

Mount Saint Anne's Killenard,
Tuesday, 12th April, 2011.

Why Do I remain A Catholic?

I am a Catholic and I shall remain a Catholic because this was the faith into which I was born and baptised when I was a child, and I believe that it is guided by the Holy Spirit, in spite of all the signs to the contrary.

I have had the privilege of being allowed to study it in depth and in detail for the last sixty years, and I now know that it does contain within it everything that is needed to connect with God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to live with them forever in eternity.

This assurance does not come without a great deal of doubt and examination, especially in the last number of years. Although I have never questioned or doubted God or God's connection with me, I have had, as you have had, every reason for questioning the credentials of the Roman Catholic Church as a reliable go-between.

So, I have just finished writing a book on this subject called *Dancing with Dinosaurs* which will be coming out in the next few weeks, and I am very happy to give you a preview of the movie here this evening as my contribution towards these Lenten talks at St Anne's.

Dinosaurs have been described as 'the most successful animals that ever lived.' They ruled the earth for almost 200 million years, during what paleontologists describe as the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods of our planet's development. If they had not been mysteriously wiped out in a catastrophic event 65 million years ago, they might still be around today – and we might not.

No one can say exactly what happened to eliminate them, and there are many theories pieced together from remaining evidence left to us on this side of the divide. A meteorite strike seems to be the most likely explanation. Part of an asteroid some 10 kilometres wide slammed into the earth where we now have Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. Millions of creatures were killed by the impact of the strike which in seconds had blasted out a crater 175 kilometres in diameter. The impact threw up billions of tonnes of rock and dust into the atmosphere, triggering earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis on land and ocean, so that the whole earth became shrouded in darkness, as the sun was blocked out. Temperatures dropped; and the few remaining dinosaurs that had not been killed by the explosions, died of starvation or exposure.

We, as a human species, are comparatively recent arrivals on the planet. However, in the strange history of life on earth we are descended from the dinosaurs. We were a smaller, neater version, a pocket-sized edition, if you like. The rapid demise of the reptilian giants left open opportunities for a small upwardly mobile class like ourselves. Mammals, which is what we are, scurried into the gap they left and bred like the rabbits they were soon to become. Sixty-five million years later, the Age of Mammals is still in full swing. *Homo Sapiens*, as we have been taught to label our species, has been on earth perhaps 50,000 years. Those of us who have seen films

such as *Jurassic Park* will be aware of what it was like to live in a world where other species were in charge and where we were like irrelevant insects crushed between claw and hoof. It took us, with a great deal of evolutionary effort, several thousand years to produce the first billion of our species; now, in this blessed 21st century, we are producing a billion every ten to fifteen years. We have subjugated the other species. We are not just in charge, but we're here to stay. Unless, of course, we wipe ourselves out as happened to the dinosaurs.

However, in case you haven't noticed, we have bred our own species of dinosaur. And in this second decade of the 21st Century, unless we become fully aware of this and learn how to dance with these dinosaurs, we too could be crushed between their toes. Where are they? Who are they?

Dinosaurs as a species are diverse and varied, but, without putting a tooth in it, as they say, you are probably working for one; you may be investing your money in one; and, if you are a believer, you are likely to be worshipping in one. Churches, banks and multinationals are some of the modern breed of dinosaur. Perhaps it might be true to say that unless a pioneering brainwave turns into a lumbering dinosaur it has little hope of surviving the vicissitudes of history. So many religions, political parties, businesses have thrived for a few inspiring and energetic years before collapsing into oblivion. Statistics supplied by sociologists [mostly in America] suggest that 75% of small businesses fail in their first 5 years and 50% of the remainder collapse by their 10th year. Small may be beautiful, but in the world in which we live it is not very durable.

The rapid rise of multinational corporations, the more recent breed of dinosaur, has been of concern to many who see them as a threat to human and civil rights. Every year the world provides images of these more recent dinosaurs. 2010 was the year when the whole world held its breath as we watched 33 Chilean miners being released from entrapment from the copper mines at San José.

Never before have so many been trapped underground for so long. Beginning at midnight on Tuesday, 12th October, 2010, the rescue operation exceeded expectations at every step. Officials first said it might be four months before they could get the men out; it turned out to be 69 days and 8 hours. However, even though we all enjoyed the understandable elation, first of all of finding the men alive, and then watching their protracted rescue, we cannot lose sight of the dinosaur which caused the disaster in the first place.

Chile is the world's leading producer of copper. The price of copper at a record high was driving companies to extract as much ore as possible while the boom lasted. Mining was getting more dangerous all over Chile. The owners of the San Jose mine had failed to install alternate exit routes, as required by law. When the miners first made contact with the outside world, eighteen days after the initial explosion, they had to be told that the legally mandated emergency ladder didn't exist. The evacuation exit remained clear for 48 hours and they could have escaped during that two day period, if the ladder had been there.

The government had, apparently, ordered the mine to be shut down for safety reasons in 2006 and 2007. When the owners heard of the disaster they were on the

brink of bankruptcy and could not afford to pay the miners wages while they were trapped underground.

The San Esteban mining company therefore turned over the rescue operation to a state owned company since they had no money to pay for it. So, the real question is how a mining company so deep in debt and with so little income was able to maintain its operations for so long. And the answer must be: by cutting corners and risking the lives of their workforce. It is only when the global spotlight is focused on this troubled mine, these buried miners, that such basic problems become visible. One wonders what would happen if this spotlight were turned on the great underground dinosaur which is the total mining industry of Chile?

Why would any such dinosaurs come to Ireland? And why would they stay here?

Ireland's low corporate tax rate of 12.5% on trading profits has been a magnet for MNC dinosaurs, who, in turn, represent 90% of Irish exports. Between 1998 and 2002, profits of US companies with Irish facilities doubled. Even in the present monetary crisis, figures released in September 2010, for exports from Ireland, exceeded €40 billion in the April-June period, a record figure for a single quarter, topping the previous high water mark reached in the final three months of 2008.

The first dinosaur sighted in Ireland in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century still lives in a cave, now world famous for its stalagmites and stalactites, at Ringaskiddy. Pfizer was the first MNC dinosaur to migrate to Ireland, raising its leg and pouring Citric Acid over County Cork from 1969. With headquarters in New York, Pfizer is the world's largest biopharmaceutical company, and one of Ireland's leading employers. It manufactures here some of its best selling medicines including Lipitor and Viagra.

Viagra is known locally as the 'Pfizer riser,' while Lipitor is its great 'down-sizer.' Viagra, the first of the Pfizer twin towers, is probably the most famous product of the 20th century, as well as being the most wanted and least needed in pharmaceutical history. Lipitor comes hot on its heels. At least 16 million people in America take drugs to reduce cholesterol. I myself am one of the adults who have taken it every evening for the last five years. This is to lower my bad cholesterol when I know full well that a low fat diet and other non-medical treatments, such as daily exercise and lifestyle changes, would do the job quite as effectively. But who am I to turn down that double whopper MacDonal's cheese burger with Ireland's favourite Hellmann's real mayonnaise on top, when I can now have heaven and all this as well by taking my daily dose of Lipitor?

Although there are other dinosaurs out there, ready and able to flood the market with LDL [so-called bad cholesterol-reducing commodities], the Pfizer dinosaur maintains its monopoly and mutilates or destroys all rivals. It recently gobbled up Wyeth in a \$68 billion takeover deal.

On the 7th July, 2010, EC approval was issued for a new chewable type of Lipitor which can be used by 10 year old children. Now, if, as we are told, there are nearly 7 billion people on the planet, then the goal presumably is to get as many of these as possible chewing Lipitor every day at several dollars a crunch.

The first home-grown dinosaur in Ireland was introduced by Tony Ryan then an Aer Lingus executive, co-founder of Ryanair. Tony built this country's biggest business [GPA], a commercial aircraft sales and leasing company in 1975. At its peak, it was valued at \$4 billion net income.

Here was a company expected to grow phenomenally. It was to be a super stock, expected to account for one-fifth of the entire market value of the Irish Exchange. There was to be a simultaneous mid-summer launch in London, New York, Tokyo and Dublin. However, international stock markets were jittery in the early 1990s and then there was The Gulf War. Within a year, Guinness Peat Aviation was in serious trouble.

The (GECAS) dinosaur was waiting in the wings. GE Capital Aviation Services is the largest owner/lessor of commercial aircraft in the world and is part of the US General Electric Company. It gobbled up GPA and now has a base in Shannon which is its largest operational centre outside of the US. *Céad míle fáilte and ad multos annos* to the GECAS Dinosaur, going forward, as we say!

So, the fact is this, every large institution that means to survive on this planet has to become a dinosaur. Something in our nature, which comes from the dinosaur, impels us to construct mirror images of our terrifying ancestors as external correlatives of ourselves. It is as if, inside every tiny human being, there is a dinosaur trying to get out. Unless your business is big and boisterous, it is never going to endure. The Catholic Church has over one billion members living in almost every country in the world and is the oldest religious institution in existence. So, the Roman Catholic Church inevitably became a dinosaur, in its institutional aspect, over the 2,000 years of its existence.

The Church is a human organization which travels through history as a dweller on this planet, even though those of us who belong to it believe that it is also a divinely appointed institution which is perennially guided by the Holy Spirit. We have to recognize, therefore, that the Church is a twofold phenomenon. St Augustine puts this in another way:¹

The Church knows two lives which have been laid down and commended to her by God. One is through faith, the other through vision. The apostle Peter personifies the first life, John the second. The first has no place except on earth; it lasts only to the end of the present age and comes to an end in the next world. The second life has no end . . . To preserve the still and secret heart of this second life, John the Evangelist rested on Christ's breast: sublime knowledge proclaimed by John concerning the trinity and unity of the whole godhead, which in his kingdom we shall see face to face, but now, until the Lord comes, we must behold in a glass darkly. It was not only John who drank: the Lord himself has spread John's gospel throughout the world, so that according to each one's capacity all people may drink it.'

¹ Augustine on St John's Gospel, Homily 124,5,7.

The esoteric church of St John (the 'heart' of the Church), is distinct from the exoteric Church of St Peter (the 'head' of the Church). When we talk of the Church as dinosaur and the Church as inner spiritual presence, we are not talking about two separate realities or an ecclesiological Nestorianism, whereby the Church would be Clark Kent in everyday attire and then disappear into a telephone booth to turn into Superman. It was never the intention or the role of John to found a new Church, that was always Peter's charism. No, the Church is one, but, as such, the Church is both divine and human, as is her founder. The Church as the Petrine Church, is a necessary though cumbersome outer shell for the Church as Spirit, or the Johannine Church, which is its inner mystical life of relationship with God. And this inner mystical relationship is continued throughout history between person and person.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the essential mystery upon which any faith in Christianity is based, was an unwitnessed event. No human person was present. Witnesses have testified to having seen his empty tomb; others claim to have met Him in his resurrected humanity; but no one knows how or when his dead body was brought back to life.

Christ came on earth to reveal the mystery of that life which is lived eternally by the three persons of the Trinity. This mystery was best understood by the beloved disciple, St John, who then, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, found the words most appropriate to expressing it in language available to our understanding. However, even he recognised that his words were poor and trembling substitutes and that his efforts recorded only a fraction of the reality he sought to convey. 'This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.'²

The double reality of the Church, the human, all-too-human carapace, makes it necessary for us to winnow the corn and jettison the chaff which every century of Christianity inevitably reaps. In the Parable of the tares, Jesus tells us: 'Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'³

The Church is a relationship between persons. It is founded on a person, by a person, through other particular persons. Tradition for Christianity is the process whereby the mystery of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God's love in person, is transmitted by his followers. These followers are now organized into an official body called the church. However, the truth which they transmit is ultimately derived from an oral preaching by the original bearers of this truth (which is no more and no less than privileged contact with Jesus Christ as the Risen Lord in person) passed on in many different ways through the ever-present agency of the Holy Spirit. Every form and variety of tradition must travel the narrow path between these two translations. At every moment we can be betraying the truth and preventing people from seeing it.

² John 21: 24-25.

³ Matthew, 13:30.

Tradition itself is free of every determination and cannot be contained in any formula, locality, or cultural manifestation; any historical embodiment limits it.

What the church is, its reality, is handed on, handed down, from persons to persons in a relationship of faith, hope and love. The word to 'hand on' or 'hand down' from which our word 'tradition' derives is the same word in Latin for 'betrayal'. Jesus was handed over [same word 'tradere' in Latin] by Judas to persons who would murder him. As J.D.Salinger puts it: 'I like Jesus and all, but I don't care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible. Take the Disciples, for instance. They annoy the hell out of me, if you want to know the truth. They were all right after Jesus was dead and all, but while He was alive, they were about as much use to Him as a hole in the head. All they did was keep letting Him down. I like almost anybody in the Bible better than the Disciples.'⁴

Much of what has happened during the 2000 year history of Christianity is open to such an accusation. Crimes and horrors have been perpetrated by its members and in its name. However, in spite of the aberrant behaviour of many of Christianity's adherents the truth which it embodies and which is its direct source and origin is still the truth that can save us and save our world. And by 'save' I mean accomplish for us, in us, through us, the highest form of life possible to imagine, both now and in eternity.

The church of Christ is founded on a silent personal mystery which can never be translated adequately into human words. All speech about this reality is necessarily fumbling: a stab at the truth. Tradition of the mystery always risks betrayal. And yet we have to formulate the wonderful works of God into some enduring shape so that they are never forgotten and so that they can be passed on from generation to generation. However, like the written notation which preserves great musical works, the encodement is nothing without the music which must be realised in every generation. Unless the music is actually heard it remains a disembodied skeleton in the score. Similarly, all credal formulae, dogmatic tracts, articles of faith, articulations of the mysteries of Christianity, are humble servants of a much greater and quite other reality which no person in the world can claim as a possession. No person or people, no church or catechism, no dogma or denomination incorporates the mystery of our faith. Definitive incorporation of this mystery took place in the person of Jesus Christ. Post-Christian elaboration of this visitation must be the work of the Holy Spirit.

Even at the most turbulent and scandalous moments in Church history there was always at least one person who kept the flame of 'right relationship' or orthodoxy alive. Maximus the Confessor (born in 580; died in exile 13 August, 662) was one who confessed true belief in who Jesus Christ really was, even when the Pope Honorius (625 to 638) was ready to condone the monothelite heresy.⁵

⁴ J.D.Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Penguin Modern Classics, 1967, Pp. 104-5.

⁵ Monothelitism is teaching which began in Armenia and Syria in AD 633 and held considerable support during the 7th century AD before being officially condemned at the Third Council of Constantinople. It was really an extension of the monophysite position of earlier Christological arguments, hammered out in the seven councils previously mentioned. It wanted to believe that Jesus Christ had no human will of his own but had only one divine will. Maximus and others held to the true doctrine, at great physical cost to himself, that Jesus Christ has two wills (human and divine) corresponding to his two natures.

Later, from the second half of the thirteenth century to the first half of the fifteenth century, when the Church was awash with antipopes, two of the greatest mystics of the world, Julian of Norwich (c. November 8, 1342 – c. 1416) and Catherine of Siena (25 March 1347 in Siena – 29 April 1380 in Rome), kept open the vital connection with the three Persons of the Trinity while the Church was being led astray. At the beginning of the fifteenth Century, for instance, Pope Gregory XII (1406-15), who died the year before Julian of Norwich herself died, was opposed by no less than three antipopes: Benedict XIII, antipope (1394-1417) John XXIII, antipope(1400-1415) and Alexander V (1409-1410). One might have presumed that the Holy Spirit would have regarded this as three popes too many, but as it turned out, the Holy Spirit decided that this was four popes too many and got rid of the whole lot of them in favour of Pope Martin V who was elected as the 207th successor to St Peter in 1417.

The Church is prone to every form of political intrigue and power-seeking corruption. Wherever human beings are vying with one another for control they are all subject to the dark forces which penetrate each one of us. *'The frontline between good and evil, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn suggests in his book The Gulag Archipelago, doesn't run between classes and parties but right through the human heart. It doesn't stay the same but varies over the years. You will find a bridgehead of goodness in a heart possessed by evil. And the most well-meaning heart contains an unassailable pocket of evil.'* The Church as an historical structure must eventually disappear altogether. When the kingdom comes there will no further need for earthly paraphernalia. The only thing that endures is love. Love began the Church and love is her only end. Her role is to deliver her children over to love and then disappear. So the Petrine Church is a very human organization which can make many mistakes.

Institutional religion, and certainly Christianity the religion, is always a human construct. It is itself a work of human hands and manned [sic] by ordinary men and women who are no more gifted by the grace of God than the rest of us . . . Christians must recognize the fact that they have regularly distorted the truth of the faith of Jesus, in various ways and to varying degrees over virtually the whole history of their religion.⁶

The Catholic Church is not simply an organization it is more properly described as an organism. That is: it is not simply constituted by the macrocosm of its totality, it is alive and well and fully present in each part of itself wherever 'two or three are gathered in my name.'⁷ The renewal of the Church must begin and end with the action which Christ performed at the institution of the Eucharist. 'Do this in memory of me'. It is a deed that we do, rather than a manifesto which we proclaim. Christ is remembered after 2000 years in a series of cultic actions which are known to the faithful as the Liturgy of the Eucharist or more popularly as the Mass. This constitutive event is available to every unit of the Church; every local church in Ireland is, therefore, a Temple of the Lord. Now, the truth is this: unless the church anywhere is founded on the vital connection between at least one living person and the living God, it is in danger of going astray. Apostolic foundation and succession

⁶ James P. Mackey, *Christianity and Creation, The Essence of the Christian Faith and its Future among Religions*, A Systematic Theology, Continuum, New York & London, 2006, Pp 397.

⁷ Matthew, 18:20.

are dependent upon living connection in the here and now between at least one person in the church and the living God. ‘When I return will I find faith upon earth’⁸ is a moment by moment concern of the three persons of the Trinity. And they are not going to find this in empty churches, curiae, tabernacles or ciboria, they will find it only in living persons. The church is founded on people and not on stones or documents, legal formulae or dogmatic treatises. Unless it is anchored in a living relationship between the risen Christ as a person, and the person of someone graced by the Holy Spirit, which allows them to say with utter conviction that Jesus is Lord, and that God is Father, there is no guaranteed church in that place. All secondary tributaries of the river of life, institutional, pedagogical, liturgical, structural, socio-economic or political are dependent upon personal connection with the source. And the source is real relationship with the living God.

The mystery of what happens on and around the altar, which is so vitally important to the authentic life of any community, is the mystery of connection between the person of Jesus Christ, his real presence, and the person or persons of those who surround that altar. Ultimately the anchor is personal faith.

And, fortunately for us, there are still huge reservoirs of this faith in every part of this country, despite all the evidence to the contrary and in spite of all scandals and stumbling blocks which have been thrown in their way over the last fifty years. The renewal of the Irish Church will take place in communion with all such persons, many of whom, I am sure, are among this gathering here this evening.

Personally, I do not subscribe to a Catholicism which fails to live up to this name. Catholic means ‘universal’ which means open to and embracing the whole universe. And this means recognising that Judeochristianity is one religion stemming from the revelation of the one God; that the break between Judaism and Christianity is similar to that between Protestantism and Catholicism, a break in the overall unity which should never have occurred. Jews and Christians belong to the Catholicism which stems from the God of Abraham [also recognised by Moslems] and Isaac and Jacob, and which [in our view] reaches its culmination and fulfilment of revelation in Jesus Christ [the Messiah that Judaism has announced through its prophets], who is God incarnate.

The Church [the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic] must, as an organisation, embody the Holy Spirit of Christ. Until it does so, it remains human, fallible and faulty, not yet having reached its full potential. I believe in God and I believe that the Holy Spirit is gradually improving the mechanisms which might change the church from being the fragmented, self-opinionated, thick-headed, sexist, male-dominated organisation that cultural forces in our patriarchal world have allowed it to become. I believe that it can and will eventually become the transparent image of the God it was meant to be serving. I shall work as hard as I can to remove such dross and clean these windows, so that all manner of thing may be well, and that all may be one, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mark Patrick Hederman.

⁸ Luke, 18:8.