

Godspell 28th July 2024 Saint Anthony's Parish Clontarf Out of Darkness by Austin Iverrigh PART 4

During July/ August the Parish Newsletter takes a break. I would like to invite and encourage you over the coming weeks, to read this article which was written in The Tablet Magazine on 20th February this year by Austin Iverrigh. It was inspired by a book entitled "Afternoon Christianity" by a visionary Czech.

Priest- philosopher, Fr Tomas Halik, who sees the crisis facing the Church heralding not the extinction of Christianity, but its transformation.

The old category of dividing belief from unbelief, practicing from non-practicing are insufficient.

A extract from the article will be printed each week. Perhaps you could read it as an alternative to my sermon! Fr Larry

The Afternoon of Christianity is dedicated to Francis, "with reverence and gratitude", and begins by quoting him on the importance of uncertainty in faith: "If one has the answers to all the questions – that is the proof God is not with him," says Francis to Antonio Spadaro in 2013, adding: "It means he is a false prophet using religion for himself." Today, says Halik, the greatest differences are not between the Churches but within them, between very different ideas about God and ways of being religious: ones capable of self-transcendence, and others whose faith is essentially ideology.

At the same time, he sees the walls between believers and non-believers are coming down: dogmatic believers and militant atheists are being marginalised by the rise of those for whom faith and unbelief are intertwined, or at least not so easily separated. (Imagine a dialogue between a faithful Mass-going Catholic who is disillusioned with the Church and a Catholic who no longer goes to church but spends time in nature because "it feels more spiritual". Then imagine either of them talking to a militant atheist or believer convinced they have all the answers.)

The "soft secularisation", especially among the young believers-without-belonging, the seeker-searchers, is the place where Halik discovers the "hidden Christian stream" in Western culture, one that often reflects an intrinsic religiosity – open, tolerant, flexible, socially sensitive, sacrificial, sympathetic. The point here is that *how* we believe (*fides qua*) is as important as *what* we believe (*fides quae*): converted life, in other words, shows in how we live in relationship to God, Creation and each other. Whatever I might believe about the origin of the universe, what affirms my relationship with God is how I treat fellow creatures, human and non-human. The Spirit blows where it wills; faith can be manifest, or latent; God is welcomed, or resisted, in humans' hearts, whatever their belief.

So when there is a growing disjuncture between those two, when we are confronted with the "faith of unbelievers" – especially the fanaticism that masks unbelief, belonging without believing, Catholicism without Christianity – in contrast to the "unbelief of believers", Halik's point resonates. The old categories dividing belief from unbelief, faith from atheism, practising from nonpractising, are insufficient.

In calling Catholicism to a humble, dialogical, "third ecumenism", Halik means not just building a bridge between Churches and faiths, but now between believers and nones. The future of Christianity, he says in *Afternoon*, "will depend primarily on the extent to which Christians relate to the spiritual seekers among the nones". This is a mission *ad gentes*, not to small groups: nones are the third largest "religious" group in Western society, after Christians and Muslims, but won't be for long. Recently Switzerland became the first country where more citizens claim no religious affiliation (34 per cent) than the largest religious group, the Catholics (32 per cent). In culturally church-going America, those who deeply dislike organised religion have been growing for three decades, and are close now to a third of the population.

TO BE CONTNUED NEXT WEEK

