FORMATION OF THE HEART

The WHY and HOW of being a Catholic today

RAYMOND FRIEL

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By the same author

Seeing the River (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995)

Southfields Vol 1–6, ed. with Richard Price (London: Southfields Press, 1995–2000)

Renfrewshire in Old Photographs, with Richard Price (Glasgow: Mariscat, 2000)

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The Revolution of Tenderness: Being a Catholic in Today's Church (Chawton: Redemptorist Publications, 2016)

Gospel Values for Catholic Schools: a practical guide for today (Chawton: Redemptorist Publications, 2017)

Prayers for Schools: original prayers and resources for teachers and chaplains (Chawton: Redemptorist Publications, 2018)

At Your Side: a book for those who pray, those who want to pray and those who lead prayer, with David Wells (Chawton: Redemptorist Publications, 2020)

Dedication

In memory of my parents

Francis Gabriel Friel (1930–2010)

and Ellen Friel (1933–2019)

my first teachers in the faith

"For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also."
Matthew 6:21

"The mind seeks to understand the why and how
of the Christian life, in order to adhere and
respond to what the Lord is asking."
Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2705

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Introduction

It might be better to start by saying what this book is not. It's not a book for those interested in becoming a Catholic (although it might help on that journey). It's not an A-Z of Catholic belief. It's more of an introduction, or perhaps re-introduction, to what I consider to be the basics of being a Catholic, the why and how. People in other Christian denominations will, I hope, also get something out of this book. We have a lot in common.

The book is aimed primarily at a lot of people I know in the Church, whose formation in the faith may have stopped around the age of fourteen, roughly the time they were confirmed. This book is for anyone who is a baptized member of the Church who'd like to pick up where they left off all those years ago. The people I have in mind may well go to Mass, or maybe not. They may not read much sacred scripture, they may have some notion of what prayer is but don't practice it all that often. They want to live a good life but are sometimes confused about what that looks like.

This book won't answer all the questions about how to live in this world as a Catholic disciple of Jesus Christ, but will, I hope, offer some guiding principles, not least the why and the how. To cut to the end (spoiler alert!), the why of our faith is that God loves us and wants us to flourish in a new creation. The great pattern of Christian faith is God's gift followed by our gratitude, proclamation followed by response. God wants to communicate with us; this is what we call revelation. God loves us, God always takes the first step towards us.

We are invited to respond, to cooperate with the love being offered. This cooperation, which requires trust, we call faith. As this faith grows it seeks understanding; this is what we call faith in the other sense of the teaching of the Church, the Catholic faith. The teaching and tradition of the Church offer us a rich menu to choose from to nourish us in the life of faith. This is the how of being a Catholic today, how to grow in holiness, to participate in the work of building up the kingdom of God in this world, the kingdom of love, justice and peace. Our faith needs to be known, celebrated, lived and translated into prayer. By partaking of the daily bread of sacred scripture, the liturgy (especially the Eucharist), prayer, and a life committed to virtue, we will grow as Christians, we will be true to our common priesthood bestowed at baptism.

This book is not intended as an academic survey of the basics of the Christian faith. I've tried to make it personal. I've used scripture a lot, which I think we should. Catholics are making up for lost time, having let the prayerful study of the Bible disappear from our practice, until the inspiration of Vatican II brought it back to our attention. The chapters are deliberately roomy, a bit untidy. The rooms are not swept and clean. I'm not sure that's a good thing anyway. Come and see. Come in and wander around. Take your time. Make your own notes. See where the gaps are, ask your own questions. Join the conversation.

I hope your encounter with this book helps in some way to deepen your faith, to re-energize your formation, perhaps set you off on new paths of practice. The one thing I've learned about the how in recent years is that you just need to show up. The life of virtue by definition is a life of habit. This bread

needs to be consumed every day. Exactly what the meal looks like will vary from person to person to person, although there will be some staples such as scripture and the sacraments.

I've also learned not to get overly stressed about ideas of "progress" in the Christian life. Our society is obsessed with measuring performance. The Bible talks about bearing fruit and we will if we believe that this is God's work, not ours. This is an invitation to a new way of being human and belonging in this world. Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, became flesh so that we might have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

PART I

WHY?

Chapter 1

"In the beginning…"

God the loving creator

In exile you see things differently. When you're removed from familiar surroundings, including your sacred places, when your most cherished beliefs don't look as secure as they once did, then you look into things a bit more deeply. This was our experience during the Covid-19 pandemic. We were in a kind of internal exile, on the unwanted margins of our lifestyle, not allowed to visit our churches, not allowed to leave our homes (unless we were a key worker), to travel, to socialize, to celebrate our festivals, sacred or secular. We asked ourselves some fundamental questions about what we believed, how we behaved, what we took for granted. We listened to birdsong as if for the first time. We looked up to the empty skies. Nature breathed a sigh of relief, granted a Sabbath rest from our incessant activity and polluting. We lost loved ones before their time, came face to face with our own fragility.

Pope Francis says that to enter into a crisis is to be sifted, like wheat is shaken to separate the inedible chaff from the wheat: "Your categories and ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities and lifestyles are challenged."[1] He goes on to say that the basic rule of a crisis is that you don't come out the same: better or worse, but not the same. To be tested is to grow, to grow is to make choices, and in those choices our hearts are revealed. The Pope urges us "to dream big, to rethink our priorities—what we value, what we want, what we seek."[2] We are invited to imagine "better ways of living together

on this earth."[3] Ours is not the first era in human history to undergo a crisis, or exile, be that internal or external. The Jewish people were exiled from their land in the sixth century BC. Babylonia was the regional superpower and in 597 BC its armies, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, besieged and destroyed Jerusalem. Archaeological evidence suggests that the city within the walls was completely destroyed. The Temple, the most sacred site in Judaism, was left in ruins. They did not blame God for this. One of the remarkable features of the Hebrew scriptures, or Old Testament, is the searing honesty of the people who wrote about themselves. They did not produce propaganda, or self-serving hymns of achievement, but self-critical reflections on their relationship with God and each other.

The writer of the book of Chronicles sees the fall of Jerusalem as a punishment from God for their behavior. Zedekiah, the young king of Judah, "hardened his heart against turning to the Lord" (2 Chronicles 36:13). The heart is an important organ in sacred scripture and central to the concerns of this book, so a brief note at this point might be helpful. In Jewish thought, the human being is conceived as a unity, an animated body. The Hebrew word "nefesh" meant "person" or "self"—a "living being" (Genesis 2:7). When "nefesh" was translated into Greek as *soul*, it was an idea which was foreign to the Old Testament. There was no body/spirit dualism in Old Testament thinking. There was a person, animated by God, and the emotional, intellectual and moral center of that person was the "heart," a word which occurs over one thousand times in the Bible. The *Catechism* says that "the heart is the dwelling place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or biblical expression, the heart is the place 'to which I withdraw.' "[4]

The heart thinks, as well as feels, as well as makes choices. The heart is our moral and spiritual core. This is where the Lord

looks. As the prophet Samuel said, mortals look at outward appearances, but the Lord does not see as we see, "the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). When hearts are hardened then relations with God and neighbor are closed off. The law of Moses warned against this: "If there is among you anyone in need,… do not be hard-hearted" (Deuteronomy 15:7). The *Catechism* goes on to describe the heart as, "the place of decision… the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation; it is the place of covenant."[5] A key dimension of being human is that we are relational, we are called to live in communion with God, neighbor and the earth. Our hearts have a homing device, a longing for truth. As St. Augustine said, addressing God: "You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."[6]

So when King Zedekiah "hardened his heart against turning to the Lord" (2 Chronicles 36:13), he was breaking covenant, breaking the life-giving bond between himself and God. His example spread to the whole kingdom. The leading priests and the people were unfaithful, "following all the abominations of the nations" (36:14). They forgot who they were, turned from the Lord and behaved as everyone around them did. The Lord got tired of sending them messengers whom they ignored or abused so his "wrath" rose up against them and Nebuchadnezzar was sent as the instrument of his vengeance. The Church today does not believe that Covid-19 was some kind of punishment on the world for its wrongdoing (some believe that, but it's not mainstream Catholic thinking). But in the Old Testament, that's how they interpreted disaster, and disaster often followed a turning away from the Lord, a hardening of heart.

Out of a total population in Judah at the time of around seventy-five thousand, it is estimated that as many as ten thousand were

deported to Babylon. The ones who were exiled were the elite and those who supported them: the priests, scribes, aristocrats, civil servants, the ones who ran the country, the guardians of its self-understanding. These were the ones, in the books of Chronicles, who turned from the Lord. They were taken to Babylon, in chains, an 800-mile trek through desert and rough terrain. There are no records of how many survived the journey. We can only imagine the state of the exiles when they arrived "by the rivers of Babylon" (Psalm 137:1) and sat down and wept when they remembered Zion (Jerusalem). They had been defeated, displaced, and marginalized. They became "servants" (2 Chronicles 36:20) to the king and his sons. Their God, who had chosen them and led them out of slavery in Egypt, seemed to have abandoned them.

Let there be light

And yet scholars believe that it was theologians from this broken group of exiles who wrote the remarkable story of creation that we find in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. In Babylon, the exiles would have come across the creation myths of the region, including the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth. The first Genesis account of creation was not written in a vacuum. It can be seen as a response to the world view around them, a kind of pastoral statement to the exiles in the face of despair. At its heart is a remarkable claim that God watches over creation; it was an affirmation that this God can be trusted even when all the evidence suggests otherwise. The people in exile found a deeper level of faith in a faithful God. They were sifted and got rid of a lot of useless material. They came out of their crisis with a deeper faith. They found good news in their darkest moment.

The vision of God presented in Genesis is dramatically different from the Babylonian account. In that, the world was made out of the struggle between opposing powers and it took form when Marduk, the god of light, split in two the body of the primordial dragon. The heavens and the earth were produced from the sundered body of the dead dragon and, from its blood, Marduk fashioned human beings. Pope Benedict XVI said that, according to this account, "at the very origin of the world lurks something sinister, and in the deepest part of humankind there lies something rebellious, demonic, and evil."[7] Only the king of Babylon, a tyrant, the representative of Marduk, can repress the demonic and restore the world to order.

What a contrast when we turn to the book of Genesis. It is worth reminding ourselves how it begins, to take our time to read the passage, read it out loud, slowly, and appreciate its extraordinary depth and beauty. Listen to the soundscape. What do you hear? It is not the noise of cosmic carnage and the death throes of dragons.

> In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.
>
> (Genesis 1:1-5)

Out of the silence of the void comes the wind of God (in Hebrew *ruah*) sweeping over the face of the waters. Chaos is not given a name, an identity. That would be to pay it far too much attention. Perhaps the "darkness" is an expression of

what the authors of the text were experiencing in exile. They find hope, good news, in God's creative presence and purpose. Then we hear the first words of God in sacred scripture. Not the decree of a tyrant, not an order, or a reprimand, but the creation of something out of nothing, light out of darkness, the first moment of creation: "Let there be light" (1:3).

And there was light. God creates by speaking. God's word is generative. Creation is meant to listen and answer, although our track record on that front is not good. The Bible in many ways is a history of us not listening, of forgetting the promises of God. But there is always an invitation to come back. At the heart of the Jewish faith is an invitation to listen. The *Shema Israel*, the most important prayer in Jewish life, begins with the word for "listen, take heed, hear" from a passage in Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart…" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). God authors life, but there is no authoritarianism, no demeaning role for creatures, such as you find in the other creation myths of the time. Quite the opposite, there is an invitation to be in relationship with a caring and attentive Creator. As the *Catechism* says, "God has no other reason for creating than his love and goodness."[8] This is our *Why*, in a nutshell. We are invited to respond to that love, with all our heart.

What the Creator has made the Creator declares to be "good" (Genesis 1:4). This was not the point of view of the other creation myths available to the Jewish writers in exile. Those myths were all about the gods and their tyrannical proxies on earth. They were about the power of kingdoms, in the heavens and on earth. The writers of Genesis had a new insight, a counter assertion. For them, creation had value in itself. Creation is blessed. God's first blessing is on the creatures, even before men and women (Genesis 1:22). Creation is a treasure of God. Creation

is a blessing. It is embraced and guaranteed, as we see in the covenant with Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:8-17). As we see when God takes flesh and dwells among us. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus casts a loving eye over the lilies of the field and the birds of the air which his heavenly Father feeds (Matthew 6:26). There is no gulf between the goodness of God and the world. There have been moments in the Christian tradition when the depravity of nature and the purity and otherness of God have been emphasized, but that is not the insight that the writers of Genesis arrived at in the experience of exile.

Let us make humankind in our image

Then in Chapter 1, verse 26, those theologians in exile describe the creation of "humankind." In the creation myths of the society around them, as we have seen, humans were made from the blood of the slain dragon. It wasn't a very promising start. The purpose of humans, in the *Enuma Elish*, was to do the work done by the gods, "so that the gods will not be required to labor for evermore."[9] The deal was that the humans would be the slaves of the gods and the gods could put their feet up. Creation is a means to an end, humans serve the gods and the gods "lord it over them" (Matthew 20:25) in eternal indolence. What we read in Genesis is a revolution in thought, a completely new insight, better news than a vision of human beings as slaves and chattels of the gods and tyrants. Again, the emphasis is on the speech of God:

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."
>
> (Genesis 1:26)

And so it was, God created humankind. No mention in this account of Adam and Eve, that's the next chapter by a different group of writers, probably writing before the exile. This is about humankind, male and female. In another remarkable counter assertion from the view of reality around them, the writers of this creation account say that humankind was made "in the image" of God. In exile, Israel resisted the temptation to be like the Babylonian religion and its images of the divine. They may have succumbed to such temptations before exile, but not now. God was not imaged in any of the empires around them. But in a breakthrough of religious insight, the writers of Genesis proclaim that there is only one way that God is imaged in the world: *humanness*. God is not imaged in anything fixed, but in the freedom of the human person.

Walter Brueggemann, the renowned scripture scholar, believes there is a consensus that "the image of God reflected in human persons is after the manner of a king who establishes statues of himself to assert his sovereign rule where the king himself cannot be present."[10] The image of God in the human person, as Brueggemann describes it, is a mandate of power and responsibility. But here's the rub, it is power and responsibility as God exercises power. It is the power and responsibility of love. The Christian tradition, as it developed the Trinitarian understanding of God, would regard "image of God" as about being relational, made to be in communion, as God is a loving communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We represent God best when we are in loving, right relation with creation and our neighbors.

Having "dominion" (Genesis 1:28) over creation sounds like the language of the tyrant, but this is our thinking, not God's. As Pope Francis says in his ground-breaking encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, "Although it is true that we Christians have at times

incorrectly interpreted the scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures."[11] We read the Bible *whole* and any expressions of God's power need to be understood in the light of the New Testament and the way of Jesus, who came "not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45), to show us how to live together in justice and peace.

The dominion which has been mandated, if we take our inspiration from the whole of sacred scripture, is more like that of a shepherd who cares for the animals. The task of "dominion" is not about tyrannical exploitation or abuse, but about securing the well-being of a blessed creation. The task of the shepherd is not to control or dominate but to lay down his or her life for the sheep (John 10:11). Humankind is blessed by God and given the freedom to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). This God governs by gracious giving and bestowal of freedom and responsibility. Men and women are not slaves of God, but images of God, agents of God if you like. We are collaborators in the majestic project of creation. That is the foundation for a key concept in Catholic Social Teaching: *the dignity of the person*. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis expresses this beautifully, drawing on the words of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI:

> The Creator can say to each one of us: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason "each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."[12]

In this initial survey of the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, we can hear many of the keynotes of any approach to formation or growth in the Christian life. There have been times

in the history of the Church when the emphasis was on sin and guilt, but if we begin at the beginning, the message is clear: creation is good, it is blessed; it is abundant gift. We are good, we are blessed, we are meant to be. We have a purpose on this good earth, a responsibility, a mandate from God. But we are not God, we are not in charge. While we are good, as the next chapter of Genesis explains, we are also willful and flawed, with a habit of turning away from God, forgetting our place in creation and turning inwards, living on our own terms. We mess up, we miss the mark, we harden our hearts. We see this in our relationship with creation. We have not always behaved as if we were the shepherds.

Sean McDonagh, a Columban priest and eco-theologian, offers an insight into why, in our culture, we have not cherished creation as we ought. He cites Sister Elizabeth Johnson, who locates the root of the problem in the dualism we adopted in our encounter with the Hellenistic (Greek) world. This is where the notion of soul ("psyche") first appears, as we noted earlier. This way of thinking, especially in the Neoplatonists, sees the world as a polarity of spirit and matter, with spirit closer to the divine realm. In the late Middle Ages, the distinction between natural and supernatural, designed to protect the gratuity of grace, focused so much on the supernatural that "the world became no longer a gift but just a given, a background for the human drama."[13]

This pessimistic view of the world deepened further during and after the Europe-wide trauma of the Black Death (1346–1353), one of the most devastating pandemics in human history. It is estimated that something in the region of one hundred million, perhaps closer to two hundred million, people died, around fifty percent of Europe's population. McDonagh points out that "sermons in the wake of the plague interpreted it as a punishment from God."[14] We may not see Covid-19 as a

punishment from God, but our ancestors certainly saw a destructive pandemic in those terms. The way to respond, according to the fourteenth century Church, was to double down on a spirituality based on asceticism, mortification of the flesh and withdrawal from the world. Creation, as such, had no value. If anything, it was the source of corruption and death. McDonagh finds this negative attitude to creation present in some of the prayers of the Church, for example in the missal of Pope Pius VI, which was used right up to the Second Vatican Council. One post-Communion prayer read, "Lord, teach us to despise the things of earth, and to love the things of heaven."[15] We pray as we believe.

This spirituality was part of my formation. I remember as a child sitting through thunderous sermons delivered from a high marble pulpit. The world was full of sin and temptation, the body was weak and inclined to sin, only self-denial and God's grace could wipe our souls clean and give us any chance of getting to heaven. The alternative was an eternity of graphically described torture in hell. The focus was all on our relationship with God. Relationships with neighbor came second. Creation was merely a backdrop. As McDonagh points out, the majority of Christians never thought it was wrong that forests were devastated, or rivers and oceans polluted on an industrial scale as a side effect of powering economic growth. There were always witnesses in Christian tradition to the care of nature, such as St. Francis of Assisi, or the Celtic saints. Many of the monastic communities of Europe were leading centers of innovative agricultural methods, but that was not the mainstream way of thinking and when the industrial revolution scaled up for its great pillage of the natural world, with the consequent degradation of human beings, the Church took some time to find its voice.

Our common home

Today, creation is on fire. The earth, our common home is being desecrated (literally, to treat a sacred thing with violent disrespect), and human beings live in societies of epic inequality. Millions live in poverty and oppression and are subject to degrading working conditions which very often benefit the insatiable appetite of richer consumers. The blessed creation is ransacked for profit and pleasure, the images of God in many places are defaced.

One papal document which reflects the urgency of what is happening to creation (understood as human beings *and* nature) is *Laudato Si'*, in which Pope Francis addresses not just Catholics, but every person on the planet about the condition of our common home. He states bluntly, quoting Pope Paul VI, that "due to an ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation."[16] In language previously not associated with papal documents, the Pope says that because of the hundreds of millions of tons of waste, much of it non-biodegradable, "the earth, our home is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."[17] Unlike natural ecosystems, our industrial systems, at the end of the cycle of production and consumption, have not developed the capacity to safely absorb and re-use waste.

The Pope points to the compelling science linking global warming to the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxide and others) as the result mostly of human activity. A key driver of this is a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels. Throughout the document, the Pope is adamant that this is not just about saving the planet. It is a question of social justice, it is about promoting human flourishing, "the intimate

relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected."[18]

We are called to a change of lifestyle in order to reverse this damage, to restore the bond of right relations between God, nature and our neighbor. A point which has been re-discovered in Catholic thinking recently is that the lifestyles of those in the richer sections of any country are only possible because of the poverty endured by those who do not enjoy such material goods. In the present model of distribution, the Pope says, "a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption."[19] Being a Catholic today, a socially engaged and aware Christian, involves examining our lifestyle: what we consume, how much we consume, why we consume it, how it is produced, how it got to our home, and the human and environmental costs of the process. The change of lifestyle the Pope calls for begins in the heart, since that is the source of the problem: "The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of the sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life."[20]

We are blessed, we are good, but we are flawed, "wounded by sin." This is an insight drawn from the second account of creation, the story of Adam and Eve, which was most likely written before the account in Genesis 1, somewhere around 900–750 BC, when the Jewish people were scraping an existence from the rocky soil of Judah and King Solomon was building a great Temple on the backs of forced labor. We will return to Adam and Eve in the next chapter, but for now the definition of sin in *Laudato Si'* is helpful for those brought up primarily with the view that sin was about breaking rules, often associated with the body. Pope Francis says that the creation accounts in

the book of Genesis suggest that "human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin."[21] When our hearts are turned to the Lord, we will turn in compassion to our neighbor and to the earth our common home and live in ways which allow both to flourish.

This violence in our hearts has resulted in a distorted view of creation as a commodity to be exploited, to be bought and sold for our pleasure and entertainment, as well as for our survival. The exploitation is always of nature *and* humankind, since one requires the other. The papal encyclical which inaugurated the era of modern Catholic social teaching was *Rerum Novarum* (New Things) by Pope Leo XIII in 1891. The chief concern in that document was the exploitation of workers in the rapidly expanding industrialized world. In the gender exclusive language of its time, Pope Leo XIII states, "Religion teaches the rich man and the employer that their work-people are not their slaves; that they must respect in every man his dignity as a man."[22] We hear in this the keynotes of the Genesis account of creation, the rejection of the *Enuma Elish* vision of humankind as slaves of the gods, the proclamation of the dignity of the human person as a "viceroy," if you like, of the king of heaven. Therefore, "it is shameful and inhuman to treat men like chattels to make money by."[23] A more recent publication from the charity Together for the Common Good, states that "no political or economic power formed nature or human existence. Creation is not a commodity but a sacred inheritance, and we have a high calling."[24]

Creation is a sacred inheritance, and one to be shared. When Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* used the striking phrase, "The

climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all,"[25] he was drawing on one of the first principles of the social teaching of the Church: *the universal destination of goods*. I have to confess that this principle has passed me by for most of my adult Catholic life. I don't recall ever hearing a sermon on this, or thinking it was anything that should impact on the way I lived my faith. No wonder it's sometimes referred to as the "best kept secret" in the Church. If something is a secret, it's usually not by accident, since the revelation would be embarrassing and uncomfortable. But it's there in Vatican II, in broad daylight: "God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity."[26]

Pope Francis, in his 2020 encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, brought our attention back to this key principle. He reminded us that this thinking goes back to the early centuries of Christianity. The key insight was that "if one person lacks what is necessary to live with dignity, it is because another person is detaining it."[27] He quotes St. John Chrysostom who said that "'Not to share our wealth with the poor is to rob them and take away their livelihood. The riches we possess are not our own, but theirs as well.'"[28] This is a profoundly counter-cultural insight. The market-driven society we have been formed in and live in does not take that view. What we own is ours and our increasing tendency is to build walls around it to protect it from harm. The Pope invokes another principle of the Church's teaching which in many ways is the acting out of the principle of the universal destination of goods, and that is *solidarity*. This is about believing that we are in community with each other, that we belong to the same human family and have access to the same abundance in creation. Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, and as the Pope says, "service in great

part means 'caring for vulnerability,' "[29] which in turn means getting close, looking into the faces of the vulnerable. Critically, it is more than just "sporadic acts of generosity."[30] It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights.[31]

This for me is a key passage. To make any sense of the universal destination of goods, we must begin by applying ourselves to an understanding of how poverty is contrived in our society, which includes my role in that. How could the goods of creation be shared more equitably in order to better promote the dignity of each person? How could the rights of workers be improved for the same end? In a gig economy are we aware of the working conditions of those who drive the vans to deliver the packet of pens or the book we ordered for next day delivery? As many have observed, the pandemic shone a light on inequality and gave us a new appreciation for the necessary work of those who keep our society running: who deliver and process and sell our food and household goods, who clean our office spaces and schools, who tend our sick, who teach our children, who keep our communities safe.

In the exile of lockdown, new insights opened up, or old insights re-emerged, about how interconnected we are, about how fragile and beautiful our world is, about how the goods of this world are drawn so disproportionately into the enclaves of a minority whose lifestyle can never be universalized. As those remarkable Jewish theologians wrote in exile, creation is blessed, creation is good and we have a role to play, a vocation if you like, to be the ambassadors for God on this planet, to promote justice and a fair distribution of goods, to look after the earth our common home, and each other. Creation is not

a passive system for us to use as we see fit. It is an abundant, diverse and beautiful gift of the Creator, a reflection of his goodness, as St. Thomas Aquinas said so memorably:

> God cannot express himself fully in any one creature: and so he has produced many and diverse life forms, so that what one lacks in its expression of divine goodness may be compensated for by others: for goodness, which in God is single and undifferentiated, in creatures is refracted into myriad hues of being.(32)

Sabbath rest

When the Lord finished his work of creation, he did what we wouldn't expect God to do, he rested. In some expressions in the tradition of Christianity, God is a remote and static being, perfect in heaven. In the Hebrew scripture, God invests his energy, imagination and authority in the loving act of creation and is tired by the effort. God's third and final blessing is on the seventh day, the sabbath day, the day of rest. This was not just a kind of divine vacation, a time to enjoy yourself. It was blessed and made holy. There is something much more important going on here. In the *Enuma Elish*, the creation account ends with the founding of the city of Babylon and the creation of the temple, the place where the gods might be worshipped. But for the exiles, with no land or temple, it was time which came first. Abraham Heschel puts it this way: "The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things in space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time."(33) For Heschel, a world without Sabbath would be a world that knew only itself, or a distorted image of God in the temples of the world.

The market economy we live in, and which lives in us, depends on the generation of needs and desires. These are needs and desires we did not even know we had until we saw them in another, in the advert, in the car driving past, in the neighbor's new extension. We desire according to the desire of the other, in the succinct insight of the French thinker René Girard. And this desire, of course, is without end, literally insatiable. In Heschel's memorable phrase, "things, when magnified, are forgeries of happiness."[34] The endlessly unfulfilled offer of desire leaves us rest-less and results in anxiety, which Jesus will address in his teachings, especially in Matthew's Gospel. For Brueggemann, Sabbath is a *resistance* to a consumer market which has now colonized every waking moment. The 24/7 culture means we can purchase and consume what we want when we want it, with one click, or with a drive to the 24-hour convenience store, operated by staff for whom the hours are far from convenient. Sabbath is an alternative, and "the alternative on offer is the awareness and practice of the claim that we are situated on the receiving end of the gift of God."[35] This awareness of gift is what lies at the heart of the Catholic Eucharist (thanksgiving) that we will come back to in Chapter 6.

The Book of Exodus provides an even more interesting description of God resting on the seventh day. The Lord is reminding Moses of the importance of the Sabbath, as "a sign between me and you throughout your generations" (Exodus 31:13). The text goes on to say that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (31:17). The phrase "and was refreshed" is an addition to the Genesis text. The God of Israel is again seen to be depleted in some way by the labors of creation, needing to be "refreshed," literally to recover a full sense of "self." The root verb here again is "nephesh"—the "living being" God made in Chapter 2 of

Genesis. God rests to become a fully living being again, restored, breathing freely. The market economy, which is not regarded by Catholic social teaching as an intrinsic evil, nevertheless when unconstrained can produce "*depleted*" selves, reduced by anxiety and the endless frustration of never having enough, or being enough. The market depends to a large extent on depleted selves to operate, it feeds on the desire it creates. The unconstrained market also depletes those who work for it, demanding more hours, more efficiency, less favorable terms and conditions.

In contrast, Sabbath rest invites us to be "refreshed," to be "*gathered* selves," in the term used by Brueggemann.[36] The gathered self of Sabbath refuses the anxiety and hyperstimulation of the market and its products. The gathered self draws on a different kind of energy, authority and courage, refusing activity for its own sake. The gathered self asks a different set of questions, such as: what did my creator intend me to be, how am I living with my neighbor, how can I be more generative and generous in my living, why am I looking for happiness in the wrong places? As it says in the prophet Isaiah's great vision of abundance, "Why do you... labor for that which does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2).

Pope Francis is thinking along very similar lines in *Laudato Si'*. For him, Christian spirituality offers an alternative understanding of the quality of life, one free of "the obsession with consumption."[37] He advocates a return to simplicity, moderation, being happy with little, "avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures."[38] He paints the portrait of a Christian as one who finds satisfaction in "fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer."[39] In a language similar to Brueggemann's notion of the "depleted self" he defines happiness as "knowing how to limit some needs which only

diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer."[40] For him, this is an "attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God."[41]

A note on our relations with our Jewish sisters and brothers

Christian Churches share a common guilt and responsibility for anti-Semitism over the centuries. It took a long time for this to be acknowledged, but a breakthrough came at the Second Vatican Council with the document, *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), which was approved for publication on October 28, 1965. In the debates on the document, the role of the Catholic Church in promoting or supporting anti-Semitism was acknowledged with remarkable candor. Robert Graham SJ recalls that Cardinal Bea, an influential figure at the proceedings, "admitted in an address to the Council that anti-Jewish ideas in Christian history had helped Nazism."[42]

The document itself, although it stopped short of asking for the forgiveness which many at the time were looking for, is now seen as an important first step in repairing relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. One of the historical accusations against Jewish people which fueled so much persecution was that they were guilty of *deicide* (the killing of God), and as such were cursed by God. The document makes clear that "the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy scripture."[43] In stronger terms, the document goes on to say that the Church,

"deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-semitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews."[44] At a stroke, any Catholic sanction for anti-Semitism was removed.

Since the Council, subsequent proclamations and events have extended the statements of *Nostra Aetate*, perhaps most dramatically in the pontificate of St. Pope John Paul II. He was the first Pope to visit the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz, the first Pope to attend a service in a synagogue and the first to ask for forgiveness for the suffering of the Jewish people caused by Christians. On a visit to Israel in 2000, by then struggling visibly with Parkinson's disease, he inserted a prayer into a gap in the Wailing Wall, a section of the Jewish Temple which was re-built by Herod in the first century AD. The prayer read:

> God of our fathers,
> you chose Abraham and his descendants
> to bring your Name to the Nations:
> we are deeply saddened by the behaviour of those
> who in the course of history
> have caused these children of yours to suffer,
> and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves
> to genuine brotherhood
> with the people of the Covenant.[45]

"Judaism sees only one world, which is material and spiritual at the same time. The material world is always potentially spiritual. For Judaism, all things—including, and especially, such apparently non-spiritual and grossly material things as garbage, sweat, dirt and bushes—are not impediments to but dimensions of spirituality. To paraphrase the Psalmist, 'The whole world is full of God.' The business of religion is to keep that awesome truth ever before us."

Lawrence Kushner[46]

"In this vision he also showed a little thing, the size of a hazelnut in the palm of my hand, and it was round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and thought, 'What can this be?' And the answer came to me, 'It is all that is made.' I wondered how it could last, for it was so small I thought it might have suddenly disappeared. And the answer in my mind was, 'It lasts and will last forever because God loves it; and everything exists in the same way by the love of God.' In this little thing I saw three properties: the first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God cares for it."

Julian of Norwich[47]

"We need economies that give to all access to the fruits of creation, to the basic needs of life: to land, lodging and labor. We need a politics that can integrate and dialogue with the poor, the excluded, and the vulnerable, that gives people a say in the decisions that impact their lives. We need to slow down, take stock, and design better ways of living together on this earth."

Pope Francis[48]

SEE

What do we see in creation—understood as human beings and the natural environment—and the way it is used? What gathering of information would help our seeing?

What do we see in the use of natural resources in our community, our household, our lifestyle?

Can we begin to see from the peripheries of our world, as Pope Francis invites us to do? What is the impact of wealthy nations on the rest of the world?

DISCERN

In what we see, what do we think is of God, and what is seeking to frustrate his will?

What options would we like to hold before the Lord?

With whom would dialogue help us to discern? Can we make more time for prayer?

Do we feel the "gentle pull of the Spirit" within us towards a course of action?

ACT

What course of action do we feel moved to embark upon? What impact will our actions have on those who are poor?

What strategy do we need in our course of action? Who do we need to work with, in what ways might we be an obstacle?

Are we open to the gentle, encouraging voice of God (as opposed to the strident, insistent voice of rigidity) prompting us to modify our course if needs be?

Will we make time to rest, to recover ourselves, to review our actions over time to discern if they were the right actions, with the best impact, or do we need further seeing and discerning?

Creator God,
thank you for the abundance,
diversity and beauty of creation,
given to us to reveal your love
and to invite us to become your images
on this earth, creatures who reflect
your care and compassion
for all created things.

Give us the wisdom
to understand that the goods
of the earth are to be shared by all.
Give us the courage to examine
our own lifestyle and habits,
to see that to have more than we need
is to deprive our sisters and brothers
of a dignified life.

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