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2024 Faculty Summer Seminar - Gracious Catastrophes: Contemporary Representations of Mystery and Mercy in the Catholic Literary Imagination

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2024 FACULTY SUMMER SEMINAR

GRACIOUS CATASTROPHES

May 22 – June 23, 2024

Co-sponsored by the

CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES

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THE G.K. CHESTERTON INSTITUTE FOR FAITH & CULTURE

2024 FACULTY SUMMER SEMINAR

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Co-sponsored by the
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THE G.K. CHESTERTON INSTITUTE FOR FAITH & CULTURE

Patrick Manning
Director, Center for Catholic Studies

2024 FACULTY SUMMER SEMINAR

GRACIOUS CATASTROPHES

Contemporary Representations of Mystery and Mercy in the Catholic Literary Imagination

MAY 22 - MAY 23

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Facilitated by Michael P. Murphy, Ph.D.

Director, Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage
Loyola University, Chicago

Murphy is a senior lecturer and author of *A Theology of Criticism: Balthasar, Postmodernism, and the Catholic Imagination* (Oxford). His research interests are in Theology and Literature, Systematic Theology, and the literary/political cultures of Catholicism—but he also thinks and writes about issues in mimetic theory, social ethics, and Ignatian pedagogy.

Hosted by the Center for Catholic Studies, the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership & the G.K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture

CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES
2024 SUMMER FACULTY SEMINAR

GRACIOUS CATASTROPHES:
CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATIONS OF MYSTERY AND MERCY
IN THE CATHOLIC LITERARY IMAGINATION

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2024

Gracious Catastrophes: Contemporary Representations of Mystery and Mercy in the Catholic Literary Imagination

Michael P. Murphy, Ph.D.

About the Faculty Summer Seminar

In its most basic scholarly form, the "Catholic imagination" refers to the holistic faculty endowed to creatures for critical, contemplative, and creative engagement with the living God. To be sure, this three-day workshop will engage the Catholic imagination in this needed (albeit) academic way, but we will also explore the term in other, more personal and experiential ways as well. Some questions, topics, and points to be considered:

- What is the state of discourses in faith and Christian humanism in a world increasingly described as "Post"—postmodern, post-human, post-Christian, post-religious?
- How are Catholic thought and practice represented in select literature, poetry, and cinema?
- What does it mean to be a Catholic writer (let alone a Catholic of any sort) in an increasingly secular culture?
- Does art transcend religion? Can the contemporary Catholic poet/artist/writer succeed in creating art for readers who both share his/her belief and for those who do not?
- If the Church is indeed an "expert in humanity," how might it teach and practice the mystery of mercy? How might art, poetry, literature, and film help convey, reveal, complicate mysteries like mercy—and grace and joy and suffering and forgiveness? How might an attuned Catholic imagination help?

And so: we turn to the arts of the imagination. If, as David Tracy observes, religion's "closest cousin is not rigid logic, but art," what might art—and conversations about the imagination—be trying to communicate to its "cousin" (and to us all) as we travel along the first decades of the 21st century? This workshop will not only reflect on the nature of a "Catholic Imagination" (as a theoretical/creative lens, an exercise in cultural production, and so on), but as a theological way of knowing with a very long (and living) tradition.

READINGS:

1. Flannery O'Connor, "A Temple of the Holy Ghost"
2. John L'Heureux, "The Expert on God"
3. Kirsten Valdez Quade, "Ordinary Sins"
4. *and:* Additional poetry and film clips to be threaded in.

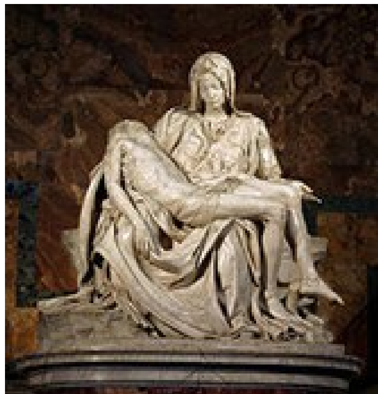
About the Facilitator:

MICHAEL P. MURPHY is Director of Loyola's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage. His research interests are in Theology and Literature, Systematic Theology, and the literary/political cultures of Catholicism—but he also thinks and writes about issues in mimetic theory, social ethics, and Ignatian pedagogy. His first book, *A Theology of Criticism: Balthasar, Postmodernism, and the Catholic Imagination* (Oxford), was named a "Distinguished Publication" in 2008 by the American Academy of Religion. His most recent scholarly work is "*Panem et Circenses*: Michel Houellebecq, *Submission*, and the Liturgies of Spiritual Exhaustion" in *The Call of Literature* (Forthcoming from Routledge in fall, 2024). He is currently at work on a monograph entitled *The Humane Realists: Catholic Fiction, Poetry, and Film 1965-2025.*

The Images of Motherhood as Reflective in Catholic Writings and Art

Josephine De Vito

The image of motherhood in Christianity shows not only faith, but compassion, love, and a belonging between a mother and child which is displayed in art, poetry, and scriptures. The image of the "Pieta" illustrates maternal attachment that the mother of Jesus Christ has for her son. The sculpture captures the moment when Jesus, taken down from the cross, is given to his mother, Mary. It is noted that Mary looks younger than Jesus and some art historians believe Michelangelo was inspired by a passage in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*: "O Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son, your merit so ennobled human nature that its divine Creator did not hesitate to become your creation.[1] The "Pieta" represents the body of Jesus on the lap of his mother, Mary. Pieta means "Pity or Compassion" and represents Mary's sorrowfully contemplating the dead body of her son. The "Pieta" is not mentioned in the Bible but in the Middle Ages was cited as one of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary.[2] The devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary, helps us to meditate on the events in Our Lady's life when she lovingly and willingly united herself to her Son's sacrifice on the Cross and shared in His redemption.


[3]

The Blessed Virgin Mary always had a prenatal connection to her unborn son, even though she did not understand it but felt an undeniable love since she accepted this without question. According to contemporary maternal child theorists, Mercer[4] and Rubin[5] prenatal attachment enhances postnatal attachment behavior. The role of becoming a mother is a part of a woman's psychological inner self, as she progresses through her pregnancy as the newborn becomes viable. With the acknowledgment of pregnancy, a mother develops an initial and intense relationship with the child that is the foundation of a special relationship between them. At the annunciation, Mary never doubted this but asked, "How can this be? I do not know man" When the angel Gabriel explained, Mary accepted the beautiful gift of the Son of God, conceived by the

Holy Spirit.[6] When she visits her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist, Elizabeth felt the baby “leap” in her womb, declaring “blessed is the fruit of your womb.”[7] Elizabeth had been barren for many years before she was able to conceive. Both women, acknowledged the beauty of life in their unborn sons. Motherhood is a miracle for both Mary and Elizabeth that gives meaning to the most important part of being a woman.

According to contemporary maternal newborn theories, this is evident in Mary, the mother of Jesus, since as a mother attains the role of motherhood, she envisions her newborn and the role they will have in life.[8] The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon, who was a righteous and devoted man that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Simeon took Jesus in his arms when his parents were going into the temple and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”[9] Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.[10]

Throughout Christianity, a woman was the foundation for the continuation of the family. A woman’s role in the patriarchal family as a supportive spouse and mother was paramount. Since motherhood was held in high esteem, a women risked physical pain and possible death to have children.[11] Sarah loved her husband Abraham, but she felt she was letting him down because she was unable to give him a son, despite God telling her this would happen.[12] She felt it was her most vital role to provide an heir and continue the family of Abraham. Because of this, Sarah insisted Hagar lay with Abraham to have a son, which was Ismael. It was God who proclaimed that Isaac would be the promised son, but what Sarah did not understand was, the time would be when God wanted this to happen. Sarah as a mother wanted to protect her son Isaac. She grew jealous of Hagar and Ismael’s relationship with Isaac. Sarah made Abraham send Hagar and Ismael away. Hagar was made aware that God had a plan for Ismael, and he would lead the tribes of Israel. Both Sarah and Hagar were good woman and mothers who loved their sons and God.[13]

In Exodus we also see how the role of midwives assisted in helping mothers giving birth. The Pharoah of Egypt told the Hebrew midwives if a Hebrew woman gives birth to a son, kill them. Midwives had a dedication to their role in assisting a woman during birth. Even though males were valued more that female births, all newborn life was precious to the midwives.[14] The midwives feared God more than the Pharoah and did not obey this order. A Hebrew mother, Jochebed gave birth to a son, but would not turn him over to be killed. She kept him hidden for as long as she could and sent him in a basket down the river. Miriam, the baby’s sister watched as Pharoah’s daughter rescued him. Pharoah allowed his daughter to raise the baby and named him Moses, meaning he was drawn from the water. Miriam told Pharoah’s daughter she knew a woman who could breast feed the baby and suggested Jochebed. Unknown to them, Moses’s

birth mother breast fed him. Jochebed's love and attachment survived, and she was united briefly to provide for her son.[15]

We can also see an example of motherhood in the martyrs St. Perpetua and St. Felicity. Perpetua wrote her own martyrdom until the time it occurred. Both Perpetua and Felicity, her slave had recently converted to Christianity. It was a crime for Roman citizens to convert to Christianity as they would be sentenced to be thrown to the beasts. The courts showed them no mercy. Perpetua was nursing her baby and Felicity had just given birth before they entered the arena to be tortured by the wild beasts. They were told to reject their conversion to Christianity so they would not be tortured, but they refused. The day before her martyrdom Perpetua had a dream, where she is turned into a man. The symbolism reveals that in martyrdom, a Christian woman is no longer a woman since she is not defined by her "weakness" and "dependence." Instead, she takes on the role the world thinks is reserved for men, the role of conquering hero.[16]

While awaiting her persecution, she was very distressed concerning her infant son who needed to nurse. When she was placed in the dungeon, she was glad to be with her son and nurse him. She loved her son and arranged for her mother to take care of her baby, which shows the love of a mother. Felicity also left her newborn to someone to raise the baby. Both Perpetua and Felicity were stripped naked and tortured by the beasts. Their love of Jesus Christ and vision of ascending the ladder to Paradise made them able to endure this horrifying experience.[17]

The image of motherhood can be seen in early Christianity as a very important role for women of faith. It was a challenge since conception and birth came with great risk for both a mother and child. What made women desire motherhood was that life was precious and the foundation of love for the family that Jesus promised. God the father, sent his son to be born to Mary, a virgin and to a man who was would be his foster father, Joseph. The sacred heart of Jesus holds for all who believe in God infinite love and everlasting life.

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[1] Paolucci, A. *Michelangelo, la Pieta,* (Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, Paradiso, Canto XXXIII, 1997), p. 40

[2] O'Neil, K., *The Seven Sorrows of Mary,* (Liguori Publications: New York, 2008), p. 21

[3] Jameson, A., *Legends of the Madonna: A representation in the fine arts (Omnigraphics Inc., 1990)* (ISBN 13: 978-1558882775) https://www.amazon.com/Legends-Madonna-Represented-FineArts/dp/1558882774, p. 1

[4] Mercer, R.T., *Becoming a Mother versus maternal Role Attainment,* (Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 2004), p. 24

[5] Rubin, R. *Maternal, Identity and the Maternal Experience,* (Springer: New York, 1984), p. 42.

[6]Coogan, M.D., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: The Gospel of Luke 1:30,* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2018), p. 1868

[7] *Ibid*., p. 1868

[8] Mercer, p. 24

[9] Coogan, *Luke 2:25-32*, p. 1871

[10] *Ibid*., *Luke 2:19*, p. 1870

[11] Campbell, J., *The Stories of the Old Testament: A Catholic's Guide,* (Loyola Press, A Jesuit Ministry: Chicago, 2007), p. 35

[12] *Ibid*., pp. 31-33
[13] Coogan, *Genesis 21:15-19*, p. 40
[14] Coogan, *Exodus 1:15-22*, p. 84
[15] Campbell, pp. 56-57
[16] Aquilina, M., *The Witness of Early Christian Women: Mothers of the Church,* (Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division: Indiana, 2014), pp.60-61
[17] Aquilina, M., *The Fathers of the Church: An Introduction to the First Christian Teachers,* (Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division: Indiana, 2014), pp.254-255

Love of things invisible: A theological look at the Catholic Imagination

Matthew Higgins, Ed.D.

For in the mystery of the Word made flesh
a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind,
so that, as we recognize in him God made visible,
we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible.[1]

Introduction

The text above comes from the preface to the Eucharistic prayer recited during the Mass of our Lord's Nativity at Christmas. Within this prayer, the faithful are called to reflect upon the power of the Incarnation as the way in which God chose to reveal himself to humanity, namely by entering into it, but also its effects and deeper meaning regarding God's revelation to humanity. There is a common phrase in the Catholic Studies movement, attributed to the original Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas, "The Incarnation changes everything." The Incarnation, the "mystery of the Word made flesh," as noted above, changes how we view God, ourselves, and the world. If there is a God who created all things out of nothing, and that same all-powerful God who needs nothing still chose to take on human form out of love for His creation, then everything in His creation has the potential to point our hearts and minds to Him. In fact, from the earliest pages of Scripture, we read that God created man and woman "in His image," meaning that humanity bears the image of God. It is therefore possible that through these image bearers, we can begin to see the One whose image we bear.

The Catholic imagination assists us in doing just that. It helps us view the world and creation through an incarnational and sacramental lens, meaning that through human faculties, senses, and creativity we can begin to know, love, and serve God. This topic was explored over the course of two days at the 26th annual Faculty Summer Seminar at Seton Hall University. Visiting Seton Hall University for the two-day seminar, Dr. Michael Murphy from Loyola University in Chicago offered insight into the Catholic imagination, particularly through literature and works of art. Participants explored how through these created works of beauty, we behold Beauty Himself.

Imagination—the eyes of our mind

When we hear the word, "imagination," our imaginations are automatically engaged. We start to visualize with our mind's eye. Perhaps we think of our childhood and the games we once played, performances we put on for our parents, or how we conceived of our lives in the future. When asked to define imagination, there is a general consensus that the imagination is something within the human person, more pointedly the mind, which enables us to formulate and create a visual idea of something that is otherwise invisible. For St. John Henry Newman, the imagination is a faculty of the mind that combines our personal experience and memory with an abstraction.[2] For example, we do not need to have ever set foot on a tropical island for us to imagine what it looks like. The same can be said of certain spiritual realities. One does not need to have witnessed the Incarnation or the events of Jesus' Passion to imagine their deeper truths.

If we look at the words in the preface to the Eucharistic Prayer above, this notion rings true. We also get a glimpse of the beauty of studying theology, spirituality, and Catholic "stuff." One of the many reasons I chose to study theology in graduate school was the wonder and awe caused by the fact that we can never truly understand God and His purposes—especially not in human terms; these are but images. Even the greatest minds in the Church's history have striven to define and describe theological truths and supernatural realities only to fall short. As the famous story of St. Thomas Aquinas at the end of his life shows us, all human attempts to describe the works of God are "all straw." As Newman stated in *Grammar of Assent*: "No human words indeed are worthy of the Supreme Being, none are adequate; but we have no other words to use but human..."[3]

Because of this, Newman often spoke of the imagination, the illative sense, and their rootedness in the search for Truth.[4]

> The mystery transcends all our experience; we have no experiences in our memory which we can put together, compare, contrast, unite, and thereby transmute into an image of the Ineffable Verity;—certainly; but what is in some degree a matter of experience, what is presented for the imagination, the affections, the devotion, the spiritual life of the Christian to repose upon with a real assent, what stands for things, not for notions only, is each of those propositions taken one by one, and that, not in the case of intellectual and thoughtful minds only, but of all religious minds whatever, in the case of a child or a peasant, as well as of a philosopher.[5]

Knowing this and the limitations of our humanity, God in His goodness desiring all to be one with Him, chose to become one like us so that we may come to see, know, and love Him. We are much more apt to relate to and understand things on a human level and therefore, it is through our

imagination and the eyes of our mind and heart that we can begin to see God's glory revealed. It is through the visible, that is those which we can perceive through the human senses, that we can see reflections of the invisible.

This particular seminar explored works of art as examples of visible things. Seminar participants discussed literary works, poetry, music, and film. Works of art assist us in our search for Truth. The journey of faith via the Catholic imagination includes works of art as an outward or visible sign that points to the invisible, the metaphysical, and the Divine. In *Reading for the Love of God*, Jessica Hooten Wilson describes reading, both Biblical and non-spiritual texts, as a spiritual practice that awakens our imagination among other things.

> The way we read books will foster a certain imagination, a particular way of reading the world, in which we ascend toward contemplating God and all his graces or descend into utilitarianism and reduced vision. [6]

Reading has long been associated with fostering imagination, but reading through a sacramental lens offers us a deeper look into our relationship with God as His beloved creation. It opens us to our whole self.

The Catholic Imagination and Sacramentality—the eyes of our whole self

The most commonly used etymology of the word catholic is "universal." However, as Dr. Murphy shared during the seminar, the Greek roots of the word Catholic mean "according to (*kata*-) the whole (*holos*)." Much like Newman argued how the imagination is not exclusively for the intellectual, the imagination can be used by all and is multifaceted, using the whole of our experience. Works of art include images, film, music, sculptures, and more. All of which can speak to the imagination of any individual. Furthermore, imagination is more than just an intellectual gift, but as Newman stated, a faculty. It is a process that utilizes many facets of our experience including memory, emotions, desires, hopes, and senses.

Catholic theology emphasizes the human being as a unity of both body and soul.[7] The two are not separate entities wherein our biological body is a suit worn by our souls. We are more than just a mind and therefore the Catholic imagination includes our whole self, all of the human senses, as well as our spirit. As created beings, we see and relate to our Creator through these faculties. It is upon this notion that the sacramental principle is built. Monica Hellwig explains the basis for the notion of a "sacramental principle" when she states,

> What is behind all this is simple: the realization that in a confused and sin-laden history our access to God is in double need of mediation. As creatures, corporeal beings in space, time, and cultural

> context, we relate to God through created things—speech, analogies, images, expression in gesture and song, and so forth.[8]

Created things, expanding upon what Hellwig states, include sacramental symbols, statues, icons, stained glass, mosaics, music, stories, parables, and the like, all point to a deeper reality. Viewing the world through this Catholic lens not only helps us see things differently but helps us see things we have only ever felt as something beyond our human senses. Moreover, mysteries can be revealed to us, and deep theological truths can begin to make sense.

Some argue that through this, "we discover the central principle of Christian existence – the presence of a sacramental imagination."[9] By exercising the Catholic imagination through exploring works of art, we are not entering into an imaginary or make-believe world like Narnia or Oz, but we experience the deeper reality of God's omnipresence, His metaphysical action in a physical world. As Hooten Wilson explains, "Novels introduce us to ways of imagining God already at work in our hearts, present in the world, transforming and sanctifying His creation all the time"[10] Wilson speaks particularly about novels and books, but the same rings true with other created works. All of which can lead us from the visible to the invisible. However, when considering the Catholic imagination, being mindful of its purpose is important lest we find ourselves missing the point, which is to be "caught up in *love* of things invisible."

Caught up in things invisible: A balancing act

Imagination and learning to appreciate beauty through the arts, literature, and the natural world in a Catholic context is a delicate balance. Art is beautiful. It entices and awakens our senses. Such pleasures can cause us to fall in love with the creation while losing sight of the Creator. This, some might argue, is the cause of opposition between a Catholic imagination and a Protestant imagination. Or, at the very least, the root of misunderstandings about the sacramentality of created things versus idols.[11] This point is echoed by Br. John Mark Falkenhain, O.S.B. as part of a compilation of priestly formation documents on the Catholic Imagination in the priesthood. In his chapter on the Catholic Imagination, he states,

> What if 'make believe' leads to a permanent belief in something that is simply wrong, unorthodox or dangerous? The difference between a mystic and a heretic, of course, is accountability and discipline, which often comes in the forms of study, the acceptance of limits, and relationship with an ultimate authority who can provide a reality check, feedback and an occasionally necessary redirection – in other words, accountability to a magisterium.[12]

While this particular selection is intended for the formation of priests, it speaks to all the faithful, and reminds us to exercise awareness in the journey into the Catholic imagination. Falkenhain's

call to hold oneself accountable in the Catholic imagination reminds us of the ultimate purpose in our journey of faith, namely a relationship with God and an ever-deepening unity with Him. As Fr. Andrew Greeley points out, “Religion begins in the imagination and in stories, but it cannot remain there.”[13] Experiencing God in the imagination through created works calls us to act, to conversion, and to a deeper understanding of the call we have received. Otherwise, we miss the point. As Hooten Wilson states, “Our imagination becomes the realm where God meets us first and *shows* us more than *tells* us who he is and to what life we have been called.”[14] Furthermore, we find this in C.S. Lewis’s *Surprised by Joy*, as he recounts his conversion but after dedicating a majority of the book focused on his imagination. He explains,

> I do not think the resemblance between the Christian and the merely imaginative experience is accidental. I think that all things, in their way, reflect heavenly truth, the imagination not least.[15]

Lewis and others have been led to a deeper life of faith by recognizing God’s presence and His truth through what we might call the Catholic imagination.

Conclusion

As with all things, Catholics must constantly orient themselves towards Christ. The means by which people find themselves converting to or fully embracing their Catholic faith vary, yet the source and summit remain the same. The Catholic imagination, like sacramentals or devotions, should be viewed as a vehicle used in our journey of faith and not the destination, lest they fall into the idolatry others accuse them of. In short, a Catholic imagination must be Christocentric and practiced with a heart of faith. Faith, as we read in the book of Hebrews, is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.[16] A Christocentric faith, rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation, is of its very nature imaginative because it leads us to understand there is more than what meets the eye. Both the Incarnation and the cross illustrate this point. They are not merely historical events, but mysteries beyond what the eyes of the mind can comprehend. It is only through the eyes of faith, and for many with the help of the Catholic imagination, that we see beyond what is visible in order to be caught up in love of things invisible.

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[1] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Roman Missal*, 2011, p. 538

[2] St. John Henry Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, pp. 23-30

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 127

[4] Robinson, Very Rev. Denis,, O.S.B., “The Priesthood in the Illative Sense: Newman, Knowledge and Imagination in the Practice of the Priesthood,” in *Catholic Imagination* (2012), retrieved from https://pressbooks.palni.org/catholicimagination/chapter/the-priesthood-in-the-illative-sense/

[5] Newman, pp. 130-131

[6] Hooten Wilson, Jessica, Reading *for the Love of God,* (Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, 2023), p. 126

[7] United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (1994), nos. 362-368
[8] Hellwig, Monika K., *What Can the Roman Catholic Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education*, in *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrien, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), pp.17
[9] Robinson, *ibid.*
[10] Hooten Wilson, Jessica, *The Scandal of Holiness: Renewing Your Imagination in the Company of Literary Saints,* (Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, MI, 2022), p. 208
[11] Greeley, Andrew, “Introduction: The Sacraments of Sensibility,” in *The Catholic Imagination,* (1st ed., University of California Press, 2000), pp. 1–21
[12] Falkenhain, Br. John Mark, O.S.B., "Introducing the Question: Catholic Imagination," *Catholic Imagination* (2012). Retrieved from: https://pressbooks.palni.org/catholicimagination/chapter/introducing-the-question-catholic-imagination/
[13] Greeley, p. 4
[14] Hooten Wilson, *The Scandal of Holiness*, p. 5
[15] Lewis, C.S., *Surprised by Joy, (*Harvest: New York, NY, 1955) p. 167
[16] cf. Hebrews 11:1

The Catastrophe of Faith:
A Close Reading of "The Expert on God" by John L'Heureux

Mary Grace Mangano

In Chapter 8 of the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples experience a minor catastrophe: a violent storm has begun. Yet Jesus sleeps. "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" they exclaim. Jesus responds, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?"[1]

I would guess that most of us are inclined to side with the disciples here, and we remain indignant. They could have died! But perhaps we can also begin to see from Jesus' perspective. As it is told in Matthew's account of events, the disciples have just seen Jesus heal a leper, the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, and a man possessed by demons, so they should have a good sense of the miracles He's capable of performing. By this logic, they don't doubt *what* He can do, but *who* He is. This is a greater betrayal, and this is what bothers Jesus. Surely, they must know Him by now? How can they think He would be the kind of person to let His friends die? If He was not worried about the storm, they should trust Him. Men of little faith: they believe the actions when they see them, but they still do not believe *in* Him. Had their interactions with Him changed nothing about their faith?

The short story "The Expert on God"[2] by John L'Heureux (October 26, 1934 – April 22, 2019) begins with the statement "From the start faith had been a problem for him, and his most recent ordination had changed nothing." Just as with the disciples, who we expect to have faith, one would expect that a priest –someone who has devoted himself to following and serving God, as the disciples did – has faith. Yet L'Heureux's story starts by telling the reader that this has always been a problem for the priest who is the main character in the story.

Throughout his own life, L'Heureux asked questions about faith, both personally and in his writing. After attending Holy Cross College for two years, he was ordained a Jesuit. Despite finding religious life difficult, he was a priest for 17 years before requesting and receiving laicization in 1971. L'Heureux then married and began teaching at Tufts and Harvard. His longest tenure was at Stanford, where he directed the highly regarded Creative Writing Program and the Wallace Stegner Creative Writing Fellowship program. A prolific writer himself, he was also a tremendous teacher, with students such as Ron Hansen, Tobias Wolff, Jeffrey Eugenides, and ZZ Packer, among others. So constant were the themes of belief in his writing that his *New York Times* obituary was titled "John L'Heureux, Whose Novels Wrestled With Faith, Dies at 84."

"The Expert on God" has an ironic title, as its main character, the unnamed "everyman" priest actually does *not* know who God is, much like the disciples in the boat do not truly understand *who* Jesus is. The story involves a car accident, but this is not the ultimate catastrophe, just as the storm is not the true catastrophe in the Gospel. In Greek, "catastrophe" means "reversal." For the disciples, the reversal that needs to happen is that their fear be turned into faith, and that they learn not to be afraid of the

storm, but to trust Jesus. Similarly, the priest in L'Heureux's story requires a reversal of doubt turning into faith, and it just so happens that this is brought about by a car accident. In this way, it is a "gracious" catastrophe because something good might come from it. In our fallen world, God does not will suffering to come to us, like a car accident or a storm, but He can use these things for our ultimate good.

Throughout the story, the priest begins to learn what faith truly is. By the end, hopefully – like the disciples – he comes to see that the Christian faith must be grounded in belief in the person of Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, though whether this "reversal" takes place is left somewhat open-ended.

Even the story's opening line shows the priest's initial lack of understanding about the nature of faith. He thinks his ordination has changed nothing. And while it perhaps has not removed his doubts, it *does* change something since Holy Orders is a sacrament – a visible sign of an invisible grace. But from this first statement, the priest then indexes the history of his doubts, which began in childhood. His first doubt was about the unity of the Trinity. He finds brief comfort when he tells himself that one God being three Persons is a mystery. He learns to hide his doubts, though, and feel shame about them. The priest, even as a boy, is more worried about others knowing he doubts than the doubts themselves. As he grows older, he doubts Christ's presence in the Eucharist, the virginity of Mary, the divinity of Christ, and the humanity of Christ.

Eventually, the priest realizes how difficult true faith is, as he says, "Faith demanded a response to each mystery, he discovered, but doubt remained the same." Slowly, he starts to understand the challenge of faith and what it requires of a person. Change is required. Sometimes, that change must happen through somewhat violent means – a storm, perhaps, to wake up the complacent. This calls to mind an oft-quoted passage from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*; the monastic elder Father Zosima says, "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all. Men will even give their lives if only the ordeal does not last long but is soon over, with all looking on and applauding as though on stage. But active love is labor and fortitude."[3] Active love is a lot like active faith, it would seem. Faith demands a response; it demands action. In an idealistic vision of faith, it is a one-time cure-all that means living a life of joy and peace once a person has accepted Jesus as her true Savior. But, like Flannery O'Connor said, "What people don't realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross. It is much harder to believe than not to believe."[4]

After listing the specific parts of the catechism that the priest struggled with at various times, he then discloses that he doubted the love of God and "that doubt did not pass." Out of all the doubts he has had, this is the main one, the one that persists. In some ways, it is the same one the disciples struggled with as well. If God truly loved them, why would He let the disciples perish in the storm? The priest has accepted faith in the "what" of Christianity, but still not the "who," much like the disciples who have seen *what* Jesus can do, but still doubt *who* He is.

Part of what makes faith difficult for the priest is that he has cut himself off from God's love in several ways. He's described as a popular priest, but he has no friends. Therefore, he has no experience of God in a community, as the Body of Christ in the Church. He kept others at a distance. This is how things were – staying the same – "on the day of the accident," the gracious catastrophe. L'Heureux writes that

when the accident happened "It was Christmas day, not because Christmas is symbolic, but because that is when it happened." Although the priest does not seem to realize the truth of his own statement here, what he says is quite true: Christmas is not symbolic. God entered reality through the mystery of the Incarnation. The fact that this gracious catastrophe takes place on Christmas prepares readers to see how God *does* enter the world through His Son, and this is how we can know His love.

The priest, though, is still blind to this reality and mystery. On Christmas day in the story, "The air was clear and the day was bright after all that snow, and as he drove through the vast open countryside, he marveled again at the absence of God." Once again, the priest misses God's presence in his life, this time in God's creation of nature. He does, however, see a little red car crumpled in two on the side of the road.

At this point in the story, the true catastrophe – the reversal – begins. The priest "stooped and looked through the shattered window." This signifies that he must lower himself, or humble himself, as Christ does. He inspects the crashed car and sees that "The door hung on a single hinge, open a few inches but not wide enough for the priest to get in." Again, he says, "There was no way in." This is a metaphor for the priest himself, and possibly for us as readers. The way he has been living – at a distance from others, disconnected even from nature – has offered God no way into his heart.

From here on, we can read the priest's actions and observations as God's actions and observations. Examining the broken car again, the priest observes, "Somebody was inside, dying perhaps, and though he was only a few inches away, he could not reach him." This can be read as God trying to reach the priest. He is so close – inches away – in community, in nature – and yet He can't get in. Next, the priest must break the passenger seat to get behind the person stuck inside, who is described as a body. Again, this is how the priest has been living – as a body going through the motions of life. And yet, God breaks through in order to restore his life.

Earnestly, the priest tries to help the boy in the car, and once more we can read his actions as a metaphor for the way God tries to reach him. The priest is "Crushed himself, [but] he nonetheless managed to get the oils from his pocket and to wet his thumb" and to absolve the boy of his sins. God also forgives the priest for his sins, for his doubts; Jesus is "crushed" on the cross for his sins. After the absolution, the priest is frustrated that nothing happens, and that the world seems silent. Faith demands a response; he finally changes how he would typically react. The priest begins "to pray, aloud, which struck him as foolish." He is angry that heaven still seems silent. It seems that Jesus is still in the boat, sleeping, and like the disciples crying out, "Lord, we are perishing!" the priest cries out.

Despite all his doubts, the mystery is that the priest *does* have faith after all. In this moment of crisis, or tragedy and catastrophe, he realizes it. Frustrated that there is seemingly no response from God, the priest's "doubts became certainty and he said, 'It doesn't matter,' but it did matter and he knew it. What could anyone say to this crushed, dying thing, he wondered. What would God say if he cared as much as I?" This, though, is how God feels towards the priest; He seems to be saying *What can I say to you to make you see how much I care?*

One of the greatest mysteries of faith is this: God comes to us, to dwell *in* us. Sometimes it is in recognizing this reality that we see how great God is. How is it that the God of the universe could choose to live in me? His love must be great for this to be true. As L'Heureux's story draws to a close, finally the boy "tilted in the priest's arms, trusting, like a lover. And at once the priest, faithless, unrepentant, gave up his prayers and bent to him and whispered, fierce and burning, 'I love you,' and continued till there was no breath, 'I love you, I love you, I love you.'" This is Jesus on the cross, giving up his breath to show His love. This is God, sending His only Son into the world so we might have life. Finally, do we know who He is? Do we still doubt His love?

L'Heureux's story leaves these questions open-ended in the case of the priest. Will there be a true reversal in his life? Will he still doubt? In my reading, though, he has found faith because he has found the cross. He let himself be crushed to try and save another person. Loving this stranger in the broken car required action and there was no one there to applaud him for it. Having read L'Heureux's story, we as readers have to ask ourselves these questions as well. Finally, now – do we have faith?

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[1] Matthew 8: 25-26

[2] L'Heureux, J., "The Expert on God," *A Celestial Omnibus: Short Fiction on Faith*, edited by J.P. Maney and Tom Hazuka, (Beacon Press: Boston, 1997), p. 57

[3] Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 2002), p. 58

[4] O'Connor, Flannery. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1988), p. 354

“Mad Ireland Hurt You Into Poetry”: Gerard Manley Hopkins in Dublin

Elizabeth Brewer Redwine

In the South Transept of the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey stands a stone, placed in 1975, in memory of Gerard Manley Hopkins. The Stone reads “*Esse Quam Videri*,” or, “To be rather than to seem” with the poet’s name, birth and death years (1844-1889), S.J., noting the poet’s membership in the Jesuit order, and the words “Priest & Poet” and then “Immortal Diamond” and “Buried at Glasnevin Dublin.” About three hundred miles away, across 250 miles of England and the Irish Sea, in Dublin, lie the remains of Hopkins in Glasnevin cemetery, his name one of many in a list underneath another carved stone: a Celtic cross with the figure of Jesus in the middle, in the Jesuit plot. I was able to visit this memorial last week on a research trip to Dublin. Hopkins, in Dublin, wrote sonnets that express a strong Catholic faith tested by doubt and suffering.

The Jesuit plot lies past the grave of Victorian Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell, the resting place of thousands of 19th century cholera victims, the contemporary memorial gardens for those who have recently been cremated, and the monuments to the Irish killed in the First World War. The whole cemetery is in the shadow of a 180-foot tower to commemorate the Irish liberator Daniel O’Connell; visitors reach into O’Connell’s marbled perforated tomb to touch the wooden coffin within for luck. Empty kennels built for his Irish wolfhounds flank the entrance to the tower. While more than 55,000 people visit Glasnevin Cemetery annually, Hopkins’s grave, in a quiet corner, remains outside of the formal tours and largely unseen.

Buried amongst Irish Jesuits after dying of typhoid in 1889 at forty-four years old, Hopkins spent his last years in a land where he never felt at home, and this dissonance gave rise to searing poetry of faith. In the years before his death, lonely in Victorian Dublin, a city rife with poverty, contagious disease, and the turbulence of anticolonial independence and social movements, an isolated Hopkins, disapproving of the Home Rule movement and devastated by loneliness, expressed his suffering in his terrible sonnets, poems that his friend Robert Bridges would publish twenty-nine years after his death in 1918 and that continue to shock with their profession of faith in struggle.

This summer, 135 years after that lonely death, I visited both Hopkins’s grave and the building on St. Stephens’ Green in Dublin where Hopkins lived and died. The building had been the Jesuit College, founded by Cardinal Newman, a Catholic University developed to counter the Protestant establishment of Trinity College nearby. Cardinal Newman brought Hopkins to Dublin to teach at the University in 1884. There is something particularly Irish, Catholic, and literary

about Hopkins's life, particularly its end; a lonely man turning a mental health crisis into beautiful and harsh poetry of faith. The building where he lived and died is now the Museum of Literature Ireland, or MoLI, a name that honors James Joyce's Molly Bloom, the character who ends his *Ulysses* based on his wife Nora. Joyce had been a student at Newman House, the building now housing the literary collections. The beautiful classical structure, built in the Georgian era in the 18th century, faces St. Stephens Green, where in 1916 rebels would mount an offensive against the British, an expression of the tensions that animated the Dublin of Hopkins' final years. An image of someone's tattoo greets the visitor to MoLI with a line from Beckett, one that expresses Hopkins' own struggles: "I can't go on. I'll go on." Last weekend, when I visited, the docent at the Museum gestured towards the room where Hopkins died and remarked, "Sure, he haunts us here. Still trying to find some peace, poor man." The terrible sonnets are the poems of a searcher in crisis living in a faith that reaches rather than rests.

Hopkins converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1866 and burned his earlier poems upon conversion. His final poems, or "Terrible Sonnets" reveal paradoxical suffering and questioning while remaining firm in faith. The tension between these sites of commemoration – the unmarked grave in Glasnevin where Hopkins is listed in small print on a stone amongst many other Jesuit priests—and the pomp of the Westminster stone in England reveal a split between the 20th and 21st century appreciation of Hopkins and the reality of his painful, faithful last years. This paper will close read the Terrible Sonnet "To seem the stranger lies my lot," exploring how Hopkins's unusual words hold onto faith and commit to God in crisis.

Hopkins spent his years in Ireland in desperation and turned that sadness to his sonnets. He arrived in Dublin in February 1884, the month before James Joyce's wife Nora Barnacle was born in Galway, to a Dublin rife with tensions around the question of Home Rule, the Celtic Literary Revival just beginning. Found after his death, the "Terrible Sonnets," probably written from 1885-1886, detail the horrors of suffering and depression and the poet's grasping of his faith, a faith stronger for the misery he experienced. The first stanza of "To seem the stranger lies my lot"[1] laments the feeling of strangeness, of distance from family. The verb "lies" suggests a snake, or a danger lying in wait for a powerless and unsuspecting person, and the word suggests a double meaning of falseness and dishonesty as well. Hopkins's use of "lot" echoes Ecclesiastes 5:18, verse 20, "to accept their lot and be happy in their toil"; this acceptance is what Hopkins is striving to achieve, to try and suffer in Christ but struggling. The figure of Lot from Genesis haunts this line as well, the one exile surviving his family leaving Sodom, and we recall that Hopkins was estranged from his family because only he had converted to Catholicism, shocking his staid Church of England parents. This second stanza is the only one that mentions "Christ": "Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near/ and he my peace/ my parting, sword and strife." Godliness and wholeness seem far away; Hopkins knows that faith is not rooted in one place, but his desperate sense of isolation and loneliness in a new city going through upheaval impels the poem. Though

not capitalized, the "he" seems to refer to Christ here, though the pronoun could refer to a close friend as well; the "sword and strife" and "peace" denote Christ or a Christ-like figure. The peace comes from family and Christ; the parting causes "sword and strife". The repeated word is "stranger"; Hopkins feels lost and without community. The second stanza expresses his love of England, his sense that England is "wife to my creating thought," a partner in his poetic output. He tries not to "plead" unheard, but laments living "by where wars are rife," a reference to the political tensions in Dublin and Ireland as a whole in the 1880s.

The quotation in my title comes from W. H. Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," noting Yeats's complicated but loving and fruitful relationship with the land of his birth. Hopkins wrestled with the university, city, and country of his death, in a particular place and time that contributed to his pain while serving as a Jesuit priest and teacher in 1880s Dublin. He turns in the third stanza of "To seem the stranger" to Ireland, where he lived, isolated and suffering. What was the Ireland and Dublin of 1884, and how did Hopkins' academic world of University College fit into this shifting city? To Hopkins, the place is a "third remove" from God, far from love and ending the stanza with a floating "word." At University College, Jesuit priest William Delany and Cardinal William Walsh argued about the religious future of the school. While Walsh wanted the University to develop as a Catholic University alongside Protestant Trinity College Dublin, Delany disagreed.[2] Maurice Whitehead's history of the Jesuits, "From Expulsion to Restoration," charts the maelstrom of academic and religious politics that greeted Hopkins in Dublin, "like a Victorian academic melodrama."[3] The college had become Jesuit in 1883, and English Catholic leaders could not spare their most successful Jesuits, sending Hopkins, according to those in charge, would not be an asset: 'Fr. Hopkins is very clever & a good scholar,' Purbrick admitted. 'But I should do you no kindness in sending you a man so eccentric.'[4] Any perusal of Hopkins' poetry confirms his genius, eccentricity, mental health struggles, and profound faith. Hopkins, emotionally fraught and in exile, estranged from his family due to religious differences, landed in a university and a city rife with colonial and nationalist power struggles. The Jesuit authorities in Ireland "did not trust converts," making Hopkins more isolated. In a city rife with sectarian tensions and a history of colonial subterfuge, Hopkins was at a loss.[5]

The Ireland that greeted, or did not greet, Hopkins was still recovering—is still recovering—from the trauma of the famine in the 1840s. Forty years after that cataclysmic shift in Irish history, Hopkins landed in a culture rife with subterfuge and political divisions. The university question was central to the debate around nationhood, Home Rule, and anticolonial action, and religion--Catholicism in particular—animated much debate. Hopkins's status as an English convert and as someone who disapproved of Home Rule gave him the unpleasant and uncanny sense of outsider, of a solitary man among his co-religionists. He had been separated from his Protestant family in England after his conversion; now, surrounded by Catholics, he felt even more out of place.

The final stanza of the poem that centers this essay reads:
Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,
Hoard unheeded, leave me a lonely began.

Heaven is "dark" here, "baffling"– Hopkins struggles to understand what is happening to him, to his faith; this ban from heaven, through "baffling" "bars or hell's spell thwarts." Though painful, "heaven's baffling ban" does keep him from the draw of hell. The "hoard" may be his poetic and imaginative possibilities, but "unheard" and "unheeded," and the poem ends "leave me a lonely began"– solitary, feeling alone, and "began" functions as a noun, a thing, something that has started but is static, stuck. "Leave" suggests being left behind, unheard, though through his faith, he continues to speak in these sonnets. Hopkins wrestles here with his distance from people and a place he loves and how that separation makes him feel farther from God; at the same time, one senses that the expression of suffering brings him closer to God. The poems hold this paradox. He cannot understand these tensions, echoing Jesus's "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46), the cry on the Cross, the sense of being distant from God even as Jesus nears him. Hopkins' final poems, too, through suffering and a feeling of distance from heaven, bring both the reader and Hopkins nearer to God. In his expressions of yearning, disconnect, and suffering, his poems reach the spirit.

Hopkins died in this exile, never to return to England. Twenty-seven years later, his friend Robert Bridges published Hopkins' surviving poems in 1918 in the final months of the First World War. Typhoid was an international crisis in the late 1880s, mortality rising in cities, and Hopkins lived in close quarters with poor air circulation. He was given last rites, and his remains were moved to Glasnevin Cemetery. The belated acknowledgment, in the 1970s, of Hopkins's genius in his beloved England, in Westminster Abbey, stands as a solitary stone, but perhaps in a great list of Jesuits on a stone cross under yew trees in Glasnevin, Hopkins' name and remains are not as solitary as they were in the last years of his life.

A mental health crisis far from home grounds Hopkins' final poems, but Ireland has responded by celebrating the powerful faith of these sonnets and Hopkins' life. This past July, in County Kildare, from July 19th-24th, Newbridge College presented a wide-ranging Hopkins Literary Festival, now in its 36th year. Lectures, writing workshops, youth discussions, concerts, and poetry readings in honor of Hopkins end in a celebratory Mass. Though his time in Ireland resulted in such sadness and tragedy, Hopkins's sonnets are prayers through suffering, and he remains present in the Catholic Literary Imagination of Ireland and readers worldwide.

[1] Hopkins, G. "To Seem the Stranger Lies my Lot," from: https://hopkinspoetry.com/poem/to-seem-the-stranger/
[2] University College Dublin, University History Timeline: https://www.ucd.ie/president/about/university history/ucdtimeline/
[3] Higgins, L., & Barber, N. "If You Knew the World I Live In!" in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 103 (412), p. 462. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/24347843, p. 462
[4] *Ibid*., qtd., p. 463
[5] *Ibid*., pp. 463

The Catholic Literary Tradition and Climate Challenges

Judith Chelius Stark

What can the Catholic Literary Tradition contribute to the discourses about current and future climate challenges? At least two streams of thought hold great promise. The first may not be so familiar as the second: the first is the work of Rev. Thomas Berry, C.P. who relied on the work of Teilhard de Chardin to formulate what has come to be called "The New Creation Story." The second is contained in the recent writings of Pope Francis on care for creation: his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* and his more recent Apostolic Exhortation called *Laudate Deum* (Oct. 4, 2023). This paper explores the ways that these two streams may converge and complement each other in confronting climate change. In doing so, these paradigms enrich the ways we think about climate change. Each in its own way evokes the play of the imagination in ways that are aesthetic and ethical. These two streams may also help achieve deep spiritual understandings, as well as encourage grounded action to address current and future climate challenges.

There is no doubt that the planet and its climate are warming at unprecedented rates and have been doing so dramatically in the past fifty years or more.[1] Many groups and agencies are doing groundbreaking work to monitor, mitigate, and adapt to these dramatic changes. One of the most important agencies doing this essential work is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which was formed in 1988 (IPCC).[2] The "Synthesis Report of the Sixth Assessment Report" was released in 2023 outlining the current and future threats of the warming climate.[3] In addition to the IPCC, there are thousands of groups, non-profits, research centers, universities, and other organizations working to analyze and mitigate climate challenges across the globe. While these organizations provide policies and suggestions for action to address climate challenges, other efforts can provide the intellectual, literary, moral, and spiritual foundations that can help ground these actions. Two powerful and elegant foundations are those that are analyzed in this paper— "The New Creation Story" of Rev. Thomas Berry and Pope Francis's ecological and climate documents.

Rev. Thomas Berry's work is broad, creative, and revolutionary. In addition to Christianity, he mines the great world religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism, to postulate new ways to think about the universe as a whole and the roles humans play in this new story. In his work, he relied on new findings in astrophysics to bring evolution and religions into rich conversations to articulate "The New Creation Story." These creative efforts became the foundation of his life's work.

In an interesting historical connection, Fr. Berry taught here at Seton Hall for a few years in the 1960s. He then moved on to teach at Fordham University. From there he established the Riverdale Center for Religious Research in Riverdale, New York (1970-1995) where he wrote and exercised his calling as a "geologian." During his long and distinguished career, Fr. Berry also studied and taught classes on Native American cultures and shamanism. Furthermore he assisted in an educational program for the T'boli tribal peoples of South Cotabato in the Philippines. This paper will explore several of his significant contributions, especially "The New Creation Story" with applications to our climate challenges.

The New Creation Story as an Embodied Theology

Humans are and have always been story-creators and storytellers. From the great religious traditions of the west to the Analects of Confucius, the Mahabharata of the Indian subcontinent, the teachings of the Buddha, and Indigenous accounts, we use stories to help us ask and attempt to answer the great cosmic questions. What and when was the beginning of the universe? Was there a beginning? What are the human place and role in the great story of the universe? How do we discover and articulate these questions and answers? Up until the scientific revolutions of the 16th and 17th centuries, we humans in the west felt fairly secure telling the then current story of the geocentric universe. After Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin, and Einstein (among many others), new stories were told about the universe and the human place in the greater scheme of things. Then about a hundred years ago with the help of astrophysics and technology, Edwin Hubble discovered not only was the Milky Way not the only galaxy in the universe, but that there are a hundred billion galaxies, and that the universe is continuing to expand in astonishing ways.[4] The challenge to human comprehension in the west is to negotiate the move from the metaphorical six days of creation to the awareness that the estimate of the beginning of the universe is an astonishing 13.7 billion years ago.[5] Enter Rev. Thomas Berry's "New Creation Story."

The most accessible account of Fr. Berry's work is contained in a short and readable book written by two of his associates, Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker[6] and is entitled *Journey of the Universe* (cited above). In their account, Swimme and Tucker take the reader from "the great flaring forth" of light and matter that would eventually become "stars and galaxies."[7] The authors present this grand sweep from the brilliance of stars to the birth of solar systems, and then to life itself that emerged about four billion years ago. In the Appendix, Swimme and Tucker construct a helpful timeline of these stupendous events in which they delineate the various phases of cosmic emergence. Humans appeared in Africa 2.6 million years ago and from there our human ancestors enacted their journey to inhabit virtually the entire globe. The development of bipedalism, increased brain size, and behavioral flexibility were tremendous assets in the human capacities to make these journeys.[8] These assets brought about another revolution in human development: the emergence of symbolic consciousness, expressed in language, cave paintings, art, and storytelling. As Swimme and Tucker write,

> With the invention of symbol, humans released their blazing imaginations into the world. Nothing would ever be the same again. With the creation of language, humans entered into symbolic consciousness. Now humans could remember and could celebrate the great events of their journey. Story was born.[9]

As a result of these extraordinary capacities that were not available to other species, humans quickly became a planetary species. Tremendous advances accrued to humans as a result, but other species and ecosystems were not so fortunate with these changes. This has been the case particularly with the arrival of the industrial revolution in the mid-18th century, notably in the west. The one discovery that made this possible was burning coal to replace water-powered machinery as the available and very usable energy source. Beginning in England, the use of this early fossil fuel quickly spread to other parts of the world, including the newly formed United States, particularly in Paterson, New Jersey.[10]

Ever since those momentous changes, humans have benefited by controlling and manipulating nature to produce more food, make work easier, and bring enormous progress to many people across the world. But at what price? Plant and animal species as well as entire ecosystems are in danger of degradation and extinction. As Swimme and Tucker write, "We are faced with challenges no previous humans even contemplated: how are we to make decisions that will benefit the entire planet for the next several millennia?"[11] The answers are challenging and complex, but they begin with acknowledging the roles humans have played and continue to play. Now what is called for is acquiring the knowledge and moral courage to alter profoundly the ways we live on this planet. As the authors note,

> Our challenge now is to construct livable cities and to cultivate healthy foods congruent with Earth's patterns. . .Our destiny is to bring forth a planetary civilization that is both culturally diverse and locally vibrant, multiform civilizations that will enable life and humanity to flourish.[12]

Again, the efforts to accomplish these goals need to be focused, systematic, and deeply structural in order to begin to mitigate the worst effects of the climate challenges now and in the immediate future. In this essential work, Rev. Thomas Berry's "New Creation Story" demonstrates the power of ideas and the work of literary imagination to show the way to effect and bring new energy to the tasks at hand.[13] As Michael Murphy notes, one of the hallmarks of a Catholic imagination is embodied consciousness. Going beyond the body/mind dualism of Plato and Descartes, "incarnational consciousness" is the gift that Christianity brings to discourses on the importance of the senses and their role in "perceiving God's presence."[14] Fr. Berry's work exemplifies the centrality of incarnational consciousness in engaging the on-going complexification of the universe and the human place within it.

Pope Francis: *Laudato Si* and *Laudate Deum*

True to his eponymous patron St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis has been and continues to be a global champion of the environment. Beginning with his comprehensive analysis of environmental challenges in *Laudato Si* (2015) to his most recent document *Laudate Deum* (October 4, 2023), he uses the power of his office to call for deep spiritual, moral, and structural changes. In this way, we come to the second stream of the Catholic intellectual and literary tradition that provides powerful resources to effect ecological transformations needed to avert climate disasters. Moreover, in the second and more recent document on the environment, the Pope is laser focused on climate change and its mitigation. In the 2015 encyclical, Pope Francis makes the deep and structural connections between the plight of the earth and the plight of the global poor.[15] Both have been sacrificed to the idols of consumerism and so called "progress." But progress at what costs, for whom, and with what consequences? The costs to the well-being of ecosystems are enormous; the beneficiaries are corporations and stockholders; and the ends are short term profits for the few without due consideration for the flourishing of the many. Short term gains prevail over long-term sustainability for ecosystems and concerns for the quality of life for most of the peoples of the world and for all living beings. Again, literary imagination is called for to bring into focus the implications of ignoring or denying the scientifically based predictions of the climate trajectory. Pope Francis's recent writings on ecology and climate are replete with powerful images and metaphors inviting readers to heed

his exhortations on many levels. In this regard, Pope Francis emphasizes the beauty found in nature when he notes Jesus's appreciation for nature,

> . . . because he himself[Jesus] was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attraction full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way through the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things.[16]

Space considerations here hardly permit an extensive analysis of *Laudato Si* with its broad sweep and specific recommendations. In the document, Pope Francis attends to the pressing ecological challenges, e.g. pollution, "throw away" culture, over emphasis on rampant financial gain, water poverty, uncontrolled fishing (any many others). He calls for "all people of good will" to adopt an "integral ecology" that stresses an "ecology of daily life" and is grounded in the common good ". . . the sum of those conditions of social life that allow groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment."[17] He also summons us to solidarity with those "who are deprived of this access" and to embrace a "preferential option for the poor."[18]

In *Laudate Deum* Pope Francis focuses almost exclusively on the current and future effects of climate change on the planet and all its inhabitants. Humans have unique responsibilities in this regard since human inventions and actions are the causes of the changes in the global climate. He notes that "it is no longer possible to doubt the human-- 'anthropic'—origin of climate change."[19] He cites data from the IPCC to emphasize that the effects of climate change are already painfully obvious around the world with increasing examples of extreme weather events, e.g. heat waves, droughts, floods, and sea level rise.[20] After presenting these dire and disturbing data, what recommendations does Pope Francis have to offer in this document?

In sum, these recommendations can be organized in four categories: awareness, learning, organizing, and acting. All of these categories are predicated on the reality of community (*communitas* and communio) as Murphy stresses in his document, especially calling for the "exercise of personal gifts for the common good."[21] The first entails awareness that climate is the overriding and global reality that needs attention and action now and for years to come[22] Every dimension of global societies needs to take up these challenges, including international organizations, nation states, community groups, families, and individuals. As Pope Francis states at the onset of the document, climate change "is a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life."[23] Learning needs to take place at every level of human societies with renewed focus and hope. The specific areas that the Pope brings forward include rethinking our uses of technological power, acknowledging the weaknesses of international politics, and realizing that a narrow focus on technical remedies will not solve climate challenges. Without spiritual motivations and ethical principles, technical remedies (although essential) will lack grounding and effect. Pope Francis call for organizing on every level of global societies. Communal action provides the focus and energy for local communities, families, and individuals to take on the many aspects of the climate crisis that call for urgent attention. Furthermore, multigenerational responses can galvanize groups to effect the changes needed for the long haul. These last suggestions encompass the sorts of actions that we are called to enact. As Pope Francis notes, we are "journeying in communion and commitment" with

ecosystems and all other living beings on the planet realizing "that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures."[24] In these compelling ways, Pope Francis expands the notion and practice of *communitas* to embrace our obligations to all living beings on the planet. He goes on to praise efforts by families and individual persons to "reduce pollution and waste and to consume with prudence" thereby "creating a new culture."[25] These efforts at the local level are "contributing to greater concern about the unfulfilled responsibilities of the political sectors and indignation at the lack of interest shown by the powerful." In a compelling coda, Pope Francis calls out the United States where "emissions per individual are two times greater than those living in China, and about seven times greater than the average of the poorest countries."[26] The statement of these facts may be read as a rebuke, but they are also an exhortation to those who live in the west. In that region of the world, individual and communal choices can have enormous consequences once we enact deep and structural changes in how we live and work. All these recommendations from Pope Francis are predicated on enlarged notions of *communitas.*

At the outset of this essay, convergence was the word that came to mind about these two streams of the Catholic intellectual and literary tradition. Now the word complementarity seems more appropriate to describe their relationship. In the Pope's writings we see ecological wisdom combined with his teaching mission. In the "New Creation" story, Rev. Thomas Berry joins creativity and the recent astrophysical findings about the massive size and tremendous age of the universe as the context for ecological action. This story does not reference the great religious traditions *per se*, but nothing in that story contradicts the teachings of the Abrahamic religions. In fact, I argue that the "New Creation" story and traditional religious beliefs provide powerful complementary ways to understand and appreciate all these ways of believing, knowing, and acting to confront climate challenges in the social arrangements of *communitas*. Reading about and enacting the injunctions of the "New Creation Story" and Pope Francis's *Laudate Deum* promote deep ecological spirituality and focused actions. Their complementarity provides profoundly spiritual, ethical, and ecological foundations for concerted action to address the climate challenges looming now and in the future. This is the great work that summons us in our own time and for years to come. It remains to be seen if we have the courage to answer the call to care for creation in all its wonder and beauty.

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1 Weather and climate patterns have been changing dramatically over the past 50 years or more. Examples of past and current extreme weather events include droughts, floods, wildfires, and sea level rise. As I write this paper, over 600 active wildfires are currently burning in western Canada. Reminder: last summer the smoke from these Canadian fires reached us in the New Jersey-New York City area. This was a stunning and powerful example of the reach of the effects of extreme weather events.

2 The IPCC was formed in 1988 by the World Meteorological Association and the United Nations Environment Programme. Its objective is "to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies. IPPC reports are also a key input into international climate change negotiations." (About IPCC: https://www.ipcc.ch)

[3] IPCC, AR6 "provides an overview of the state of knowledge on the science of climate change, emphasizing new results since the Fifth Assessment Report (ARS) in 2014."

[4] See Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe,* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2011), pp. 6, 21, 40, 108. See this book for a presentation of Rev. Thomas Berry's account of "The New Creation Story" in an accessible and cogent format.

[5] Swimme and Tucker, Journey *of the Universe*, p. 6

[6] Brian Thomas Swimme is a professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies, in San Francisco, where he teaches evolutionary cosmology to graduate students in the philosophy, cosmology, and consciousness program. Mary Evelyn Tucker is the co-founder and co-director of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology with her husband, John Allen Grim. Tucker teaches in the joint Master's program in religion and ecology at Yale University in the School of the Environment and in the Divinity School.

[7] Swimme and Tucker, Journey *of the Universe*, p.5

[8] *Ibid.,* pp. 82-84

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 88

[10] One of the earliest industrial locations in the U.S. was the planned industrial city of Paterson, N.J. Alexander Hamilton was the visionary who saw the potential uses of the Great Falls of the Passaic River as the source of power for manufacturing. Later coal began to replace water-generated power for the expanding industrial needs of the region.

[11] Swimme and Tucker, Journey *of the Universe*, p. 102

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 117

[13] A very readable account of Fr. Berry's "New Creation Story" is contained in his book *The Dream of the Earth,* (Sierra Club Books: San Francisco, 1988).

[14] Michael P. Murphy, "A Sacramental World View: Some Hallmarks of a Catholic Imagination," no. 2.

[15] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, (Vatican Press: Rome, 2015), chapter 1, paragraph 49.

[16] *Laudate Deum*, paragraph 64, citing the *Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region, Final Document, October 2019,* 10: AAS 111, 2019, 1744

[17] *Laudato Si*, chapter 4, paragraphs 148-49, 156-158

[18] *Ibid.*, chapter 4, paragraph 158

[19] *Laudate Deum*, Rome, (Vatican Press, October 4, 2023), paragraph 11

[20] *Ibid.*, paragraph 5

[21] Murphy, "A Sacramental World View: Some Hallmarks of a Catholic Imagination," no. 7

[22] *Laudate Deum*, paragraphs 2,3,5,9,10

[23] *Ibid.*, paragraph 3

[24] *Ibid.*, paragraph 67

[25] *Ibid.*, paragraph 71

[26] *Ibid.*, paragraph 72

The Pre-Christian Celtic Roots of the Catholic Literary and Artistic Imagination

Gloria Thurmond

The Christianity of the early Celtic-speaking peoples exercises a great fascination and influence on the Roman Catholic religious and artistic imagination today. “The intricate, interweaving designs and natural motifs created by Celtic artists convey the impression of a religion that is in close dialogue with nature, and the rich adornment of the biblical text is a reminder of the great status accorded to the Word of God.”[1]

For early Celtic Christians, "the Gospels were often believed to possess mystical power as objects of incarnate grace, with the understanding that the presence of God could be felt and discerned in the natural and human landscapes of the world. God was present to them in images and signs, in poetry and art, in sacrament and liturgy; and their own response to God was commonly a physical one expressed at the level of the body in the embrace of a life-transforming penance. It was, therefore, the themes of penance and creativity that formed the guiding motifs of Celtic Christianity. Both speak of incarnation, and of the affirmation and transformation of life.”[2]

In addition to its strong theme of incarnational theology, “Celtic Christianity makes a strong connection with physicality and materiality that supports both asceticism and sacramentality. Nature has autonomous value apart from being viewed as a human commodity only. Human creativity is drawn to the center of the Christian life in Irish art and Welsh poetry, both of which stress the role of the imagination.”[3]

Unlike the Mediterranean world, there was the notable absence of the written word in early Celtic society, and therefore, the absence of written philosophical and religious writings. It was through the oral tradition of poetic forms that cosmological stories, genealogies, military events, special occasions and events were preserved by the druidic bard.

Central to pre-Christian Celtic religion was the locality of place. Religious observance was localized within the immediate community, and its activity took place at specific sites deemed sacred – such as woodland glades, lakes, springs, or mountains. For the pre-Christian Celtic population, “nature was a living presence, and there was no concept of an inanimate thing.”[4] With the interpenetration of religion with the Celtic landscape, the transcendent dwelled within the natural world of humanity.

In the role of keeper, preserver, and distributor of information, the early Celtic monk parallels that of the ancient Celtic bard. Scholar and author Robert O’Driscoll suggests that “many of the earliest Irish monks had been druids and bards [prior to] their conversions, and that they carried on into their Christianity a momentum of their sense of a common spiritual ground to be recognized in silent wonder, in themselves, and all around in the natural world.”[5]

With this background, “Imagination as expressed in Irish art and Welsh poetry supported religious unity within the centrality of the Trinity in the Christian community, which profoundly shaped the religious imagination of the early Celtic peoples, that would become the rich heritage of the Catholic literary and artistic imagination.”[6] In His incarnation through Jesus Christ, God fills all Creation with His presence, thereby making His grace possible through every worldly experience.

Early Celtic Christian monasteries, which were populated by a diverse group of both lay and religious men and women, ministered to the physical and spiritual needs of religious pilgrims, as well as to those in the surrounding community. Thus, the cultural/religious traditions of the community were maintained and preserved. As a place of discipline, the ancient Celtic monastery provided a place of solitude and community, contemplation and activity, and worship and pastoral care for its residents and for all who sought refuge within its walls. The lifestyle was characterized by a rhythmic balance of spiritual activity and open hospitality.

The Celtic monastic community forged a cultural continuity between the pre-Christian tribal druidic religion and the new Christian religion. Functioning as houses of hospitality, the monasteries offered diverse ministries to meet the physical and spiritual needs of penitent pilgrim people. A life of pilgrimage was undertaken as an expression of penance and as an imitation of the life of Christ. Living lightly in the world as a guest and journeying towards one’s spiritual “place of resurrection” are descriptive of the Celtic monk’s approach to his vocation.[7]

Metaphorically, the ancient pilgrimage that spiritually reflected one’s life’s journey might be expressed as:

1. Journeying to a physical place popularly recognized as sacred from which one can receive the blessing of spiritual renewal.

2. Journeying inwardly through prayer, meditation, imagination, and contemplation toward spiritual understanding and transformation.

Donald Allchin, the great Welsh poet, wrote that “pilgrimages to sacred sites [were] understood as meetings between God and humankind… which therefore [became] places where the kingdom of heaven comes very close the world of time and space.”[8]

The spiritual essence of Celtic Christian poetry combines diverse elements of human experience, thus establishing a sense of a universal whole. The thematic center of the poetry is penance, which is understood to offer a path to glory, and to be a form of beauty. It is intensely life-affirming and expresses an appreciation of beauty in all its forms, including the social and the individual, the natural and the sacred. Celtic Christian poets “see the world as a book in which God writes for our instruction, and they see nature as our teacher who tells us of the greatness and beauty of the Lord. Every part of Creation mirrors the eternal loveliness of God.”[9]

Hermit Songs, a mid-twentieth century vocal composition by American composer and pianist Samuel Barber, is a musical setting of anonymous Irish poems from the Middle Ages written by Celtic monks and scholars. The texts are small poems which reflect individual thoughts

or observations. They speak in straightforward terms of the simple life led by these early monks, which was close to nature, to animals, and to God. In their powerfully expressive writings, the monks were able to demonstrate a remarkably clear vision of the interpenetration of the natural and the spiritual – an integration of the sacred and the secular, where God was perceived in all things. A tenth century text included in the *Hermit Songs* volume is entitled *The Heavenly Banquet*, which exemplifies this early Celtic Christian vision of being in community.

The Heavenly Banquet[10]

I would like to have the men of Heaven in my own house –
with vats of good cheer laid out for them.
I would like to have the three Marys, their fame is so great.
I would like people from every corner of Heaven.
I would like them to be cheerful in their drinking.
I would like to have Jesus sitting here among them.
I would like a great lake of beer for the King of Kings.
I would like to be watching Heaven's family
Drinking it through all eternity.

In chapter four of his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes that "[T]he one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things."[11] The thirteenth century poem, "The Loves of Taliesin," reflects the proclamation of this scriptural passage through the envisioned spirit of early Celtic Christianity. "In the manner of the earliest Celtic Christian poems, it combines the diverse elements of human experience, thus establishing a sense of a universal whole. The thematic center of the poem is penance, which is understood to offer a path to glory and to be a form of beauty. It is intensely life-affirming and expresses an appreciation of beauty in all its forms, including the social and the individual, the natural and the sacred."[12]

(Excerpts from)[13]
The Loves of Taliesin

"The beauty of the virtue in doing penance for excess,
Beautiful too that God shall save me.
The beauty of a companion who does not deny me his company.
Beautiful too the drinking horn's society.

The beauty of berries at harvest time,
Beautiful too the grain on the stalk.
The beauty of the sun, clear in the sky,
Beautiful too they who pay Adam's debt.

The beauty of a herd's thick-maned stallion,
Beautiful too the pattern of his plaits.

The beauty of desire and a silver ring,
Beautiful, too, a ring for a virgin.

The beauty of an eagle on the shore when tide is full,
Beautiful too, the seagulls playing
The beauty of a horse and gold-trimmed shield,
Beautiful, too, a bold man in the breach."

The theological and philosophical prowess of Catholicism is rooted in two millennia of practice and mastery. However, formal analytical thought is not the primary means by which most people experience, accept, or reject a religious faith. "They experience the mysteries of faith (or fail to) in the fullness of their humanity – through their emotions, imagination, and senses as well as their intellect. Until recently, a great strength of Catholicism has been its glorious physicality, its ability to convey its truths as incarnate. The faith was not merely explained in its doctrine but reflected in sacred art, music, architecture, and the poetry of the liturgy."[14]

Given the depth and diversity of the human experience which has helped to shape the Catholic religious identity, it is important for Catholic institutions today to acknowledge the influence of the early Celtic cultural and spiritual roots of the contemporary Catholic literary and artistic imagination. Understanding and building upon the relational thematic characters of incarnation and sacramentality that existed at the heart of pre-Christian Celtic spirituality and that reside within the texture of the contemporary Catholic literary and artistic imagination, would cultivate a deeper experience of the transcendent presence and heighten the language of literature and the arts in their ability to express Truth in the world.

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[1] Davies, O. and O'Loughlin, T., *Celtic Spirituality,* (Paulist Press: New York, 1999), p. 3
[2] *Ibid*., p. 3
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 11
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 13
[5] O'Driscoll, R., *The Celtic Consciousness*, (George Braziller Inc.: New York, 1982), p. 8
[6] Davies and O'Loughlin, p. 11
[7] Bradley, I., *Celtic Christianity*, (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1999), p. 5
[8] Allchin, D., *Celtic Christianity*, (The University College of North Wales: Bangor, 1993), p. 24
[9] Allchin, A., *Praise Above All*, (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 1991), p. 33
[10] Anonymous, Hermit Songs, (G. Schirmer: New York, 1954), p. 11
[11] Apostle Paul, *The New American Bible, Ephesians*, (Vatican: Rome, Italy, 2011), chapter 4
[12] Davies and O'Loughlin, p. 45
[13] Davies and O'Loughlin, p. 283
[14] Gioia, D., *The Catholic Writer Today,* (Wiseblood Books: North Carolina, 2019), p. 37

Flannery O'Connor's 'A Good Man is Hard to Find': 'Gracious Catastrophes' and Redemptive Opportunities

John P. Wargacki

All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful.
Flannery O'Connor[1]

"We both believe and disbelieve a hundred times an hour, which keeps believing nimble,"
Emily Dickinson.[2]

With the exception of William Faulkner, whose gothic modernist novels keenly document and wrestle with the darkest forces in human nature, Flannery O'Connor stands alone in crafting tales within an American southern gothic landscape that thoroughly deconstructs the Christian theology of redemption through a cast of characters who are simultaneously strange and wholly familiar. O'Connor's tales, in all of their engaging repulsiveness, require multiple readings for her characters to transform from thoroughly other, to familiar, to the deepest level of revelation: self-reflexive. For most of her persistent readers, there will come a point when "grace changes us" [them] because we, or her readers, ultimately recognize who we really are in the family of unredeemed creatures.

As Dr. Michael Murphy notes about O'Connor's fiction: "Any story is about conversion brought about a 'gracious catastrophe.'"[3] This essay will consider such 'gracious catastrophes' through the two central characters in one of her most famous tales that keenly demonstrate the possibility and problems of grace within its catastrophic aftermath: "A Good Man is Hard to Find." As may be said of all her stories, the author's grotesques Gothicism will be conspicuously present in this tale though its dynamic plot en route to disastrous consequences that enable painful, even improbable, opportunities for redemption. What O'Connor depicts throughout her fiction are the ways in which she pits genuine salvation against all manners of human constructs: self-reliance, class superiority, social norms, family status, even community. And while all of these factors may come into the service of one's authentic spiritual quest, none are sufficient unto themselves for delivering one's soul (or character) toward redemption. Indeed, such deliverance, as Christianity maintains, comes through Christ alone, the gateway and endpoint of all salvation. At best, those forementioned temporal conditions become a distraction from the Christian journey; at worst, these social constructs become false gods that will lead the unscrupulous pilgrim unwittingly toward the destruction and damnation.

In "A Good Man is Hard to Find," O'Connor pits the self-righteous "grandmother" of a family on vacation against "The Misfit," the armed and dangerous escaped convict. In fact, the story opens auspiciously with the line: "The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida" precisely because she rightly fears encountering this criminal. However, readers soon learn that any rendering of this seemingly prototypical protagonist and antagonist quickly unravels as the author wastes no time in depicting "the grandmother" as a delusional character, certain of her superiority as rooted in cultural norms. Our narrator shows the grandmother comparing her manner of dress for the long car ride to the far more casual attire of the "children's mother" (the only term the grandmother uses in reference to her son's wife throughout the story), conveying her pretentiousness in life or in death:

> Her [the grandmother] collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the road would know at once that she was a lady.[4]

A series of other events, dialogues, and one roadside rest stop along their travels only serve to reinforce the grandmother's misguided and antiquated worldviews, but for the purposes of this short analysis, it is when their car overturns on the road that the family comes face-to-face with The Misfit and his two accomplices. And what appears to be an awful coincidence will soon turn deadly after this exchange:

> The grandmother shrieked. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring. 'You're The Misfit!' she said. 'I recognized you at once!' 'Yes'm,' the man said, smiling slightly as if he were pleased in spite of himself to be known, 'but it would have been better for all of you, lady, if you hadn't of reckernized me.' Bailey turned his head sharply and said something to his mother that shocked even the children. The old lady began to cry and The Misfit reddened. 'Lady,' he said, 'don't you get upset. Sometimes a man says things he don't mean. I don't reckon he meant to talk to you thataway.' 'You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?' the grandmother said and removed a clean handkerchief from her cuff and began to slap at her eyes with it. The Misfit pointed the toe of his shoe into the ground and made a little hole and then covered it up again. 'I would hate to have to,' he said.[5]

From here on, the grandmother's confident reliance upon her upbring and culture slowly erodes when juxtaposed with The Misfit's honesty which O'Connor wraps within the language of old-school manners. Even though his effort to comfort the grandmother over Bailey's reaction is genuine, his words offer no consolation in light of how he answers her question about killing "a lady."

So often the case with O'Connor, the dialogue that transpires from here to the story's conclusion serves as the primary action. The grandmother and The Misfit converse as she

desperately attempts to convert him by asserting his underlying goodness, which she is utterly sure of: "Why I know you are a good man. You don't look a bit like common blood. I know you must come from nice people!" Such observations, however, have no effect on The Misfit for whom such traits matter very little, even if he agrees: "Yes mam, he said, finest people in the world."[6] And while their exchanges become more intense and desperate, her family is being executed one-by-one in the neighboring field. Finally, after a number of attempts to communicate and reason with The Misfit, the grandmother pivots to her Christianity, which only elicits a shocking response:

> 'Yes'm, The Misfit said as if he agreed. 'Jesus thown everything off balance. It was the same case with Him as with me except He hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one because they had the papers on me. Of course,' he said, 'they never shown me my papers. That's why I sign myself now. I said long ago, you get you a signature and sign everything you do and keep a copy of it. Then you'll know what you done and you can hold up the crime to the punishment and see do they match and in the end you'll have something to prove you ain't been treated right. I call myself The Misfit,' he said, 'because I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment.'"[7]

The Misfit provides two stunning revelations which neither the grandmother nor any reader would expect. His claim about Jesus having "thrown everything off balance" speaks directly to crux of belief: how does one believe without empirical evidence and where does "faith" reside if one has such evidence? In terms of the epigraph by Dickinson about how we "believe and disbelieve," one must ask whether it is even possible for belief can remain "nimble" without doubt. Put another way, is not faith ultimately strengthened via the crucible of doubt? Unfortunately, for both the Misfit and the grandmother doubt is granted no space within their diametrically opposed positions. The Misfit has unwittingly rendered himself into a ghastly atypical Christ-figure by positing that both he <u>and</u> Jesus were falsely accused of crimes; while the grandmother's belief is predicated upon her social construct as a "lady" in grossly ostentatious terms. Lastly, up to this moment, O'Connor has skillfully misled her audience to misinterpret the name "The Misfit" as *other*, the criminal who stands outside of those who presumably "fit," only to be both surprised and shocked to learn this name is actually self-wrought, a symbol of all he has suffered that does not "fit" whatever wrongs he allegedly committed. What makes this disturbing revelation especially untenable is we simultaneously identify with the grandmother's terrible misfortune (despite all of the tale's harbingers) and feel just enough empathy for The Misfit who is clearly is incapable of accepting his religious upbringing without first-hand information. For him, the eyewitness who testifies in St. John's Gospel is merely second-hand information and unconvincing. Thus, the stage is set for O'Connor's final, grotesque showdown as the grandmother concedes The Misfit's dilemma before her last-ditch effort to literally reach him, an act that will prove fatal:

'"Maybe He didn't raise the dead,' the old lady mumbled, not knowing what she was saying and feeling so dizzy that she sank down in the ditch with her legs twisted under her. 'I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't,' The Misfit said. 'I wisht I had of been there,' he said, hitting the ground with his fist. 'It ain't right I wasn't there because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady,' he said in a high voice, 'if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now.' His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, 'Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!' She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them. Hiram and Bobby Lee returned from the woods and stood over the ditch, looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky."'[8]

Whatever motivated the grandmother's last words and action, neither could not reconcile The Misfit. As Edward Kessler posits in his study of *Flannery Connor and the Language of the Apocalypse*:

> What religion presents cannot be represented, as Paul Ricœur asserts – even his 'place' is a metaphor. O'Connor's subordination of both history and community to metaphor may imply her acceptance of the impossibility of representing 'true reconciliation.' Because O'Connor's 'history' is inward and her authentic community figurative, her violent metaphors paradoxically deny her readers social adjustment and stability while at the same time opening up the possibility of transcending the limitations of conventional and verbal forms.[9]

Such opportunities for transcendence seem impossible in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" between the murders of the grandmother and her family along with The Misfit's inability to believe in anything he had not personally witnessed. This is a rare ending for O'Connor, whose tales more often offer faint glimmers of "possibility" even if her readers will never know what any of her surviving characters ultimately reap from what their attitudes have sown.

> '"She was a talker, wasn't she?' Bobby Lee said, sliding down the ditch with a yodel. 'She would of been a good woman,' The Misfit said, 'if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."'[10]

Perhaps that is what makes this text one of her hardest and most anthologized texts since it leaves us to wonder which of us, other than God, may be "good," without "somebody there to shoot" us every minute of our lives. Such a drastic and memorable declaration by The Misfit – so fitting in terms of O'Connor's style – demands our undivided attention and honest consideration, an extreme variation perhaps of the dichotomy that defines our public and private behavior. If so, then any grace that might be rendered from this story depends upon its readers and the questions

it raises from its catastrophic end when one's faith is defined by time and space rather than what the absolute and eternal. John Desmond, conversely, sees the "possibility" of gracious transformation even for The Misfit, albeit as a propositional reading that extends beyond the text:

> In the end, the Misfit's spiritual and mental suffering continues and intensifies, for with the failure of his code, his awareness of the gap between good and evil has widened. His violence is projected back onto himself as self-hatred. Perhaps at some future time his knowledge of this interior chasm will bring about the collapse of his self-begotten identity as a 'Misfit,' and an acceptance of his broken humanity. O'Connor suggested the possibility that he might ultimately be Brought to such a conversion. She called the Misfit a 'prophet gone wrong,' and referred to the grandmother's touching him as 'like the mustard-seed,' which 'will grow to be a great crow-filled tree in the Misfit's heart, and will be enough of a pain to him there to turn him into the prophet he was meant to become.'[11] The Grandmother's touch may bring him to the point where the mystery of good and evil is finally subsumed in the mystery of love. For the Misfit, evil may, in the end, through the grace of charity, bring about his ultimate good.[12]

No, "The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida," an opening line that serves as both ominous and factual since her worst fears are realized long before her family can arrive. One need not agree with Demond's claim to recognize he has insightfully tapped into O'Connor's blessed skills as both a believer and an author: the gift of seeing hope even in her seemingly hopeless characters, even if their "ultimate good" remains a mystery, ultimately residing in the hearts of her innumerable readers.

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[1]O'Connor, Flannery, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, edited by Sally Fitgerald, (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978)

[2] Dickinson, Emily, (*L*, 3:728) *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, editors: Cristianne Miller and Domhnall Mitchell, (Harvard University Press, 2024)

[3] Murphy, Michael P., Seton Hall University's Catholic Studies Summer Seminar, May 23, 2024.

[4] O'Connor, Flannery, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." *Flannery O'Connor: The Complete Stories* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992), p. 118

[5] *Ibid*., p. 127

[6] *Ibid*., p. 127

[7] *Ibid*., p. 131

[8] *Ibid*., p. 131
[9] Kessler, Edward, *Flannery O'Connor and the Language of the Apocalypse* (Princeton University Press, 2017)
[10] O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," p. 131
[11] O'Connor, Flannery. *Mystery and Manner*: Occasional Prose, (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1969), pp. 110, 112-113
[12] Desmond, John, "Flannery O'Connor's Misfit and the Mystery of Evil." Flannery O'Connor Critical Insights, editor Charles E. May., (Salem Press: Hackensack, NJ, 2012), pp. 153-154

A Sacramental World View: Some Hallmarks of a Catholic Imagination

Michael P. Murphy

Note: the list that follows is meant to provide a compass for a Catholic Imagination and is in no way complete. The hallmarks featured not only outline elements of Catholic belief but provide helpful clues and contexts for criticism when encountering Catholic art. In other words, focus on these hallmarks become a mode of paying attention and seeing what it there.

1. ***Emphasis on the Incarnation***- historically, ethically, aesthetically, etc. The fundamental point of an incarnational consciousness is, as William Lynch asserts, "the finite always leads somewhere" and that "Jesus Christ moved down into all the realities of humanity to get to his father." So many implications here, the Thomistic idea of grace building on nature chief among them.

2. ***Embodied Theology*** is the chief byproduct of the Incarnation and of an *incarnational consciousness*. Sacrament, language, imagery, metaphor, and symbol point to the importance of the senses as inroads to the divine. God is always present in the world in matter and spirit. We must keep our senses (the senses being one of our vital faculties) vigilant and receptive in order to perceive God's presence. Finding "a sensible manifestation of the spiritual," in Artistic Beauty is an important aspect of embodied theology. (Aquinas, Ignatius, Maritain, Gilson, Teilhard).

3. ***The Analogy of Being.*** As David Tracy observes: generally speaking, the Catholic tradition emphasizes God's infinite closeness (God's immanent being) against the Protestant tendency which emphasizes God as radically other (transcendent being). There is less emphasis on dramatic leaps of faith (as in Kierkegaard) and more emphasis on sacramental "seeing" and "feeling" God in whose presence "we live, move and have our being" (***cf. 1 Corinthians 12***). More explicitly, it is the traditional doctrine of the *analogy of being* (esp. through the lens of Erich Przywara and the *analogia entis*) that clarifies to the relationship of God to creation in this intimate way: the Incarnation of Christ is the "the linking term." This one historical occurrence, therefore, has endless implications analogically.

4. ***Both/And vs. Either/Or***. In support of the previous two premises: the Catholic Imagination tends to be *Both/And*. Following Romano Guardini and many others—from

Nicholas of Cusa to Pope Francis) a both/and logic is integral in understanding the tensions and paradoxes that characterize natural existence and theological mystery. The *complexio oppositorum* and the coincidence of opposites are central features of the Catholic Imagination.

5. ***The Harmony of the Transcendentals***. The mediaeval notion that the Transcendentals (the Good, the True and the Beautiful) regulate reality is as true as ever. The transcendentals make a space for the symphony and plurality of truth, topics particularly important to artists. (Bonaventure, Aquinas, HUVB)

6. ***Trinitarian Relationality***. The Mystery of the Trinity exposes the triadic and relational nature of all creation. Furthermore, as God is a community of divine persons propelled by love, the Trinity models a perichoresis—and kind of divine dance that is shared with all of creation. A ***kenotic*** relationality is the fundamental character of the Holy Trinity; and, as one element of theological anthropology, this dynamic becomes a practical model for personhood, Ignatian accompaniment, and interpersonal relationships of and for humanity.

7. ***Communitas/Communio.*** Catholic identity, and the *Catholic imagination* is nothing if not *communitarian*. It eschews the (American) Protestant tendency that valorizes the individual (the "Jesus and Me" approach). Of course, this is not to say that the individual is unimportant in Catholicism. Individuality is simply conceived of differently (e.g. different than the individual as *self-sufficient ego* that we see in late modernism). The personhood of an individual is fully realized or unrealized based on the quality of relationship between God, self, and community. Following the Greeks and St. Paul, a person is most herself or himself when he or she is in full exercise of his or her personal gifts (*charisms*); gifts, by their very nature, assert themselves towards the public (or *corporate* as in *bodily*) good. The exercise of personal gifts for the public good is a hallmark of *communio*. Because of the *Fall* (at least theologically speaking), weakness, failure, and struggle are also components of *communio*, as are forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope. The primacy of the community is a gospel mandate, a transcendental, as well as the foundation of any conception of "church."

8. ***The Communion of Saints.*** The notion and mystery of (and invitation to) *communio* informs a unique aspect of Catholic faith and imagination: the communion of saints. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we pray with all those who have gone before us and look to the example of flesh and blood lives of service and sanctity. The living can not

only pray for the dead, “the souls in purgatory,” who need prayers on their journey to God; but we can pray for the intervention of good saints who inspire us by their example, and remain present to us in ways of which we know not. “I will spend my heaven doing good on earth,” said St. Thérèse of Lisieux before her death—a job description for the communion of saints.

9. ***Marian theology***. Catholic identity and *Catholic Imagination* embrace the power of the feminine. Balthasar, for example, among others, identifies Mary as absolutely essential to the salvation of the world and exalts the wisdom with which she negotiates personal freedom and faith.

10. ***Sacred Arrangements***. “Hierarchy,” in its original context, is truly a *cardinal* concept. It establishes Christ as the center of the cosmos and therefore offers all of us a sense of meaning and, therefore, freedom. Our values, desires, and relationships become more navigable with Christ as center.

11. ***Conversion***. An ongoing process as opposed to a one-stop shop. Accepting Christ as one’s “personal savior” is life changing, to be sure, but such an assent only becomes fully intelligible within the context and vitality of ecclesial community, participation, and human encounter.

12. The constant tension between ***analogical and dialectical approaches to reality***, that is, the tension between *similarity* and *dissimilarity*, the negotiation and coincidence of opposites, etc. is always an issue. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, of course, as the analogical always contains the dialectical and is informed by it. In other words, the two are complementary, but the dialectical is ultimately less immanentist, less “Trinitarian.” Mere dialecticism is simply a further exercise in a vivisecting dualism: it results in a variety of “heresies”-Manicheanism, Pelagianism, Jansenism, Cartesianism, and so on.

13. Not only a profound reverence for transcendental beauty, but highly developed **Anti-aesthetic**. The unique character of God’s self-donation (and the general rejection of God by humanity, the violence of our banishment of God, the beauty of God’s persistence) inaugurates the credibility of an anti-aesthetic sense. The analogical (i.e. Catholic) imagination seeks to find a kind of sacramental linkage in the anti-aesthetic and begins to interpret, parody, and indict our hard-hearted resistance to God’s invitation to grace. Such an approach to art and representation finds an intense beauty in the horrific, violent, and grotesque, and finds God acting in all sorts of unexpected

settings and modes (read Robert Hugh Benson, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, John L'Heureux). Even though it may have served a vital purpose, we are compelled to move beyond the "art as dogma" stage and begin to see alternative, less didactic aesthetic settings for the exposition of theological mysteries. In this sense, the paradox of the crucifixion gives us license to explore and validate seemingly unorthodox theologies of image and narrative that both dwell in context and operate by nuance and complication.

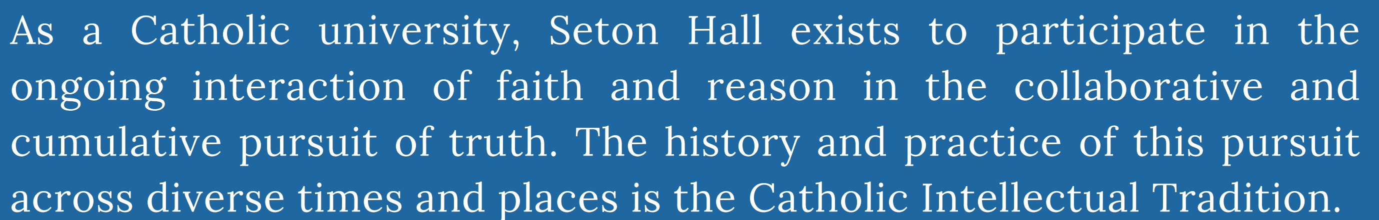
14. ***Theodrama***. Balthasar's term underscores the inherently dramatic structure of existence. The Catholic Imagination tends to sacralize tragedy and comedy, for example, and finds theologically credible activity both in existence and in depictions of existence (i.e. in narrative, visual, performing, (etc.) art).

15. ***The Reality of Sin.*** Impossible to lawyer ourselves out of a primary feature of humanity. Pope Francis: "I am a sinner—please pray for me…and not against me."

16. ***Preferential Option for Mercy, Forgiveness, Unity, and Reconciliation***. Love is God's first name; Justice is God's middle name; Mercy is God's last name.

17. ***Other(s)***

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition



As a Catholic university, Seton Hall exists to participate in the ongoing interaction of faith and reason in the collaborative and cumulative pursuit of truth. The history and practice of this pursuit across diverse times and places is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is a rich and diverse two-thousand-year conversation that springs from the encounter between human culture, thought, and practice and the incarnation of God's Word in Jesus of Nazareth. Because God is the Creator of heaven and earth who takes on human nature in Jesus Christ, all human endeavors, discourses, practices, and forms of life lie within the concern of Catholic intellectual life, as do all forms of cultural expression from the natural and human sciences to music and poetry, from political and economic theory to architecture and healthcare.

As an archdiocesan university, Seton Hall participates in this tradition which enriches its university life in several ways. It commits the university not only to educational breadth but also to depth: to educate and to exercise concern for the whole person, to recognize the dignity of each person in exercising virtues such as justice, solidarity, intellectual integrity, and the stewardship of creation, and to practice servant leadership in the pursuit of the common good for all.

It also invites faculty and students alike to ever greater integration between faith and reason, between the various disciplines of knowledge, and between learning and life.
In addition to specialized training, therefore, it aspires to an integrated understanding of how everything fits together, what it all means, and thus how we ought to live and what we ought to love. Such a search for meaning is a task always undertaken anew in dialogue with the entire Catholic tradition. In their specific contributions to ongoing integration, philosophy and theology play an important role at a Catholic University, inviting us to ask about the meaning of the whole in relationship to individual disciplines, to the human person, and to God.

The Catholic intellectual tradition marks a Catholic university with a distinctive identity. It is a special place of encounter between the life of faith, the activities of learning and research, and the needs of the world. It affirms, nurtures, and guides a human desire to seek what is true, love what is good, and delight in what is beautiful.

The invitation to ever greater depth and integration constitutive of the Catholic identity of Seton Hall motivates and enhances learning in all fields of knowledge. This educational approach responds to the needs of students and faculty today, well-attested to in various fields, and aptly described by Pope John Paul II:

> …RAPID DEVELOPMENTS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY…REQUIRE THE CORRESPONDINGLY NECESSARY SEARCH FOR MEANING IN ORDER TO GUARANTEE THAT THE NEW DISCOVERIES BE USED FOR THE AUTHENTIC GOOD OF INDIVIDUALS AND OF HUMAN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. …A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY IS CALLED IN A PARTICULAR WAY TO RESPOND TO THIS NEED. (EX CORDE §7)

We are further reminded that because of its equal commitment to faith and reason the Catholic Intellectual Tradition “is open to all human experience and is ready to dialogue with and learn from any culture” (Ex Corde §43). At Seton Hall this commitment is the foundation of the academic freedom to engage ideas and theories rigorously. It also commits Seton Hall to an active hospitality towards the great religious traditions of the world as well as to all the disciplines and discourses in a university that contribute to the common good, to the pursuit of truth, and to forming lives lived in service of others and marked by a special concern fo the most vulnerable. As a flourishing Catholic university, Seton Hall works to be a place whose educational life gives diverse expression to the life-giving vision and deepest truths of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

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