

New Perspectives on the Irish Catholic Tradition

New Perspectives on the Irish Catholic
Tradition

Edited by

Gavan Jennings

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

New Perspectives on the Irish Catholic Tradition, Edited by Gavan Jennings

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2009 by Gavan Jennings and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1304-4, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1304-4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Catholic Moment for Ireland?	1
Rónán Mullen	
Understanding Young People	9
Gavan Jennings	
New Prayers for Old	25
Patrick Gorevan	
Roman Guardini and the Liturgy	31
Patrick Gorevan	
Amnesty International: Justice, Conscience and Conflict	39
Eugene O'Neill	
Saint Oliver Plunkett, Martyr	45
Patricia O'Keefe	
Assisted Human Reproduction	55
Tom O'Gorman	
The Most Spiritual of Stands: <i>Humanae Vitae</i> and the Reversal of Materialism	61
Michael Kirke	
C. S. Lewis: 'Friendship Revisited'	69
Michael Kirke	
<i>Humanae Vitae</i> and Human Embodiment	79
Kevin O'Reilly	
Regarding Religion – Psychiatry in Conflict	81
Dr. Ciarán Clarke	

Looking at the Book of Kells	87
Michael DeArce	
An Unexpected Divided	91
Michael Kirke	
Taming the Times	95
Michael DeArce	
Book Review: John Waters, <i>Lapsed Agnostic</i>	99
Gavan Jennings	
Music and the Mystical.....	103
Eugene O'Neill	
Human Reason and the Inclination to Procreation and the Education of Offspring	109
Kevin E. O'Reilly	
Religious Freedom Under Siege?	117
Michael Kirke	
Christmas Day	121
Eugene O'Neill	
Contributors.....	125

THE CATHOLIC MOMENT FOR IRELAND?

RÓNÁN MULLEN

The author makes a plea that the Irish need to see to it that religion not be excluded from the public square; that today's generation need to embrace a culture of life as opposed to the prevalent culture of death. He sees fashionable, irrational and intolerant relativism as a philosophy that lacks foundation and can give no viable solution to the many problems which beset modern society.

It is a dreadful thing to start a speech by quoting yourself, but I want to tell you about a little exchange I had recently with another person in public life who, despite our disagreement on some issues, sent me a very kind note after my election to the Seanad. He expressed his disagreement with the view held by some that nobody should be allowed to stand for elections with an overtly religious platform. I felt that, in reassuring me in this manner, he had not fully understood where I was coming from in my new-born political career. I responded that I do not intend to advance any point of view or position in politics which is not capable of being understood and shared on rational grounds by people who may or may not share my religious convictions. I believe that human beings are something special and I naturally want to promote a culture where every person is loved and his or her dignity respected. But that desire is shared by many people of other faiths and by non-believers as well. In arguing for or against specific policies, I think I owe it to people in the latter categories to make arguments that make sense in the light of where they are coming from. I said I respected, as my correspondent clearly did, the right of people to make purely theologically-based arguments in public life if they want. But my aim is to join in the search for good public policy in co-operation with, among others, those who may not share my religious convictions.

To take a non-controversial example, I would prefer not to argue against the re-introduction of capital punishment merely on the grounds that God is the author of all life and that only God may take life (a proposition

which I accept naturally enough, subject to the usual exceptions around self-defence etc). I would argue against it on the grounds of the intrinsic dignity of the human person, and on the basis of the damage done to our community when we take it on ourselves to kill, the non-efficacy of capital punishment systems etc.

These past fifteen years have brought so much good to our country: jobs, wealth, improved infrastructure, and not least an influx of bright young immigrants from around the world. We are all aware that this internationally-envied economic miracle, which has transformed us from a drearily poor nation into one of the wealthiest countries in the world, has coincided with the most recent phase of a 'socio-economic hurricane'. Side by side with the dramatic economic changes has been the continuation of an equally dramatic rejection of the traditional Catholic world-view and with it the esteem previously shown to Catholic faith, and to certain values associated with, though not exclusive to, orthodox Catholicism, namely the importance placed on traditional life-long marriage, and respect for the sanctity of human life from conception to death. Archbishop Seán Brady, soon to be Cardinal Brady, spoke of this in Milwaukee during the summer, when he described a "...cultural shift from emphasis on community and family to an emphasis on the happiness of the individual, particularly of the individual as a consumer".¹

Many commentators on the Irish scene interpret this social upheaval as a throwing off of the shackles: the narrative proclaims that the Irish, having long laboured under a domineering and arrogant Catholic Church, have finally managed to rise up and free themselves from this religious servitude. Certainly it would be hard to deny that during the old days there were been real problems lying just beneath the surface. Otherwise the speed of the dramatic social changes we are witnessing would be simply inexplicable. The implosion of the practice of the Catholic faith (down from 90% plus Sunday Mass attendance to 50% in 30 years) might make us query the depth of conviction or understanding of the faith in the lead up to the crisis.

Speaking as a lay Catholic, I might say that the greatest failing of the Church here over the past century at least is what appears to have been a fear of an independent minded, educated and literate laity. John Henry

¹ Address by Archbishop Sean Brady to the Milwaukee "Irish Fest", Marcus Amphitheatre, Aug. 17 2007.

Newman was horrified by the clericalism he found on coming to set up a Catholic university back in the middle of the 19th century.

On the other hand, there is a small cottage industry busily at work creating a caricature of the Catholic Church in post-Civil War Ireland: the iconic image might that of a fierce blackthorn wielding cleric hunting amorous couples out of the hedges on a Saturday evening. But this is just a latter day Punch cartoon caricature, simply with the priest slotted in place of the violent, drunken, Simian-featured Irishman.

The fact that this socio-economic hurricane has caused, in the words of Archbishop Brady, the “gradual breakdown of social cohesion”², has not gone unnoticed or unremarked on during these years. Of late perhaps the voices of concern have been more urgent, and increasingly they have been voices outside ecclesiastical circles: the recent Iona institute surveys showing the increase in marriage breakdown; the critique of the radical feminist agenda at work in Irish society undertaken by Kevin Myers; John Waters’ deep analysis of a crisis affecting many young Irish males as evidenced by the spiralling suicide statistics; the awareness of the huge physical and psychological damage this generation of young Irish people is undergoing in its abuse of alcohol (as spoken of by President Mary McAleese), and the critique by Archbishop Brady himself of a new coarseness in society, his criticism of the tarot card culture, etc. Can such matters be linked in with the identified weakness in the religious knowledge of people, and the lure of material comforts made possible by the Celtic Tiger undoubtedly. This was the context in which our Ombudsman, Emily O’Reilly, talked about there being more to life than Gucci shoes or Prada handbags and suggested that it might be time to ‘tip-toe back to Church’.

The new orthodoxy

We’re starting to make connections between the challenges our society faces and the social value of religion – as expressed by the term itself, *religio*, which means to bind together. The promotion of this social value of religion is among the stated aims of the new Iona Institute.

Some people still want to look back however, and so must we. We must acknowledge the warts – there will always be warts where there are human beings – which accompany the human reality that is the Church. But we

² Ibid.

must also acknowledge that the Church has been a wonderful reality in the life of the Irish for fifteen hundred years. We might think it almost clichéd to say that Catholicism has been at the heart of the cultural and spiritual life of the country in an almost unbroken way from the evangelisation of the country in the 5th century onwards. Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the new Irish ambassador to the Holy See, said that:

for over sixteen hundred years Christianity has shaped the cultural, moral and spiritual identity of the Irish people. This is not simply a matter of historical importance. It lies at the heart of Irish civilization and it remains as a 'leaven' in the life of your nation. Indeed, the Christian faith has lost nothing of its significance for contemporary society since it touches "man's deepest sphere" and gives "meaning to his life in the world" ("*Redemptor Hominis*," 10), enabling both civic and religious leaders to uphold the absolute values and ideals inherent in the dignity of every person and necessary for every democracy.³

The Golden Age of monastic Ireland between the 5th and 8th centuries is no less golden for being a cliché; Ireland really did provide Europe with an oasis of learning during the Dark Ages following the collapse of the Roman empire. And no less than in other European countries, at the heart of mediaeval life in Ireland was the Church. And there must a genuine and incredibly strong attachment to the Catholic faith in those who preferred persecution, poverty and even death rather than embrace the Protestantism of the Reformers throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. And even the criticisms of the repressive Irish Church of the 20th century should not overlook the fact that the Church gave the mass of Irish people, in the words of Brian Fallon, 'the only morality they knew, it enriched their often hard, underprivileged lives with its rituals and Sacraments, baptised their children, married their young people and buried their dead'. The Church encouraged sports and made possible the only public pageantry that the country had.⁴

The old certainties fell away however and people found a freedom that they hardly knew how to use. The abandonment of Sunday Mass, and the forgetting of feasts that once dotted and marked the seasons, and perhaps, in the words of Pope Benedict, the forgetting of the true meaning of time

³ Address by Pope Benedict XVI to the new Irish ambassador to the Holy See, Noel Fahey, Sept. 16, 2007, no.2.

⁴ Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence, Irish Culture 1930-1960*, Gill & Macmillan, 1999, p.189.

itself.⁵ People now find themselves seeking in work, or leisure, the ultimate and definitive meaning of life, but of course those new gods don't 'stack up'. But strangely, they even think that being lost like this is a sign of having coming of age. Like the crime statistics, it is seen as the price you have to pay for making it in the world. Joseph Ratzinger spoke with his usual clarity on this phenomenon in his last homily before being elected Pope:

Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.⁶

Relativism, the doctrine founded on a 'lack of confidence in the truth' holds that 'all positions are equally valid'⁷ and that ultimately that 'man is the measure of all things' as the Greek Sophists liked to put it. Unfortunately, on this principle, there is nothing people can call bad, just as there is nothing they can call good. And where once the Church was able to speak up strongly about good and evil, it has been largely discredited due to the sordid crimes of a tiny number of Irish priests; crimes they were, they must not be forgotten, and yet they have been used and trumpeted by those who saw how much they stood to gain from a Catholic Church shamed into silence. Despite this difficult context the Church in Ireland has no right to abdicate this responsibility, and Pope Benedict addressed precisely this point when he said to our new ambassador the Holy See, that:

The Church ... serves all members of society by shedding light on the foundation of morality and ethics, and by purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths and draws upon wisdom.⁸

It might be considered heresy now to claim to be certain that something is true; and to subscribe to a system of truths which we call religion is to be a fundamentalist. And so we are left with the strange situation where it is

⁵ See *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 73.

⁶ Homily, Card.. Joseph Ratzinger, Vatican Basilica Monday 18 April 2005.

⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no.5

⁸ Address by Pope Benedict XVI to the new Irish ambassador to the Holy See, Noel Fahey, Sept. 16, 2007, no.3.

those who say ‘there is no absolute truth’ who are most absolute in their refusal to brook any dissent in the matter. Those who consider certain kinds of actions to be genuinely unjust or harmful for society, and so think that they shouldn’t be tolerated, are I suppose, in this respect ‘intolerant’. But for some unknown reason, only intolerance can not be tolerated. The shrillness with which the ‘intolerant’ are excluded from public debate (or public funding in certain cases) should concern us all.

Commentators have wryly observed that Ireland has swapped one orthodoxy – Catholicism, for another – relativism; and one sacred caste – the priesthood, for another – the media. But since the corner stone of the new orthodoxy is the rejection of the very possibility of objective truth, by definition it cannot win adherents through reason. It must, rather, impose itself on its adherents through what the then Card. Ratzinger termed ‘a dictatorship’.

Dissenting voices

It is very important that nobody would allow themselves to be cowed into silence. If we do not agree with something we must feel free at least to say it. If we think something to be seriously unjust, we must feel an obligation to say it. The words of Edmund Burke are no less true for being aired so often: ‘All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing’. Most of all I believe these words apply to Catholics, for we have received (not dreamt up ourselves) a body of ideas about the human condition which are intellectually convincing and socially relevant. They are ours to share with whole world. (As John Waters recently observed, the Catholic truths are distorted when they are presented as primarily moral prescriptions, and perhaps we’re guilty of a degree of legalism here in Ireland. The moral dos and don’ts make sense when seen as the logical conclusions drawn from the realisation that human beings are special and that our existence is due to the action of a loving creator.)

The Catholic faith illumines reason; it does not darken it. In its light it is much easier to see the value of every single human being on this planet – for we know the lengths that God has gone to to win their love. It is much easier for a person with the faith to have a deep understanding of the relationship between man and woman in marriage, or the primacy of the family as the building block of society. These are not truths of our own making, nor are they things we’ve seen because we’re cleverer than others. It is simply that the faith gives us what we might call ‘an unfair

advantage'. But these moral ideas which Catholics hold also make sense on purely rational grounds, once we share the starting point that human persons are special.

Christians cannot allow that the vision of life they propose (they don't – or shouldn't – impose) to the rest of the world, to be excluded on the basis of a relativist intolerance of religion. Richard John Neuhaus speaks of 'what is aptly called the totalitarian impulse of the modern state including democratic states to monopolize public space and consign religion to the private sphere, thus producing what [he has] called the naked public square.'⁹ Catholics here in Ireland must resist the pressure to 'go underground', to keep a convenient silence about his inconvenient beliefs.

It would be particularly damaging to Irish society if in the neuralgic points of life in the country: academia, politics, media, Catholics were to fail to share with those around them with the proposition (not imposition!) of the great truth about the dignity of man as revealed to him in the faith. Perhaps one of the reasons that our society has experienced the problems it has, is that it was excessively reliant on the clergy to provide the bulwark against secularist relativism. When the clerical bulwark was undermined, as it has been, there was nothing else.

And so in Ireland, the ideology of liberalism has come up against very little serious opposition from intellectuals.

Why is this the Catholic Moment?

But to address the theme of this talk: The Catholic Moment for Ireland? First of all, I want to point out that I certainly do not mean that this is a time for returning to imaginary 'glory days' of the past; the 1950s or something like that. I've already suggested that the past had fundamental flaws which set the scene for our current crisis. Rather, by that title I do wish to point out something which I suppose is quite evident. A whole generation has grown under the tutelage of John Paul II: maybe many were too young to have been in the Park in 1979, but they have witnessed his pontificate, and perhaps attended some of the World Youth Days. We have all witnessed the events surrounding his death and funeral, and the election of his successor. This is all a million miles away from all the talk about blackthorn wielding priests, the public proclamation of the amounts paid in parish dues, and tyrannical Mother Superiors stalking the dark corridors

⁹ Richard John Neuhaus, *The Persistence of the Catholic Moment*.

of convents. These caricatures had elements of truth. But it is not the Ireland that anyone under forty grew up in; nor is it the Church we've been seeing embodied in the figure of John Paul II. The younger Irish belong to a generation that has brushed close to and even lived the reality of the 'culture of death': alcohol and drug abuse, violence, abortion, and marriage breakdown. It has seen this way of life become the standard in a way their parents' generation could not have imagined. But increasingly there are signs that Irish men and women are opting for the 'culture of life' instead. For that reason I think there really is a 'JPII Generation'.

It is time for this generation of Irish Catholics to be heard in what has become in the 'naked public square'. It is this generation which must re-propose the Christian vision of society once again. They have no more nor less right to be heard than anyone else – but have the exact same rights, to have their proposition heard and respected, if not always agreed with. And yet when this respect is lacking, as it so palpably lacking in large sectors of the media in Ireland, it is important not to become discouraged. Mother Teresa put it well when she said that 'we are not called upon to be successful. We are called on to be faithful.' A bit of success is nice too, however, and the good news for Christians is that the possibility of it is not excluded.

UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE

GAVAN JENNINGS

Those engaged in pastoral work, and indeed adults in general can be put off by the inscrutability of young people. Two of the great priests of the twentieth century – John Paul II and Saint Josemaría Escrivá – exhibited a remarkable capacity to understand young people, and to appreciate the importance of youth in a person's pilgrimage towards God. We can learn from their insights.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to assist adults, particularly those involved in pastoral work, in understanding today's young people. I draw heavily from John Paul II and Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. Looking at the lives of John Paul II and Blessed Josemaría Escrivá we see how they exhibit a great capacity to appeal to the young. This I think stems from the fact that in both cases they genuinely understand young people. Both of them are models for a priest in his dealings with young people. By necessity there are many fairly sweeping generalisations made here, and much of it is familiar territory. This is not a scientific analysis such as would make extensive use of statistics. It is rather an attempt to see young people through the eyes of John Paul II and Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, both of whom provide us with wonderful examples of how a priest can attract young people to follow Christ. What I think we will see most patently is that both men reveal a great love for youth, and while not blind to the temptations and failings of the young, primarily see youth in a very positive light.

Who are the “young people”?

I have young Irish people clearly in mind; although the “perennial” characteristics are taken as belonging to all young people. I am not thinking primarily of young teenagers, but rather of a young man or woman in their last years in secondary school (e.g. 5th and 6th Year) or first years of Third Level. I think that we could take an eighteen-year-old

as our model. It is helpful to consider the dates surrounding his life to date. Even though we can grasp that if he or she is eighteen then he or she (he for short) was born in 1984; we don't tend to realise that anything before that is prehistory for him! His dad is say fifty-five (born in 1947), and his mum is fifty (born 1952, although she won't admit it). This fellow does not remember the Beatles, Abba, the Pope's visit, the Junior Cert exam, serious violence in the North, nor Peig Sayers. He will only have a vague memory of the punt (Irish pound) when he is older. On the other hand, he has grown up with Fr. Ted, the Spice Girls, the Internet, Sky News, and unfortunately for him, Boyzone.

Given that he is eighteen he is a bit rebellious, but probably past his most rebellious phase; he sees Third Level on the horizon, and is beginning to think about the coming 4 or so years of his life, and to some degree what "he will be" after college. This is a time when he realizes that maturing is expected to take place, and that soon, when he leaves school and enters Third Level, people will start treating him more or less as an adult. The Leaving Cert is the nearest thing he has got to a Rite of Passage.

Enigma of youth

There is always something of "an inscrutable conundrum" about young people, something that stumps even Solomon:

There are three things beyond my comprehension, four indeed, that I do not understand: the way of an eagle through the sky, the way of a snake over the rock, the way of a ship in mid-ocean, and the ways of a man in his youth. (Prov 30:19).

There is probably nothing wrong in the young being so inscrutable, after all they are inscrutable to themselves just as much. The pity would be if this were to affect our pastoral work with them. Not understanding them, we are tempted to adopt a very negative approach towards their very apparent failings, or even the things we invent ourselves. These exasperations with their foibles and weaknesses etc. are for the most part pretty transparent to them. It would be a pity if we were to give up on young people. Not only can we not give up on young people, but we have to realise that they demand the "special attention" of pastors. The young, as the Pope says, comprise a "mission territory" for the Church.

The generation gap

It is significant that the only scene from the life of Our Lord as a young person, is that of his being lost in the Temple. This should be the background of our reflection on all young people. Christ in this scene comes of age, and in the process baffles his parents and causes them a degree of suffering. This might help us understand that in youth there is room for some legitimate though disturbing expansion of the boundaries. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá often warned parents against the tendency to quickly forget the "protests" of their own youth, as if they had never once been adolescents.

There is an automatic tendency to be negative regarding the rebellions of the young! We have to be careful to get the balance right, or perhaps seek to encourage the valid elements of youth culture and to put right only those that are truly harmful. At times the protests of youth are valid; they reject genuinely negative elements of the culture of their elders. Their natural idealism leads them to reject what they see in the older generations as phony, artificial or bourgeois. At times this only reflects a failure of the young to understand the complexities and hard realities of life. But this fresh outlook is something which society cannot do without; a country, an organization or family without rebellious young people around will probably work all the more smoothly but at a great price. The prudence of age needs to be balanced by the daring of youth. The young keep a society vibrant, forward seeking.

To sum up in the Holy Father's words:

We need the enthusiasm of the young. We need their joie de vivre. In it is reflected something of the original joy God had in creating man. The young experience this same joy within themselves.

We must be able to discern what is genuine protest, what is not genuine but of little importance, and what is destructive. Parents, pastors, politicians are not impeccable, and at times quite the contrary. Young people would be deformed if they did not react against these defects. At other times their protests stem from peevishness, immaturity, testing the limits, etc. These things mustn't be given too much importance. But we cannot be blind to the fact that sometimes a young person can begin to go down a path towards a tragic life: drink and drug addiction, marriage breakdown, suicide and so on. These things must be spotted in time and taken very seriously.

I. The perennial characteristics of youth

1. Change

Having looked at the phenomenon of the "Generation Gap" in which there appears to be a breakdown in understanding between the adult world and the world of youth, it is time to ask ourselves what are the fundamental characteristics of youth. Quite obviously adolescence is defined in terms of physical change. The most important physical changes concern the onset of sexual functions and include the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. Accompanying these physical changes are psychological changes: in boys a growth in masculinity, courage etc. with accompanying anxiety regarding these changes; in girls withdrawal and rebelliousness. But to see the phenomenon of youth purely in terms of biological changes with concomitant psychological and social changes would be to miss the even more fundamental spiritual feature of youth. John Paul II describes his discovery of the "fundamental aspect" of youth as follows:

My most memorable experience of that period, when my pastoral activities concentrated above all on the young, was the discovery of the fundamental importance of youth. What is youth? It is not only a period of life that corresponds to a certain number of years, it is also a time given by Providence to every person and given to him as a responsibility. During that time he searches, like the young man in the Gospel, for answers to basic questions; he searches not only for the meaning of life but also for a concrete way to go about living his life. This is the most fundamental characteristic of youth. Every mentor, beginning with parents, let alone every pastor, must be aware of this characteristic and must know how to identify it in every boy and girl. I will say more: he must love this fundamental aspect of youth.

It is interesting that the Pope calls this a "discovery". This suggests that it is something an adult might actually fail to see; it is not self-evident. This time of life is literally "providential". In other words it forms an important part in God's plan for that human being. He is given a special aptitude and capacity to ask the most basic questions about human life - not in a detached, abstract way, but in a very practical way: in order to decide the attitude he will adopt vis-à-vis life itself. And what should be the attitude of the parent or pastor towards this characteristic? He must identify it and love it. Clearly then, were a parent or pastor to see this time of life merely as a problematic phase he would be much less effective in helping the young person at a key, or the key, time of their lives.

Very interestingly John Paul II places the development of sexuality at this time firmly within this deeper context. It is not merely that boys become interested in girls and vice versa at the onset of puberty. This happens of course, but it points the young person towards the fundamental reality that he is made for communion.

In life, youth is when we come to know ourselves. It is also time of communion. Young people, whether boys or girls, know they must live for and with others, they know that their life has meaning to the extent that it becomes a free gift for others. Here is the origin of all vocations - whether to priesthood or religious life, or to marriage and family.

I think that this gives us a very interesting approach to questions of sexuality and the young. Sometimes the onset of the adolescence is lamented as heralding the loss of the beautiful innocence of boyhood (think of Wordsworth's *Intimations of immortality*) . But the Pope points to the fact that the young person is growing more interpersonal by virtue of this interest in the opposite sex, which points to the essential characteristic of man that he is made to give himself in love. I would also suggest that young people are far more interested in the romantic aspects of girl-boy relationships than the area of sexual relations. Sex per se is not what they are seeking.

2. Idealism

It is in the nature of young people to be idealistic. They look forward to the future with great enthusiasm and expectation, where an older person tends to look back to the "good old days". (This is particularly apparent in tastes in popular music: an older person likes the music of his youth, music that evokes happy memories; the young person likes the music that is coming out now, not because of associations with the past. Now we even have LITE FM dedicated to the golden oldies for the thirty-somethings.) The capacity to give oneself in love also appears as an attractive ideal to a young person. Young people have a great capacity for idealism, and self-sacrifice, which however can go to other extreme of egoism. At times both idealism and egoism can exist side by side in dramatic ways. Young people easily establish intense relationships, but can at times just as easily abandon them.

John Paul II sees youthful idealism as a phase in life designed by God to lead the person to look for him. In their search for human love they are looking for the love of God

After all, young people are always searching for the beauty in love. They want their love to be beautiful... Ultimately, they know that only God can give them this love. As a result, they are willing to follow Christ, without caring about the sacrifices this may entail.

This conviction is the result of his years spent in looking after young people in Poland. Working with young couples in St. Florians's Church, Krakow, as a young priest, in 28 months he blessed 160 marriages, and got to know the capacity of young people for love: "Young people are searching for the beauty of love"... While they may fall short of the mark "in the depths of their hearts they still desire a beautiful and pure love." This desire of young people, even from the most opulent of backgrounds, for God has been demonstrated repeatedly in the phenomenon of the World Youth Days. Against all the expectations, each year John Paul II has managed to gather crowds of over one million in almost all of these meetings (Manila was perhaps the largest gathering of people ever seen on the planet: the crowd was estimated at 15 million). George Weigel remarks that in World Youth Day '93 in Denver, queues for confession at the impromptu confessionals looked like queues normally seen for pizzerias, and Weigel adds that John Paul II had taught his American bishops that being young is a time designed by God for searching and that their job as bishops was to be present to that search.

II. Current Influences

1. Social upheaval and loss of values

It is important to recognise that what we might term "the problem with young people today" forms part of an overall shift in society at large. As Vatican Council II puts it: 'Today's spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution'; a revolution caused largely by advances in science and technology. As a result there has been a shift away from traditional society structures. With these changes has come a questioning of accepted values, particularly by young people. It is in the context of such an overall cultural crisis that Roger Scruton places the crisis of young people. Scruton presents a rather negative analysis of youth culture; he laments the state of modern youth. He sees the kernel of the problem for modern youth as lying in its alienation from genuine kinds of membership in human community. They lack the sense of membership which characterises young people in primitive societies and young people in the past up until the 20th century. In primitive societies a child joined the adult community through the rites

of passage; they were brought to identify with the community through rituals, ceremonies, gods and stories. Even in the more civilized societies of Europe, adolescents were induced into adult life through more complex rites of passage, common religion, etc.

This has been lost in modern youth culture; young people do not have the elementary experiences, in particular of work and war, which reinforce the bond of social membership and give credibility to the adult virtues. TV has the effect of isolating young people and restricting his capacity to communicate. Having inherited the sexual revolution, sex has lost for the young person any connection with commitment and has become a simple source of pleasure.

There is little religious belief. The result: "an adolescent community that suffers from an accumulating deficit in the experience of membership, while resolutely turning its back on the adult world." Instead the young turn to new forms of belonging which do not involve discipline on the adherents; centring on spectacles in sport and music; namely following a sports team, or pop group or idol. This forms a 'virtual community of fans'. A young person must, arbitrarily for the most part, select the musical band or artist which he will "follow"; and then there is an identification that goes beyond questions of musical merit, as borne out by the fact that an insult to that group is seen by the fan as an insult to himself. Indeed the music is only "part of the process whereby a human individual or group is totemized." Scruton sees the collapse of the home as a key cause of the demise of youth identification with the adult world:

Youth culture is an attempt... to make oneself at home in a world that is not, in any real sense, a home, since it has ceased to dedicate itself, as a home must dedicate itself, to the task of social reproduction, to the transmission of tradition and responsibility.

For Jonathan Sacks, the superficiality of what young people receive in education, from the mass media, etc. has cut them off from the narratives, the shared texts, which have traditionally been the vehicle of continuity by which a culture is handed on to successive generations. TV, in practice though not of necessity, offers only 'a foreshortened and fragmented world'. This is painfully clear in Oprah Winfrey and in Big Brother type TV, where entertainment has descended into voyeurism.

John Paul II speaks of the missing dimension of heroism in the experiences of today's young people:

Today's youth are also different from those who came before. In the past, the younger generations were shaped by the painful experience of war, of concentration camps, of constant danger. This experience allowed young people - I imagine all over the world, although I have Polish youth in mind - to develop traits of great heroism.... In this regard, today's young people certainly grow up in a different context.... They live in freedom, which others have won for them, and have yielded in large part to the consumer culture.... In general, the younger generations grow up in an atmosphere marked by a new positivism, whereas in Poland, when I was a boy, romantic traditions prevailed.

It is quite apparent that young people have grown up saturated with moral relativism. Any behaviour (with the only condition that it doesn't hurt anybody else) is permissible. Regarding moral matters young people find it almost impossible to get over the hurdle of relativism: while they may believe that a certain act is wrong, they cannot bring themselves to say more than that it is "wrong for me". Moral judgements can never be universalised.

2. The Irish angle

The above analysis applies to Western youth in general, and Irish youth are no exception. In Ireland, if anything, the phenomenon of social upheaval and the loss of a sense of community is more pronounced than in other Western countries. This upheaval has two layers: that affecting the parents of today's young generation, and that affecting this generation itself. The parents of those now aged 18 (born in 1984) are those who went through the Sixties and Seventies upheavals in Ireland, which were quite real. These upheavals included the sexual revolution, radical feminism in the universities, growing use of contraceptives and abortion. Vocations to the priesthood began to decline from 1961. Mass attendance was dropping during the Seventies, and this trend is continuing.

More and more, young Irish people are experiencing the breakdown of their parents' marriage. The effect of this must be very profound when the family is "the school of love"; in other words, the first and most profound lesson about love (teaching them its permanence and fruitfulness) has become in fact a lesson about the transience and failure of love. Children of such situations find it harder in their turn to hold down stable relationships.

The Irish youngster's faith has also been weakened by the almost total non-existence of serious doctrinal formation in schools. There is some

evidence that there are two trends: a tendency away from religion and among those who remain religious a tendency to be conservative in matters of identity and belief. Today's eighteen-year-old has grown up during "the second partitioning of Ireland". He was yet to be born in the year of the 1983 abortion referendum, was two during the 1986 divorce referendum, and eleven when divorce was passed in the 1995 referendum. For him the Catholic faith has been synonymous with referenda, and legal wrangles. Young Irish people have also grown up with a Church which they see as synonymous with sex-scandals; really starting with the Bishop Eamonn Casey case (in 1992 when our youngster was eight years old). In this time the negative presentation of Catholicism in Ireland by the media has been incessant. An eighteen-year-old has grown up with the continuous repetition of the Celtic Tiger coming-of-age saga: up till the 1990s Ireland was dominated by a stern but secretly corrupt clergy, where people were rural and backward, where life was "nasty, brutish and short" (think of Angela's Ashes). But now she has thrown off this yoke, come of age, got very rich, happy (if a little stressed out because adult life is much more demanding). There is a continuous lampooning of Ireland's rural, Catholic past; e.g. the fact that even now De Valera's "dream speech" of 17 March 1943 often comes up for a lampooning. Why lampoon a sixty year old speech?

3. The consumer culture

If we follow Scruton's assessment, the entertainment culture of youth is more than about just entertainment, it is about a way of being immersed in a "virtual community" of spectators. This "fun culture" shouldn't be completely demonised. At the same time, it is widely agreed that the soft life of "fun" is detrimental. A young person is constantly exposed to a barrage of inputs: TV and videos, mobile-phone with text messages and services, the Internet and "surfing the web", portable CD players, constant and sound-bite "news" such as Sky News, leading them to superficiality, dissipation and intellectual dispersion - all of which go to make contemplative life impossible. It deadens sensibilities; Cardinal Ratzinger considers that rock and related forms of music have stunted the musical sense of young people since the Sixties; closing off to them the beauty of church music. Within the consumerist culture, it is easy for illicit forms of entertainment, particularly premarital sex, alcohol and drug abuse to be seen as natural extensions of the principle of the primacy of fun.

4. The Irish angle

Perhaps contemporary materialism has buried the idealism of many young Irish somewhat. Young Irish people see no pressing issues of poverty or social injustice to stir up their idealism. They are set thinking fixedly on their choice of career in 5th and 6th Year, when they enter the "points race" to get a place in university. While the Celtic Tiger was still healthy, there was the prospect of receiving quite a good salary on leaving college, or even without going into Third Level education at all. Certainly their parents' generation (the infamous Sixties generation) would seem to be far more interested in a lucrative career for their children than that they would find an ideal to live by. (A recent survey showed that mothers would in general be disappointed if their child were to embrace a vocation to priesthood or the religious life.) In general that older generation would seem to look slightly askance at the traditional idealism expressed in religion and politics, and this has rubbed off on their children. The political parties too have begun to grow worried about the diffidence of students regarding politics. A factor in the loss of idealism by young people has perhaps been played by a very strong vein of undisguised cynicism towards ideals in popular entertainment. The Simpsons for instance features a jaundiced young teenager in a world of uninspiring adults: the father is a slob, the mother neurotic, the next-door neighbours religious freaks, the father's employer sadistic, etc. Southpark features a band of dysfunctional kids. The priesthood had many years being sent up in Fr. Ted.

Clearly Irish young people have a lot of spending money. Often they work weekends (and sometimes week nights), parents don't ask him to hand any of it over, so it is essentially spending money: mobile phone, clothes, rock concerts, drink.

Drink forms a big part of a typical Irish youngster's social life: getting drunk on Saturday night is not unusual. In 1991 78% of post-primary students between 14 and 17 had already taken their first drink, by 1995 it was 83%. In 1994 a survey of schoolchildren in the Cork/Kerry area showed that 20% of 9-year-olds had already used alcoholic drink. According to a recent survey the trend of high alcohol intake by young Irish people rose significantly between 1995 and 1999, particularly among girls. Drunkenness among young people is becoming commoner, the starting age is getting younger, and the gender gap is narrowing. Student drunkenness in Ireland, along with Britain and Denmark, is well over the EU average. It is feared that unless attitudes to alcohol abuse change,

'there will be an epidemic of people seeking help for alcohol dependence in the next 10-20 years'.

Sexual relations between boyfriend and girlfriend seem to be the norm in late teens.

This is the summation by John Waters of contemporary Ireland:

[Without the old beliefs which gave us assurance]...we are trapped in a perverse loneliness disguised as prosperity. This is where we find our angers and our fears and this is why we are so much in the grip of addictions which do nothing to satisfy our cravings. If the term still had any meaning, you might say that what Ireland should be seeking is a spiritual renewal. What we need, in a word, is a miracle.

Here are five practical guidelines for approaching young people.

1. Understanding and affection

The first thing young people want to find in an adult, especially a pastor, is genuine affection. Pedro Casciaro describes how, as a youth, he was weak in his practice of the faith and strongly prejudiced against priests and religious, with something "almost like an allergy". A friend of his encouraged him to meet Saint Josemaría and eventually he did so. This priest made him put aside all his reservations at a stroke:

Right from the start he infused into me both a great confidence and, at the same time, a respect for him far beyond what I owed simply to his years. I was particularly struck by his goodness, his infectious joy, his good humour... And I poured out my heart to him as I had never done to anybody else in my whole life.

Pedro in turn brought his younger brother José María, then sixteen, to meet this priest. Again the effect was the same:

What was most unexpected was his affectionate behaviour, the way he inspired immediate trust, although we had never met till that moment.

The relationship between adults and the young is a two-way process:

Adults ought to engage in friendly discussion with young people so that both groups, overcoming the age barrier, can become better acquainted and can share the special benefits each generation has to offer the other.

Affection does not mean being over-indulgent. In fact, young people often see over-indulgence as a mask for the selfishness of a parent or pastor who wants to court an easy popularity at the expense of the real good of the young person in question. It is affectionate guidance, not indulgence, that they seek:

They need guides, and they want them close at hand. If they turn to authority figures, they do so because they see in them a wealth of human warmth and a willingness to walk with them along the paths they are following.

George Weigel asks why the Pope has such rapport with young people, even as a frail old man. One of the reasons he gives is the fact that he clearly does not pander to them:

Why did rapport with young people continue and even intensify? Several reasons suggested themselves. The Pope took young people seriously as persons, paying them the compliment of seeing them as people struggling with the meaning of life. When speaking with the young, he did not take the edge off a Christian message he clearly lived himself. Perhaps most importantly, he did not pander to young people, challenging them to settle for nothing less than moral grandeur. At a time in Western history when virtually no other figure was calling young people to bear burdens and make sacrifices, John Paul II touched the youthful thirst for the heroic and related it to the human search for God.

2. Authenticity

There is a danger that priests may feel they have to become something that they are not in order to attract young people to themselves. The figure of 'Fr. Trendy' has received a justified lampooning. There are two failures here.

The first failure is the failure of the priest to be true to himself. He becomes contrived and this is something which is easily noticed, and is not admired by normal young people.

One of Karol Wojtyla's group of university students from Krakow - the Srodowisko group - who would go kayaking together, etc., said that while Fr. Karol would do menial tasks during these trips like everyone else, he still had them use the polite, formal form of address, etc. The ex-student summed it up by saying: "Today, many priests try to be like the kids. We were trying to be like him."

Saint Josemaría had the experience that young people embrace the Faith when they see that it is not something odd or contrived; that it is, rather, authentic friendship with God:

I have seen with joy how Christian piety takes root in young people - those of today and those of forty years ago - when they have seen it being lived with sincerity; when they understand that prayer is face-to-face conversation with the Lord just as you speak to your father or friend; without anonymity. This comes about when you manage to have the words of Jesus Christ *vos autem dixi amicos* (Jn 15:15) (I have called you friends) echo in their souls, when their faith is given a strong call, when they see that the Lord is the same today, yesterday, and forever.

The second failure in the priest who dissimulates is that he has forgotten that young people are not looking for him, but for Christ. And if they should seem to seek the pastor for himself he should turn this attention towards Christ. John Paul II sees this clearly:

... anywhere the Pope goes, he seeks out the young and the young seek him out. Actually, in truth, it is not the Pope who is being sought out at all. The one being sought out is Christ, who knows "that which is in every man" (cf..Jn 2:25), especially in a young person, and who can give true answers to his questions!

3. Help them to reflect on fundamental issues

It is necessary to have the conviction that young people are genuinely searching for God. Without this one might be tempted to grow cynical in the face of the apparent unresponsiveness or disinterest of young people:

I would like to sum up by stressing that the young are searching for God, they are searching for the meaning of life, they are searching for definitive answers.

Perhaps the first task facing a pastor working with young people is to help them to begin to reflect. They are swept along, as we have seen, in a "culture of fun", of incessant entertainment, of instant gratification; all of which deadens the capacity to reflect. This is the contrary of being a contemplative in the middle of the world; it is to be immersed in the frenetic activity of the world without stopping to think, to reflect. Young people must be helped to create the silence they need to examine their lives more profoundly. To be drawn towards God young people need to be drawn away from submersion in their senses. It is important to be convinced that while young people may not respond well initially to a

clear presentation of the Church's teaching, as long as the seed is sown it is in their souls ready to germinate, perhaps months, even years later. Within this context it is particularly important to help youngsters know and treasure the great spiritual and intellectual tradition of the Church. As John Paul II puts it in his latest World Youth Day Message:

Discover your Christian roots, learn about the Church's history, deepen your knowledge of the spiritual heritage which has been passed onto you, follow in the footsteps of the witnesses and teachers who have gone before you!

4. Human virtues

Human virtues form the base of supernatural life; without them nothing can be achieved. Young people must be helped grow in generosity, constancy and fortitude. At the same time they must be helped to fight individualism, and to overcome excessively sentimental attitudes. This requires deep doctrinal formation. Formation in temperance is especially important to protect them against the lure of consumerism. Softness, moodiness, impressionability decline when a young people learns to work hard, play hard and live sobriety.

Vatican Council II recognized the importance of helping young people to be discerning of things seen in the mass media. This has become much more important with the advent of the Internet and cable TV. They should be discerning of what they see, hear and read; educators should help them in this regard; parents should protect them from things harmful to good morals. The formation of young people in moderation and self-control in the use of the instruments of mass media is vital.

In spiritual guidance young people must be given the supernatural means, particularly the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, to help them win in the ascetical struggle, but always respecting individual freedom:

In giving spiritual guidance we must avoid producing creatures who lack their own capacity to judge, and who only ever materially carry out what they've been told. Spiritual guidance must, rather, form people with the capacity to judge situations. And this capacity requires maturity, strength of conviction, sufficient knowledge of Church teaching, refinement of spirit and formation of the will.

5. Virtue of chastity

Young people, especially in their own families, need to be trained in chastity. They need to be shown how chastity is not something negative - a repression - but a "joyful affirmation". The priest must not be blind to the "savage work of those who think that man is a beast". Young people are subject to a relentless barrage of impurity in the mass media. Here the corruption of young girls is very evident. When presenting young Irish people the teaching of the Church on sexual morality, one has to be aware that what one is asking them to believe runs counter to perhaps everything they have heard up to that point. Many parents, teachers, media, friends, politicians, figures from entertainment constantly portray, implicitly or explicitly, a "counter-Gospel". For them then, there is no question of pre-marital sex, contraception, etc. being wrong; "the whole world knows" that there are perfectly acceptable. Certainly the fact that "the Church teaches that such behaviour is sinful" is not much of an argument for youngsters, clearly not strong enough to enable them to turn their backs on the overwhelming majority of voices they are hearing. It takes a very big leap to stop and say to oneself: "All of my friends, all of my idols, my parents and I myself up till now, have got it totally wrong!"

At times a young person can despair of ever acquiring the virtue of holy purity; he must be introduced to the means: penance, the Eucharist, a life of prayer, spiritual direction, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, mortification, work, flight from the occasions. Obviously a training here is a necessary preparation to be able to embrace the gift of celibacy.

6. Present the love of God clearly

A fundamental factor to be remembered in work with young people is that they need to have the love of Christ revealed to them. If there is a crisis with youth, its epicentre lies in the fact that they have not discovered the love of Christ and are desperately seeking for it in the other things the world offers them, and when they do not find it there they fall into despair or cynicism.

The Pope repeatedly comes back to the theme of the love of God in his addresses to young people. In the very first of his messages for the World Youth Days, John Paul II chose as the keynote passage from Sacred Scripture the line from St. John: "We have recognized and believed in the love that God has for us". The first quote that he uses is taken from his first encyclical:

Man cannot live without love. He remains incomprehensible to himself; his life is deprived of meaning, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate deeply in love.

He continues to challenge the young to respond to God's love for them, and not to settle for anything less.

Dear young people, do not be content with anything less than the highest ideals! Do not let yourselves be dispirited by those who are disillusioned with life and have grown deaf to the deepest and most authentic desires of the heart. You are right to be disappointed with hollow entertainment and passing fads, and with aiming at too little in life. If you have an ardent desire for the Lord you will steer clear of the mediocrity and conformism so widespread in our society.

7. Conclusion

In summary, we could say that there is a crisis among young people; that they are subject to corrupting influences like never before. But in the face of that we cannot fall into sterile lamentation. Both John Paul II and Blessed Josemaría give us a wonderful example of a positive outlook on youth, despite all the negative factors. In both, I think that the basis of their optimism is an underlying conviction that youth is a most special time in the life of a human being. For this reason the stakes are very high, and it is obvious that the battle will be hard. It seems that another factor for the optimism of both is their positive view of human nature; that man is made for the truth. If young people are presented with the truth of the Gospel, in an authentic manner, they will respond.

Yet again, the young have shown themselves to be, for Rome and for the Church, a special gift of the Spirit of God. Sometimes when we look at the young, with the problems and weaknesses that characterize them in contemporary society, we tend to be pessimistic. The Jubilee of Young People however changed that, telling us that young people, whatever their possible ambiguities, have a profound longing for those genuine values which find their fullness in Christ. Is not Christ the secret of true freedom and profound joy of heart? Is not Christ the supreme friend and the teacher of all genuine friendship? If Christ is presented to young people as he really is, they experience him as an answer that is convincing and they can accept his message, even when it is demanding and bears the mark of the Cross. For this reason, in response to their enthusiasm, I did not hesitate to ask them to make a radical choice of faith and life and present them with a stupendous task: to become "morning! watchmen" (cf. Is 21:11-12) at the dawn of the new millennium.