

## **Irrigating the Irish Catholic Church's « path of renewal »: a comparative insight into recent adult lay faith formation proposals**

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In his “Pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland” (2010), Pope Benedict XVI announced that an Apostolic Visitation would assist the local Church “on her path of healing, renewal and reparation.”<sup>1</sup> Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the ways in which civil and ecclesial authorities have dealt with the cases of clerical abuse revealed between 2009 and 2014 and to the subsequent attempts by the Church to begin to heal and repair. Following the Visitation in 2011, the findings were summarized and satisfaction was expressed concerning the measures put in place in the first and third areas.<sup>2</sup> I would like to explore the second one – renewal, “ecclesiastical and individual renewal”, in the spirit of the *ressourcement* theology<sup>3</sup> which underpinned the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. *Ressourcement* can be defined as “a theological renewal based on the revitalization of the authentic sources of Christian tradition (scripture, the Fathers, liturgy), supposedly obscured, rendered sterile, even distorted by more recent, less pure, traditions.”<sup>4</sup> Thus envisaged, the conciliar reforms which intended to redefine and rekindle the relationship between the Church and the world, are, according to Pope Benedict, himself a second-generation *ressourcement* theologian<sup>5</sup>, yet to be properly understood and implemented in Ireland. The path of such a renewal for the Irish Church is obviously more difficult to map than the other two (post-abuse healing and reparation), but the Pastoral Letter and the Summary of the Findings help mark it out:

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland”, March 19, 2010. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20100319\\_church-ireland.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20100319_church-ireland.html) (retrieved August 1, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> “Summary of the Findings of the Apostolic Visitation in Ireland”, March 2012. [http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources\\_sintesi\\_20120320\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_sintesi_20120320_en.html) (retrieved August 1, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Ressourcement*, Oxford UP (2012), 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Donneaud OP, in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *op. cit.*, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Ayres, Patricia Kelly and Thomas Humphries, “Benedict XVI: A Ressourcement Theologian?”, in Flynn and Murray, 423.

Among the pastoral priorities that have emerged more strongly is the need for deeper formation in the content of the faith for young people and adults; a broad and well-planned ongoing theological and spiritual formation for clergy, Religious and lay faithful; a new focus on the role of the laity, who are called to be engaged both within the Church and in bearing witness before society, in accordance with the social teachings of the Church. There is a need to harness the contribution of the new Ecclesial Movements, in order better to reach the younger generation and to give renewed enthusiasm to Christian life [...].<sup>6</sup>

How to irrigate this path of renewal towards a newly reflective appropriation of the Catholic faith in Ireland, North and South? How to involve the laity in understanding, for the first time, what it is they choose to live by or leave behind? The renewal paths proposed by commentators so far have most often been organizational<sup>7</sup>, liturgical, or extra-institutional (the popularity of retreat centres and extra-ecclesial expressions of spirituality). However, there can be no way forward for Irish Catholicism except through a reflective re-appropriation of faith, one which will see the laity empowered at a new level, and the Second Vatican Council moved to a further stage of its reception concerning the capacity of the Church to sustain the dialogue between faith and culture. In the *ressourcement* theological framework and on the basis of interviews with Irish clergy and laity involved in adult faith development proposals in Ireland and Northern Ireland and abroad<sup>8</sup>, this piece is an attempt to form a picture of the ways in which, directly or indirectly, that apostolic recommendation has been implemented in Ireland.

### **An Irish Catholic faith long seeking understanding**

To appreciate the effectiveness of the endeavour, it is helpful to take a look back at events in the history of Irish Catholicism which have led to a denial of theological formation opportunities for the Catholic

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<sup>6</sup> “Summary of the Findings of the Apostolic Visitation in Ireland”, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Gerry O’Hanlon SJ, “The Catholic Church in Ireland Today”, *Studies*, Vol 105, No 421, Spring 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Fr Vincent Twomey, June 10, 2017 and June 1, 2018; Kate Liffey, coordinator, adult faith development, Irish Bishops Conference, June 27, 2017; Archbishop of Pretoria William Slattery, June 28, 2017; Sr Patricia Finn, National Catechetical Coordinator, South African Catholic Bishops Conference; Catherine McMahon, Opus Dei Ireland, June 28, 2017; Bishop Noel Treanor, diocese of Down & Connor, August 11, 2017; Fr Gareth Byrne, author of the National Directory for Catechesis and director of Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education, September 26, 2017; Donal Harrington, Coordinator of Catechetical Formation at the Archdiocese of Dublin, September 29, 2017; Piaras Jackson SJ, Director of Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, May 16, 2018; Fáinche Ryan, director, Loyola Institute, Trinity College Dublin, May 27, 2018; Pat Coyle, director of communications, and Joe Greenan, Human Resources Director, Irish Jesuit Province, May 28, 2018; Rev Prof Eamonn Conway, Mary Immaculate College, August 31, 2018.

laity, resulting in Tom Inglis's observation in the opening of his *Moral Monopoly* that "We did not talk much about religion; we practised it."<sup>9</sup>

In post-Emancipation 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ireland, just as the Catholic Church was entrusted with the task of disciplining and pacifying Ireland through the administration of the school system, the bishops made efforts to modernise and reinvigorate the Church, to put an end to the syncretic devotions that combined praying the rosary with believing in fairies, changelings and curses. Having trained for the priesthood on the continent, those bishops brought back continental devotions and devotional books, trying to make prayer life more personal and reflective; they also imported a clerical culture based on submission and a pessimistic approach to morality. Fr Vincent Twomey describes an Irish Catholic world that was uncritically dependent on continental Catholicism, whose imported devotions "numbed the mind", and which has been "compromised by its lack of theology, in the strictest sense of the term, namely faith seeking understanding."<sup>10</sup>

In the same period, the Irish Catholic revival with its 900 churches built in 42 years coincided with a demographic peak, resulting in a priest shortage. As a result, instruction failed to reach ever larger sections of the rural population whose religion "retained its mixture of sacred and profane, orthodox and unorthodox, Christian and pagan."<sup>11</sup> To remedy that situation came the mission, imported from France. That massive enterprise of reconversion by teaching, exposition to the sacraments and opportunities for involvement in charity work was active in Ireland between 1850 and 1880, transforming "the Irish people as a people... into those pious and practising Catholics they have essentially remained almost down to the present day."<sup>12</sup> And into humanitarian missionaries and social activists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as attested by the widespread choice across generations of Irish religious and laity for mission work as the way to live out the faith, be it in St Vincent de Paul Societies, in Lourdes, or in mission hospitals

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<sup>9</sup> Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly. The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, Dublin: UCD Press, (1987) 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent Twomey, "Catholic Church today lacks a passion for truth", *The Irish Times*, April 14, 2003. <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/catholic-church-today-lacks-a-passion-for-truth-1.355669> (retrieved August 1, 2018)

<sup>11</sup> Brendan Bradshaw and Dermot Keogh, *Christianity in Ireland. Revisiting the Story*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2002, 181.

<sup>12</sup> Bradshaw and Keogh, *op. cit.*, 195.

and schools in Asia, South America and Africa. To the extent that Cardinal Archbishop of Manila Luis Antonio Tagle could confess in 2017: “I thought God was Irish.”<sup>13</sup>

But as Irish Catholic practice emerged from clandestinity, access to formation in Catholic theology was to follow a long and tortuous path in Ireland. The non-denominational Queen’s Colleges established by Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel in 1845 were to be free from all religious tests and faculties of theology.<sup>14</sup> And being non-denominational, they were condemned by the Catholic hierarchy at the Synod of Thurles in 1851. The clergy were forbidden from associating with them, and bishops advised Catholics to “shun the colleges”<sup>15</sup>; one bishop refused the sacraments to parents who allowed their children to attend one of them. Catholic parents faced with the moral dilemma of having to choose between educational opportunities for their children and their own salvation did nonetheless send their children to the Queen’s Colleges in substantial numbers. That is the context in which the Catholic University of Ireland was founded in 1851 and placed under the rectorship of John Henry Newman; it failed however to attract the Catholic middle class and became extant after Newman’s return to England in 1857.<sup>16</sup>

Public funding for theology courses was banned. When the National University of Ireland (NUI) which grew out of Newman’s university was established in 1908, the creation of a Faculty of Theology was allowed, provided it was endowed by “private benefaction.”<sup>17</sup> A Chair of theology was endowed in 1912 and three further chairs in 1938, but the holders were not considered as academic staff of the university. They were paid by the Church. And theology as taught was not conceived by the hierarchy as a university subject, but rather as “further religious instruction for undergraduates.”<sup>18</sup> There was a professorship of theology at University College Cork from 1958 until 1970, but the then holder of the Chair was not recommended for reappointment by the hierarchy as he had just expressed criticism of *Humanae Vitae*. Then, in 1967, despite a post-conciliar atmosphere conducive to the academic study of theology in the 1960s, the Irish Commission on Higher Education decided not to recommend the creation of theology

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<sup>13</sup> Leadership Conference, organized by the developers of the Alpha Course, London, Royal Albert Hall, London, April 2017. <https://alpha.org/lc/talks/> (retrieved September 29, 2017)

<sup>14</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Theology in the University. The Irish Context*, Dublin : Dominican Publications, 1997, 54-102.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. Section 7 of the 1908 Irish Universities Act.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

departments, so as not to infringe upon the non-denominational vocation of universities, St Patrick's College excepted. And in 1970, even though the Irish Federation of University Teachers supported the idea of theology in the university, the National University of Ireland failed to provide the courses to meet the demand.<sup>19</sup> Trinity College Dublin, meanwhile, has always had a theology department, and created a Chair of Theology thanks to the efforts of F.S.L. Lyons who pushed for the name "theology" as opposed to "religious studies", so as to give it a firmer footing in the university as an academic discipline which would be "self-critical and methodologically aware."<sup>20</sup> But Dublin Catholics were barred from attending Trinity College between 1940 and 1970 and thus had no opportunity to study theology in a secular environment – academic or otherwise.

### **Vatican II and the apostolate of the laity – a comparative overview**

The Second Vatican Council gave a new impetus to the study of theology, Biblical studies, and historical scholarship, and invited the laity to take an active part in the building and dissemination of that knowledge. The *Apostolicam Actuositatem* decree calls on the lay faithful to use their "gifts of intelligence and learning" to "explain, defend and apply Christian principles to the problems of our era" and to "constantly perfect the temporal order." The last chapter which is devoted to the formation of the laity for this apostolate states that the laity should receive "spiritual formation" and "a solid doctrinal instruction in theology, ethics and philosophy." The *Gaudium et Spes* constitution develops the challenges involved in articulating, accounting for and defending the Christian faith in contemporary culture. It calls on philosophers and theologians to "help express the message of Christ" in terminologies adapted to the various times and cultures.<sup>21</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* emphasises the importance of defending a comprehensive view of man and the world in the "perfection of culture" by the contribution of various sciences. Lay theologians are to collaborate with scientists towards attaining a better understanding of faith so that priests will be able to speak to the faithful in a way that is more adjusted to the concerns of

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 47.

<sup>21</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, §44.

the time.<sup>22</sup> More markedly perhaps than elsewhere, a hermeneutic of rupture rather than or reform prevailed in Ireland in the wake of Council which caused the clergy to become “uncertain of its stance and so incapable of firm leadership or persuasive arguments”<sup>23</sup> as attitudes to truth moved in official Church discourse from static, formulaic, to historically-conscious, unfolding in dialogue with culture. Ireland needed to grow lay Catholic theologians to work with the clergy on implementing the recommendations of the Council as to the articulation of eternal and temporal truths.

It was in that context that the Irish Theological Association was set up in 1966 and that such third-level institutions opened as the Mater Dei Institute of Education (1966-), the Jesuit-run Milltown Institute of Philosophy and Theology (1968-2015), and the Mount Oliver Institute of Religious Education (1969-1981) which provided catechetical training for primary and secondary school teachers and adult religious education. In 1971, the Dominican-run Priory Institute became affiliated to the Pontifical University of St Thomas in Rome; it offers an accredited distant-learning degree in theology to those seeking to study their faith at an academic level. In 1969 and again in 1977, the newly-founded Irish Theological Association asked for the introduction of theology in the National University of Ireland<sup>24</sup>, but that request was not acceded to until 1997 when the ban on public funding was lifted. Former seminaries which acted on the decline of vocations in the 1990s by transforming themselves as centres for lay formation largely missed an opportunity to address the primary need of parishes which was not maintenance but renewal.<sup>25</sup> Theology or Religious Studies would remain out of reach as an object of study for generations of Irish Catholics who had other motivations than training to teach religious education in schools, and there would be few points of contact between bishops, theologians and lay Catholics.

The watershed in the history of the access of Irish laity to faith development was the Universities Act 1997 which lifted the ban on the public funding of theology departments and allowed the constituent colleges of the National University to award degrees in theology. Following this, in 1999, theology was

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<sup>22</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, §62.

<sup>23</sup> Vincent Twomey in Eamon Maher and Eugene O’Brien, *Tracing the Cultural Legacy of Irish Catholicism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017, 92.

<sup>24</sup> Dermot Lane, 79.

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Rev Prof Eamonn Conway for this insight.

introduced as an academic discipline of Dublin College University (DCU) when the Mater Dei Institute of Education became one of its colleges. The same year, Mary Immaculate College and the University of Limerick jointly set up a Department of Theology and Religious Studies. And Trinity College offered Catholics the opportunity to study their theology (among others) when its Loyola Institute opened in 2014. The Priory Institute in Tallaght is currently opening new MA degrees (Biblical Studies and Aquinas Studies). The task is now to disseminate the knowledge built in academic institutions, to build confidence in and respect for it, and to create a space conducive to articulating the faith with a purified language stripped of past cultural representations and which is intelligible to the current generations. Revealingly, Fr Brendan Devlin, a priest of the diocese of Kerry and former director of the Irish College in Paris, could still in 2007 express an aspiration to a self-confident Catholic culture in a situation of “social and cultural flux.”<sup>26</sup>

It is useful at this stage to look at ways in which other Catholic cultures in flux – that is, where the relationships between the Church and the world, and the Church, the world and truth have been challenged – have approached the task of articulating the meaning of the Catholic faith. Clerical figures invested in lay faith development in Ireland, notably Fr Vincent Twomey, Doctoral student of Benedict XVI and Emeritus Professor of Moral Theology at Maynooth, and Bishop Noel Treanor of the diocese of Down & Connor, take their inspiration from French and German initiatives destined to engage the laity in an active endeavour to understand their faith in a philosophical and theological framework.<sup>27</sup> Their sources of inspiration are France’s *Semaines sociales* and Germany’s *Katholikentag*, both of which have for the past century been forums for the articulation of Catholic thought and its social applications. Bavaria has had Catholic academies since 1957 endowed with the task of “clarifying and promoting relations between the Church and the world.”<sup>28</sup> In a number of French cities, a number of theology studies centres (as distinct from Catholic universities) have opened their doors to the laity since the

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<sup>26</sup> Brendan Devlin, “Faith and culture in an Irish Context”, *The Furrow*, Vol. 58, No 1, January 2007, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interviews with Fr Vincent Twomey and Bishop Noel Treanor.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.kath-akademie-bayern.de/destination.html> (Retrieved August 1, 2018)

Second Vatican Council and offered courses in Scripture, theology, philosophy, patristics, spirituality, etc., to help them know and account for their faith in their living environments.

In other countries where Catholicism is or has become a minority religion, the approach to faith development has consisted rather in rethinking catechesis, the “life-long process of initial conversion, formation, education, and on-going conversion which takes places through word, worship, service and community.”<sup>29</sup> That is the case in South Africa, which is engaged in primary evangelization, where the Catholic Church is one church among 6000 others<sup>30</sup>, and where people, if not educated in the contents of their faith, will not find any good reasons not to leave to go to other churches where the choir is better or the seats more comfortable.

The Irish-born Archbishop of Pretoria, William Slattery, tells a success story about faith development and evangelization: a pastoral plan developed over 15 years in consultation with the laity.<sup>31</sup> He expressed the feeling that South Africa was ahead of Ireland in that listening process working from bottom up.<sup>32</sup> That was indeed in 1989. The first similar endeavour in Ireland took place in the Northern Irish diocese of Down and Connor in 2012.<sup>33</sup> Back in South Africa, adult faith formation (a term that characterises primary evangelization) is at the core of pastoral plans. The South African Episcopal Conference’s Adult Faith Formation programme launched a new initiative in 2015: a Catechetical Month which begins with “Bible Sunday” and carries on in the various parishes involving an ever-greater number of players in faith formation (parents, sponsors, the community as a whole). And there are also local adult faith formation programmes, such as “Renew Africa” (first brought to South Africa by archbishop Denis Hurley, a Capetonian born to Irish parents) which has fostered since 2008 an “exponential growing” of parish membership each month.<sup>34</sup> This programme offers resources (“Why Catholic?” materials and workshops) to help Catholics deepen and articulate their faith and live according to Church teaching. A

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<sup>29</sup> Definition from the Catholic News Agency (founded by Pope John Paul II to assist in new Evangelization): <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/catechism/catechism/what-is-catechesis> (Retrieved August 1, 2018)

<sup>30</sup> Cathal Barry, “Faith formation is key”, *The Irish Catholic*, September 18, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> The South African Catholic Bishops Conference, *Community serving humanity*, Pastoral Plan, 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview with Archbishop William Slattery, June 28, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Personal interview with Bishop Noel Treanor, August 11, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.catholicjhb.org.za/renew-africa/renewafrica/>



similar programme can be found in the archdiocese of Cape Town, called “Ecclesia. Brave New Church.”<sup>35</sup> Faith educators can go to the Lumko Institute, established by the South African Catholic Bishops Conference in 1962 (and whose first directors were Irish) for resources that will meet catechetical and pastoral needs.<sup>36</sup>

What lessons can the Irish Catholic Church draw from looking at initiatives in other countries to facilitate faith development? It would appear that the most effective endeavours to understand and account for faith are in contexts where Catholicism is in a minority or a counter-cultural position on the religious market. Irish Catholicism has yet to make a creative use of its new freedom of being counter-cultural and start thinking faith formation from scratch. And that is a task in which the laity have a major role to play, because the Irish Church of the future, given the current numbers of seminarians in training, will of necessity see the laity involved to an unprecedented degree to pass on the faith, and also to nurture vocations for the future.

### **The green shoots**

In 2004, priest, theologian, educator and author Fr Dermot A. Lane complained that “by far the most serious neglect by the Catholic Church in Ireland since Vatican II has been the failure to activate the priesthood of the laity as outlined in the documents of the council.”<sup>37</sup> He went on to deplore the absence of any pastoral plan for the laity and of any clear vocational pathway available for them.<sup>38</sup>

When considering bringing the reception of Vatican II in Ireland to a new constructive stage in Ireland<sup>39</sup> in relation to achieving the new apostolate of the laity, attention should also be paid to the “lived world”, the cultural milieu in which that reflective appropriation of faith might root itself. That lived world in

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<sup>35</sup> <http://adct.org.za/ecclesia-called-by-name/>

<sup>36</sup> See <https://lumko.org/history/> and <http://www.sacbc.org.za/about-us/associate-bodies/lumko-institute/>

<sup>37</sup> Dermot A. Lane, “Vatican II: the Irish Experience”, *The Furrow*, Vol. 55, No 2, February 2004, 74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> French historian Guillaume Cuchet applies the expression « cycle de réception constructive du Concile » to France after 1975, in *Comment notre monde a cessé d’être chrétien. Anatomie d’un effondrement*, Paris: Seuil, 2018, 194.

Ireland has been characterized by a mistrust of the institution leading to a shaking of the foundations of faith since the revelations of the abuse scandals – the casting into the fire of the branches that bear no fruit – in an accelerated and brutal way. Hostility has grown towards the institution and towards Church teaching which has been reduced to a conservative stance on ethical debates, as seen during the referendum campaigns concerning the legalization of same-sex marriage and abortion. The Irish Catholic lived world appears to be an “enwebbed”<sup>40</sup> world that is post-nationalist, ethically secular, de-catechized, religiously indifferent, spiritually diffuse – a world where all cultural continuity in Irish Catholic identity has been deconstructed and where the remaining appetite for meaning and spiritual development seeks nourishment outside itself in a phenomenon of “religious exculturation.”<sup>41</sup> From having enjoyed a monopoly on the religious market because of its historical position as the main source of validation in all areas of public life, Catholicism is becoming one of the options on offer, chosen by a dwindling minority. But the deconstruction of that authority in the context of the assertion of a secular worldview as Ireland comes to “late cultural self-consciousness”<sup>42</sup> contains as many opportunities as challenges. It is in this misty Irish religious landscape that some green shoots of Catholic counter-culture can already be seen on the “path to renewal” opened by Benedict XVI in 2010.

In an academic environment which encourages the study of religion in a pluralist setting, the Loyola Institute was established in 2011 as part of Trinity College’s Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology “to facilitate research and teaching in the Catholic tradition for the first time in Ireland’s *premier* university.”<sup>43</sup> It hosts free evening lectures and short courses for faith education and development<sup>44</sup> and offers a “faith seeking understanding” course for educators and the general public.<sup>45</sup> In 2012, Mary Immaculate College opened a graduate programme in Christian Leadership in Education to “help build much needed educational capacity, respond to the widespread desire for an authentic personal spirituality, which is contagious, address the acknowledged 'deficit' in theological literacy and

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<sup>40</sup> I borrow this expression from a personal interview with Bishop Noel Treanor.

<sup>41</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme. La Fin d'un monde*, Paris : Bayard, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute/about/history.php>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute/extramural/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.tcd.ie/loyola-institute/assets/pdfs/faithseekingunderstanding2017-2.pdf>

the widespread hunger for justice and inclusiveness in Irish Society.”<sup>46</sup> With a similar vision, Fr Vincent Twomey set up the Ratzinger Symposium in 2013 which is an annual academic conference articulating aspects of the thought of Pope Benedict XVI. Fr Twomey is also active in trying to establish Catholic academies in Ireland.<sup>47</sup> Addressing the needs of teachers of Religious Education (RE) more specifically at Dublin College University, Mater Dei closed down as a college in 2016 to reopen, still in DCU, as the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education which incorporates the former incarnation of Mater Dei and St Patrick’s College Drumcondra in a configuration that places the RE formation of future primary and secondary school teachers more firmly in the academic environment.<sup>48</sup> That the head of that institution, Fr Gareth Byrne, is the author of the first *National Directory for Catechesis* is indicative of a new will to think together the formation of teachers and of catechists in parishes in a new situation where religious education is being removed from the curriculum of state-funded schools and is going to be increasingly the responsibility of lay people in parishes who will need to be educated to present the Catholic faith in a meaningful way. 2016 was a very rich year indeed for the Irish Catholic renewal: Mary Immaculate College St Patrick’s College Thurles opened the Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies “to enable the fulfilment of a new vision for the Church in Ireland” as it moves “from maintenance to mission”; to prepare tomorrow’s<sup>49</sup> church, it offers formation for both priests and laity.

Extramural academic opportunities in theological formation have also been extended to Irish people not pursuing academic degrees but who seeking to affirm their understanding of their faith. The reality has dawned indeed that there were no catechetical resources in parishes to support adult faith development. Historically, Irish adults have indeed drawn meaning from their practice, but very few had availed of any form of faith development opportunity “to develop a strong adult understanding of [their] faith and a commitment to living it out in the realities of [their] lives.”<sup>50</sup> The emphasis on catechetics as the core element of faith development is reflected in other developments such as the success in Ireland of

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<sup>46</sup> Programme mission

statement: <http://www.mic.ul.ie/postgradstudies/prospectivestudents/Pages/MA%20in%20Christian%20Leadership%20in%20Education.aspx>

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with Fr Vincent Twomey, June 10, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.dcu.ie/materdei-centre-for-catholic-education/index.shtml>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.irishinstituteforpastoralstudies.com/>

<sup>50</sup> John Mangan, « Renewal for lay people », *The Furrow*, Vol. 63, No 11, November 2012, 563.

distance-learning courses provided by the Maryvale Institute & International Catholic College. Located on the premises where John Henry Newman was received into the Catholic Church and where he discerned his vocation by prayer and study, this college attracted 27 lay candidates in the dioceses of Cork & Ross and Cloyne who completed a two-year degree in catechesis in 2016, the first programme of the kind in Ireland.<sup>51</sup>

One of that same year, the archbishop of Dublin announced both the creation of a new Notre-Dame – Newman Centre for Faith and Reason at Newman University Church in Dublin which offers series of talks<sup>52</sup>, and the creation of the position of Coordinator of Catechetical Formation in the Archdiocese of Dublin.<sup>53</sup> Revealingly also, the 2017 Faith & Life Convention (set up by Bishop Treanor of Down and Connor in 2012 and consisting in lectures and workshops focused on the application of faith to social and ethical debates<sup>54</sup>), included a workshop on *ressourcement*, signalling an interest in the theological turn from “scholastic and repetitive theology” to a will to embrace the whole past of the Christian tradition going back to the Church fathers, a turn France took in the aftermath of World War II and which has yet to happen in Ireland.<sup>55</sup> It was indeed a recommendation of the Vatican II Council to go back to the sources of the Christian faith, to explore the world of Early Christianity, re-appropriate the teachings of the Church fathers, and see what they had to say in the response to the new and specific issues arising in the contemporary world which need a response that is new and specific whilst remaining grounded in dogma.

At diocesan level, since 2010, some decisive steps have been taken on the path of activation of “the priesthood of the laity.” The diocese of Limerick opened the way in setting up an adult faith development programme in 2007.<sup>56</sup> That same year, pastoral councils were created and lay people were trained, implementing a Vatican II recommendation that could not be implemented throughout Ireland, in particular in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. It took 25 years for pastoral councils to develop in

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/2016/03/catechists-in-ireland-successfully-complete-course-run-by-the-maryvale-institute/>

<sup>52</sup> <http://newman.nd.edu/category/news-and-events/>

<sup>53</sup> *Op. cit.* See footnote 2.

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.faithandlifeconvention.org/>

<sup>55</sup> Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *op. cit.*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.limerickdiocese.org/adult-formation.html>

Ireland, in anticipation of a time when a decreasing clergy would have to delegate an increasing share of the evangelizing work to the laity. In the diocese of Down & Connor mentioned above, Bishop Treanor decided in 2010 to “grow a pastoral plan” from grassroots up, through a long and structured listening process. *Living Church*<sup>57</sup> “grew” out of consultations that could take place only in the post-conflict atmosphere conducive to meetings. In 2015, the archdiocese of Dublin set up “Faith for Life” and “Pathways” training programmes for adults. But the road ahead is a long one: still in 2017, the Irish Episcopal Conference saw adult faith development as new and finding its feet<sup>58</sup>, even some years after producing the first National Directory for Catechesis in 2011 – directory in the sense of giving direction – specifically addressed to adults and the new *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* in 2014, out of which outreach movements have grown out in the form of faith development sessions organized by its publisher, Veritas.

The situation is not uniform across the island. Rather, provision of faith development opportunities is dependent upon diocesan initiatives. Around half of Ireland’s dioceses have adult faith development programmes which offer to help the faithful to “grow in knowledge of the Catholic faith” which will then “increase their love for Christ and his Church.”<sup>59</sup> The diocese of Down and Connor prioritizes new evangelization through catechetics: it supports a number of active spiritual organizations involved in primary or new evangelization such as the Parish Cell System of Evangelization or the Neo-Catechumenal Way or even the Cursillos Movement which has been active in the diocese for 30 years.<sup>60</sup> Other dioceses, such as Limerick, lead the way in terms of the abundance of faith development resources – human and material – offered for parishes to ensure that the faithful fully understand the meaning of their faith and of each event on the liturgical calendar.<sup>61</sup> The diocese of Ossory has a most comprehensive Adult Faith Development resource centre which has, since the creation in 2007 of parish pastoral councils, offered a training programme at the Kilkenny Campus of NUI Maynooth accredited by St

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<sup>57</sup> Diocese of Down and Connor, *Living Church*, 2013. <http://www.downandconnor.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Living-Church-Report.pdf> (Retrieved August 1, 2018)

<sup>58</sup> Personal Interview with Kate Liffey, Irish Conference of Bishops.

<sup>59</sup> Statement borrowed from the website of the diocese of Cloyne, <http://cloynediocese.ie> (Retrieved August 1, 2018)

<sup>60</sup> <http://corkandross.org/pastoral-development/parish-faith-development-groups/>

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.limerickdiocese.org/adult-formation.html>

Patrick's College Maynooth.<sup>62</sup> The archdiocese of Armagh has a Pastoral Plan 2015-2020 which, after a 18-month listening process, offers concrete ways of better “understanding faith” rooted in catechesis and theology courses.<sup>63</sup> Other dioceses (Cloyne, Cork & Ross, Dromore, Kildare & Leighlin, Galway) work in the same way, seeing their faith development mission as providing courses which can take place at parish level covering Bible study, the explanation of Mass and of the Mystery of the Eucharist, Catholic teaching, culture and liturgy, prayer life, Lectio Divina.<sup>64</sup> The diocese of Raphoe has prioritized the young, engaging in a survey of its members to see how parents develop the faith of their children and how it can assist them in the most adjusted way.<sup>65</sup>

In the same vein, the diocese of Waterford & Lismore launched an initiative in 2016 addressed to the young generation: the Holy Family Mission. The first of its kind in Ireland, it is a residential faith and missionary formation initiative for young Catholics aged between 18 and 30. It educates them in their faith and trains them to be missionaries. Its training is based on the study of the catechism, Scripture and other Catholic sources. It offers options of distance-learning programmes in theology. In 2016-17, it had 10 young adults in residence and 13 in 2017-18, and the programme is oversubscribed for 2018-19. The diocese estimates that it is a very healthy and positive situation so early on in the development of the programme, and other dioceses are already in contact with the organizers as they consider establishing something similar in other parts of the country.<sup>66</sup> Like Youth 2000, such a proposal aims at creating a nursery of young Catholics who are seeking to understand their faith in a new way and who may literally be the green shoots of the future Church, as lay or consecrated members.

The thousand or so members of Youth 2000 are moving closer to the Jesuits for their faith education. The Jesuits have a leading role to play in proposing a grounded, meaningful and inspiring faith development programme for the youth. The Peter Kenney Project, named after the founder of Clongowes Wood College, comprises 2 Jesuits and 3 lay people who have been looking at how the programme can increase faith formation in the Irish province, especially with the number of Jesuits

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<sup>62</sup> <https://ossory.ie/education/adult-faith-development/programmes/>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.armagharchdiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Armagh-Diocese-Pastoral-Plan-Hi-Res.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> <http://cloynediocese.ie/ministries/adult-faith-development/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.raphoediocese.ie/diocese/pastoral-team/146-faith-development>

<sup>66</sup> Private correspondence with Maura Garrihy, diocese of Waterford, head of the Holy Family Mission

reducing and ageing and the number of lay people increasing. In 2005, the Provincial sent a letter to the Jesuit schools asking them how they would continue the Ignatian ethos if there were no Jesuits left in Ireland. To address that concern, and in a new outreach movement of Irish evangelization, “Educate Magis” is also a new global proposal started in 2015 by an Irish layman (Eamon McGuinness in Galway) to link up Jesuit schools all around the world with online faith education resources. Another sign that faith formation is currently in the air, the Irish Province is currently waiting for the appointment of a dedicated faith formation delegate. The last patch of green shoots, and perhaps the most promising, is the new surge in numbers of people training in spiritual direction at the Jesuit-run Masters in Applied Spirituality (SPIRE) run in conjunction with Waterford Institute of Technology. The “applied” dimension involves spiritual direction: the students learn to be spiritual directors, and they learn that from the Jesuits. A first, and unusual experiment, it is booked out and even oversubscribed. It is described by the Jesuit Provincialate as a huge part of lay formation for hundreds of people around Ireland.<sup>67</sup>

## **Conclusion**

What picture forms from all these new developments in the new, post-abuse scandals, post-referenda Irish Catholic world? Although they may not have grown explicitly from the Apostolic Visit of 2011, or consciously seek to implement the recommendations of Vatican II, all these recent initiatives indicate a turn in the relationship to the faith, a desire to appropriate it in a reflective way. The situation may vary from one diocese to another, but some dioceses have led the way with strong formation programmes, others with a bottom-up approach, starting from people’s realities, listening to their concerns and their expressed needs. The focus of these programmes is on the younger generations whose Catholicism is less “traditionally Irish” and more internationally minded than their parents’, but whose spiritual needs and aspirations haven’t been met, and who are walking away from the Church, saying it is “irrelevant.” It has never been easier to be educated in one’s faith than today, in academic or ecclesial

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<sup>67</sup> Personal interview with Pat Coyle and Joe Greenan, Irish Jesuit Provincialate, May 28, 2018.

environments. The uptake on residential mission programmes and spiritual direction training shows where the young respond and gives a glimpse into the Irish Catholicism of the future: missionary, evangelizing and spiritual, as in the past, but rooted in a free choice and a strong educational background.

When questioning the key players in the field of lay adult faith development in Ireland, they all say that numbers do not matter. There is a sense that the fall of the old Church is an opportunity, as pointed out by several Church leaders around the country, to mark the shift, which is perceived to have taken place in post-conciliar France, “from a situation of governance to a situation of choice”<sup>68</sup>, from a quantitative to a qualitative Catholicism. The Irish Church is beginning to recognize that the old is no longer satisfying, nourishing, and to tune in to what satisfies, nourishes, sustains, energizes – to use Jesuit terminology – the current generation. The Church is listening to the new voices, the new ways of being, as opposed to listening to itself as it did in the past, thus “forming a new way of Church.”<sup>69</sup> The new importance of faith formation programmes and the sentiments of humble but firm hope expressed by clerics about the future of the Irish Church point to an overdue transition from a “standard theology” to an “exploratory theology.”<sup>70</sup>

Seghedoni refers to “liquid love” in the Church, one of the manifestations of Zygmunt Bauman’s liquid modernity. Just as contemporary Irish culture can be described as “liquid” in its many manifestations, valuing fluidity of affiliations and preferences, liquid love would seem to apply to the Irish Catholic world which values relationships over the institution. St Augustine taught us that we can only know what we love. So the capital of love that is there in abundance in the Irish Catholic world and seeks an outlet has yet to be tapped by the Church – clergy and laity – to foster a new understanding of the faith as relational, and, to quote Dermot Lane, to build a new anthropology

along the lines of the human as relational, dialogic, embodied and linguistic, no longer living in an anthropocentric universe. It will be part of the mission of the Irish Church of the future to take seriously

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<sup>68</sup> I borrow the phrase from Rev Prof Eamonn Conway, August 31, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> I borrow the phrase from Joe Greenan, personal interview, May 28, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Flynn and Murray, *op. cit.*, 199.



the intellectual and educational challenge involved in the development and communication of a new language of faith more attuned to modern ears [...].<sup>71</sup>

Bathed in the liquidity of the surrounding culture, the task of the Irish Catholic Church is to irrigate the path ahead and to quench the theological and spiritual thirst of those who will continue to travel that path. The last word here should be given to one of its members, Fr Diarmuid Hogan, from the diocese of Galway, who expresses more clearly than most the spirit of a more positive, affirmative and chosen Catholicism in Ireland among the younger, “green shoots” generation:

In Ireland now, it is entirely acceptable to not identify as ‘Catholic’. This, by implication, means that those who do describe themselves as Catholic are often much more genuinely so. And so, despite setbacks, I believe there are the seeds of a new optimism in the Irish church. It is as if we have been enduring a long sterile wait for our patient to die. Now that the death of our old and sickly Church has finally come, and now that the funeral is over, we can get back to living again. We cannot keep looking among the dead for Jesus. He is alive. And we will never see what lays ahead if we keep on looking back so it’s time at last in Ireland for believers to look to tomorrow, to the future. It’s time - and we are beginning to! This is manifested in the energy and joy of the young in organizations like Youth 2000. It is manifested in many parishes in the desire to volunteer, to go on pilgrimage, to participate in the liturgical and evangelical life of the church. It is manifested in a new willingness to engage in sacramental preparation, in a new openness to discuss the faith and in an ongoing desire by parents in particular to hand on the faith to the next generation, through their choice of schools and through their openness to supporting their children’s participation in the Sacraments of Initiation. The shoots are small but they are green. The word of God may sometimes only be whispered, but it is eternally resilient!<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> G. O’Hanlon in *Studies*, 2017, 6, quoting Dermot Lane, *Catholic Education in the Light of Vatican II and Laudato Si’*, Dublin: Veritas, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Fr Diarmuid Hogan, private correspondence, June 5, 2018.

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