eds. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977.
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- 53 Cardinal Carlo M. Martini in an address at the Gregorian University, Rome on 13 December, 1990, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Dei Verbum*.
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- 57 Ian Ker, *The New Movements*, London, 2001, p. 44.
- 58 Decree on the Missions, n.6.
- 59 Decree on the Missions, n.8.
- 60 As in Lk.20:34–39.

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- 62 Literally *beyond the mountains* (ie, the Alps), Ultramontanist favours the centralised authority of the Papacy over diocesan or national authority. It became the norm in Ireland and elsewhere from the mid-nineteenth century, and in spirituality tended to supplant diverse, local patterns of devotion with a more uniform, church-wide form.
- 63 Anglican clergy of the seventeenth century who wrote some of the best Anglican devotional literature, such as Bishop Jeremy Taylor of Down and Connor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*. They were High Church – ie, they had a 'high' concept of the sacraments and the episcopacy, and stressed Anglicanism's links with the early and pre-Reformation Church.
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