

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin Archbishop of Dublin

Saint Michael's Church of Ireland, Limerick, 19 March 2019

(Part II)

The world around us and the culture of Irish life have changed. Yet the Church continues in many ways to live in a way that fails to recognise that culture has indeed changed so much. Irish culture has drifted from being the culture of an enlarged faith community into a heavily secularised culture. For many, faith no longer plays a major role in their lives and they feel that this in no way compromises their ability to be good, honest and caring people. Believers, albeit unknowingly to themselves, often view the reality of faith through a secularised lens of modern media.

During the visit of Pope Francis, the Taoiseach made an important speech in Dublin Castle. Noting how the Ireland of the 21st Century is a very different place today than it was in the past, he reminded us that "there are more and more people [in Ireland]... who are comfortable in declaring that they subscribe to no organized religion".

He expressed the belief that "that the time has now come for us to build a new relationship between Church and State in Ireland – a new covenant for the 21st Century." He spoke about an Ireland "in which religion is no longer at the centre of our society, but in which it still has an important place".

He noted that "modern Ireland is still a country with faith and spirit and values. Family, community, enterprise, social justice, diversity, openness and internationalism, equality before the law, and individual liberty – these values describe the Republic we aspire to be". I believe that these are the values to which believers also aspire and wish to bring their specific contribution in building a future Ireland.

So far no progress has been made by the government in developing the Taoiseach's idea of a Covenant. The demands of addressing the challenges of Brexit have justifiably taken up the time of politicians. This does not mean that this dialogue is not important not just for the interests of Churches and government, but rather for the good of Irish society.

Such dialogue will involve a change in the attitude of our Churches. I do not believe that people have a true sense of the crisis of faith that exists in Ireland. Yes, there are many residual elements of faith in our society and they are deep-rooted. These elements, however, are weakened with the passage of each generation.

We have invested in structures of school-based religious education that despite enormous goodwill are not producing the results that they set out to achieve. I am a strong proponent of denominational education; Catholic education has a solid track record. I see an important future for Catholic education alongside and in dialogue with other vibrant forms of education, including that of minority Churches. The real level of parents' interest in Catholic education will only be objectively measurable only when they have real choice.

We have great teachers in our faith schools. The system is also such that teachers who do not share the faith find themselves at times teaching something of which they are not convinced. There are fundamental fault-lines within the current structure for Catholic schools that are not being addressed and unattended fault-lines inevitably generate destructive energies.

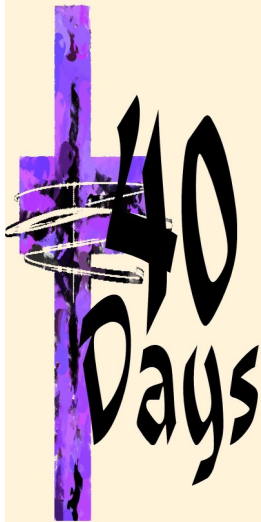
Together as Churches we have to discover new ways of reaching out to young people and help them develop a strong faith that can be authentically lived-out in a more pluralist Ireland. There are interesting ecumenical initiatives within many of our universities. Some of these initiatives are strongly devotional. Strong rooting in prayer and scripture are important but they should not produce young believers who use devotion to opt out of commitment within society.

A major challenge for the future of the Catholic Church lies in the area women's issues and of sexual morality where the Church's teaching is either not understood or is simply rejected as out of tune with contemporary culture. The manner in which the moral teaching of the Church is presented to believers is for too often not adequately situated within the overall context of the teaching of Jesus, which is both compassionate and demanding.

The curious demography and history of the Irish Church meant that the Churches developed and pioneered all sorts of valuable services within the community. This was often done at no expense to the State. As Irish society became wealthier, it was rightfully claimed that such services deserved appropriate support from public funds because of the social benefit they provided. As years went by, many of these services then lost something of the Christian concept of gratuitousness and became little different to any other professional service.

A Church that loses that sense of gratuitousness loses something of the essential dimensions of its witness to Jesus. When Church services become simply ancillary to the State, then they run the risk of losing their ecclesial originality and will one day end up being incorporated into the public service structure and subordinated to its goals.

The Catholic Church has to take a critical look at the dominant role it assumed in Irish society, while at the same time not renouncing its prophetic role in society. We need to take a radical new look at the formation of future priests. A culture of clericalism is hard to eliminate. It did not come out of nowhere and so we have to address its roots in seminary training. There is no way we can put off decisions regarding

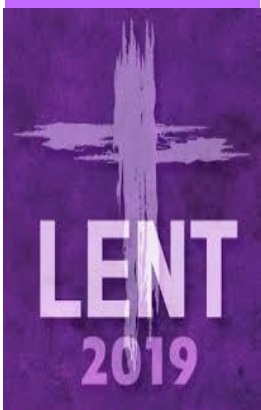


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the future.

What kind of leadership does the Catholic Church in Ireland need in the future? The term “synodality” is a current buzzword. Catholic Church leadership must represent the various charisms present in the Church: lay clerical and religious, women and men, young and old. We all agree on this, but nothing seems to happen. The alienation of so many women only increases.

Bishops play a vital role in the Catholic tradition. An Apostolic Visitation of the Irish dioceses took place some years ago. It is well known that I was unhappy with many aspects of the Visitation and its results. Despite the good intentions, the visitation froze the renewal of the Irish Church for some years, while it waited years for results that were disappointing. A number of diocese were left vacant for years. Some of the ideas of the visitation were then put back into the freezer, such as a reduction and rationalization in the number of dioceses. I believe that this is still necessary, as is the revision of the arcane workings of the Irish Episcopal Conference.

The Catholic Church in Ireland is coming out of one of its most difficult moments in its history and the light at the end of the tunnel is still a long way off. The Catholic Church in Ireland will have to live with the fruits of its actions and its inaction and with the grief of its past, which can and should never be forgotten or overlooked. There is no simple way of wiping the slate of the past clean, just to ease our feelings. Yet the Catholic Church in Ireland cannot be imprisoned in its past.

In my years as Archbishop, I have learned enormously from survivors of abuse as they allowed me to know something of their pain and of their hopes and also of the spiritual void which many experience as a result of betrayal by their Church. In my encounters with survivors, however, I have found their spiritual fragility somehow has given them in fact a deep spiritual strength, from which I have profited. For that, I thank them.

My hope is that the future of the Church in Ireland will be one where we truly learn from the arrogance of our past and find anew a fragility which will allow the mercy and the compassion of Jesus to give us a change of heart and allow others through a very different Church to encounter something of that compassion and faith for their lives.

I come back to the comments of my former superior who reminded me that as we go through various challenges of change in our religious culture, what is important is that we end up facing the right direction. That direction may not be an easy one. It may not leave us in the place we were expecting to be, or that we like, or in which we feel comfortable. But that is where our future begins.

THOUGHT FOR A DAY

The symbol of the cross in the church points to the God who was crucified not between two candles on an altar, but between two thieves in the place of the skull, where the outcasts belong, outside the gates of the city. It does not invite thought, but a change of mind. It is a symbol which therefore leads out of the church and out of religious longing into the fellowship of the oppressed and abandoned. On the other hand, it is a symbol which calls the oppressed and godless into the church and through the church into the fellowship of the crucified God.

-Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*

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MUSIC & READINGS FOR LENT

CRUX VOCAL ENSEMBLE
DUBLIN VIOLS
and TIM THURSTON

A Lenten reflection, a series of appropriate readings with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century liturgical music by Monteverdi, Scarlatti, Gibbons, J.C. Bach, plainchant and instrumental music.
Duration ca. 40 minutes.

Free admission.

St. Mary's Church, Haddington Rd.

SATURDAY APRIL 13TH, 7PM

FRIENDSHIP CLUB

**Next Monday
Parish Centre at 2:00pm**

In Memoriam

6pm: Gerry Walsh (Anniversary)

11am: Phyllis Devin (Anniversary)

Masses on 6th/7th March 2019

6pm, Liam Boyd (Anniversary)

Masses and Confession

Sundays: Vigil, 6pm (Saturday), 9.30am, 11am, 5pm

Croatian Community Mass 6.30pm

Daily masses 10am and 12.40pm, Saturday 10am only

-**Rosary** daily after 10am mass

Adoration Blessed Sacrament, Weds 10.30-12.40

Church Collections Last Week

1st Collection: €1,295

Share Collection: €980

Weekday collections: €420

THANK YOU

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