

Keeping the Vision Alive

A Modern-day Parable

There was a marvelous little parable found among the papers of the Benedictine, John Main, after his death.¹ It tells the story of a young boy who went for a walk with his elderly uncle one Sunday afternoon in the beautiful city where they lived. Called Secular City, it nestled in a picturesque valley in the mountains, a truly modern city with striking architecture and many wonderful buildings. As always, the young boy was awestruck at the beauty of his native city; it looked particularly enthralling, almost fairylike, in afternoon sunshine.

As the afternoon wore on they strolled into an older part of the city, where the young boy had never been before. Quite unexpectedly, they came upon a building in ruins. The boy was very taken aback with this unexpected sight and asked his uncle where this ruin had come from and what it was doing there in his beautiful city.

The old man began to reflect back over years gone by. ‘When I was a boy of your age’, he said, ‘this house was one of the finest in the city. It had a rather unusual feature – there was a very high tower at one side of the building; if you look over there you can see what’s left of it quite clearly. Apparently there was an incredible view from the top of that tower, though I never saw it myself.’ ‘So’, said the young boy, ‘how did it all end up like this?’ ‘A rather usual group of people lived here’, replied the old man. ‘They called themselves a community. Now that I think of it they did quite a lot for the city, although we didn’t pay much notice at the time. They ran schools, hospitals and orphanages and it was said that no poor person who came to their door was ever turned away. The amazing thing was they attached great importance to the view from the tower. No matter how busy they were there were always some members of the community at the top of the tower to watch the view; they believed it influenced the way they lived and worked. And there was certainly something in it, the old man said, because the rest of us

¹ This delightful story was first published in the Dominican review, *Spirituality*, in 1996, under the title ‘A Tale of the Secular City’.

tended to be turned in on ourselves and our own problems; perhaps it had something to do with the fact that the city is surrounded by mountains.” “Well, what happened?” asked the young boy. “Did someone drive them out of the city?”

“It all began with the stairs”, the old man replied. “Over the years the stairs going up the tower got rather shaky; as far as I understand dry rot or woodworm set in. So they called the community together one day to discuss the situation. Various suggestions were put forward to address the problem. One of the older members pointed out that the stairs had stood them in good stead over many years and the simplest and least expensive way was to replace the stairs with a similar wooden one. Someone else said that he felt that this was only postponing a problem – sooner or later they would be back in the same situation again. Something more durable was required perhaps a stone stairs that would stand the test of time. Another member of the community, I think it was the youngest one, pointed out that times had changed; why not put in an elevator, which would enable the members of the community to get up and down much more easily, especially as they grew older. All sorts of objections were raised to the new suggestions: apart from the obvious question of finance, would the walls, and in particular the foundations, support the proposed structures?”

“So the community was divided into commissions.” “What is a commission”, asked the boy. “It’s a small group of people to look at a particular aspect of a problem. They usually send out questionnaires, which give rise to further suggestions. I never quite understood the process but apparently it is quite essential. There were different commissions, one for finance, another for architecture, another to investigate the foundations and so on. The problem was that with all these discussions and with the state of the stairs, there were fewer and fewer people going up the tower until, in the end, it seemed that no one went any more.” “Did they not realize that if they kept the view in sight it would have helped them in the commissions?”, asked the young boy incredulously.

“You are right”, replied the old man, “but you shouldn’t be too hard on them; it was not an easy problem to solve. In the end the community turned out like the rest of us, caught up in their own internal issues and problems. But, it’s getting late”, he said, “it’s time to go home. The young boy went closer for a final look. There seemed to be some noise deep down in the foundations; could it be that there was someone down there still trying to come up with a solution? As the old man and his nephew moved away and turned toward home, the young boy sighed once more: “If only they had kept the view.”

The Spiritan Vision – Always old, ever new

We are privileged to share in the vision of a young man who, over 300 years ago, abandoned his wealth and a bright academic future to dedicate himself totally to the education of poor students for the evangelization of the poor of his day². Successive generations of Spiritans have been inspired by the same vision; it has led them to many different places, peoples and cultures around the globe, to give their energy, their talents, and in many cases their very lives, to make the dream of Claude Poullart des Places a reality³.

Of course, just as the view from the top of the tower in Secular City varies somewhat as the seasons follow each other and as new buildings give a different configuration to the skyline, so too the Spiritan vision, with the same essential focus, has altered as our self

² *They shall be ready for everything under the control of their superiors: ready to serve in hospices, to preach the gospel to the poor and even the infidels, ready not merely to accept but to love wholeheartedly and prefer above everything else the lowly and laborious positions in the Church for which it is difficult to find ministers* [Rule of 1734].

The priests educated at Holy Spirit Seminary quickly gained a reputation for their zeal and commitment. Fr Charles Besnard, the 18th century biographer of St. Louis de Montfort, wrote: “Whether it is a question of being exiled to the remote countryside or buried in the caverns of a hospital, teaching in a college, lecturing in a seminary...or even crossing the seas and going to the ends of the earth..., their motto is ‘Behold we are ready to do Thy will’.”

Similarly, the Abbot of Isle Dieu testified in 1769: “The priests educated at Holy Ghost Seminary ...have always surpassed my hopes, without a single one of them ever disappointing me” [Quoted in H. Koren , *Essays...*, pp.116-117.

³ In an address to the Irish Provincial Chapter in 2006 Fr. Jean-Paul Hoch expressed his conviction that there would always be a Congregation called the Congregation of the Holy Spirit: “My conviction about the permanence of the Congregation...is not based on the study of statistics but on yet another conviction: that our Congregation is truly a gift that God has given, and continues to give, to the Church and to the world. Today, and even more in the future, the Church and the world have need of the charism that has been confided to us – the evangelization of the poor, in the light of the spirituality that characterizes us.”

understanding of the mission entrusted to us has evolved and as our membership and the world in which we live and minister have changed.

Today we understand that mission is no longer simply geographical, but that there are frontiers of poverty, injustice, marginalization and incredulity in the so-called developed countries to which we belong⁴. We see that mission involves the integral liberation of people from all that oppresses them⁵; we understand our role not merely in terms of accomplishing tasks but as sharing our faith and our lives with people, in a ministry of presence, of solidarity and of humble, respectful service⁶. We are aware that collaboration is an essential dimension of contemporary mission; working with others strengthens us in our commitment and opens up new possibilities for us in the service of the Gospel⁷.

The face of our Congregation too has changed radically since those early days; Poullart des Places could never have dreamt that the small group he gathered together in Paris on Pentecost Sunday 1703 would one day evolve into a multi-cultural Congregation comprising members from six different continents and an ever-increasing spectrum of cultural origins. Current statistics from the generalate in Rome indicate that 1,215 or 41.7% of our total membership of 2,914 is now from Africa, a percentage that will very soon equal and quickly surpass that of Europe, which stands today at 47.7%, with the four provinces of North America comprising just about 5.5%. In 1980 the respective

⁴ *Mission is not to be conceived primarily in geographical terms but as a crossing of cultural boundaries and a reaching out to groups of people who are abandoned, excluded and oppressed. As these frontiers and situations change, the front-line of mission must also move. A balance has to be found between the consolidation of works we have already started and an openness to new horizons.* [Maynooth, Introduction to 2.5]

⁵ cf. SRL 14

⁶ *Recently, a certain style of Spiritan approach to mission has emerged more clearly: more emphasis is put on being close to people, on the quality of our life and presence, on solidarity, on opening up to new horizons and a greater collaboration with others... We go to people not primarily to accomplish a task, but rather to be with them, live with them, walk beside them, listen to them and share our faith with them. At the heart of our relationship is trust, respect and love* [cf. Maynooth, Chapter 2, Our Mission, Introduction]

⁷ *The Chapter experiences underlined how collaboration is an essential dimension of contemporary mission...so there is a need for a radical change in our outlook and approach.* [Maynooth, Chapter 5, Collaborative Ministry, The Spiritan Charism]

percentages were 3.9% from Africa, 85% from Europe and 10.4% from North America.⁸ The respective percentages of confreres currently in formation around the globe puts the future clearly in perspective: 816 or 84.6% of the total number of 944 come from Africa, 49 or 5.2% from Latin America, 37 or 4% from Europe and 10 or just over 1% from the combined North American Provinces. The picture, of course, is not complete today without acknowledging the increasing number of lay people who wish to be associated with our life and work. We have come to realize, led undoubtedly by the Holy Spirit, that the charism we have inherited from our founders is not the prerogative of the professed members of the Congregation but that lay people are called to share in it and to live the Spiritan charism in the context of their vocation in the secular world.⁹ The view perceived by an African or a Latin American or an Asian confrere or a lay Spiritan from the top of the tower will necessarily differ somewhat from each other and differ too from an American or European perspective.

Rediscovering the Spiritual Vision

In think it is true, however, that over the years we began to lose sight of some aspects of the spiritual vision we have inherited from our founders. An over emphasis on accomplishment, on achievement, led us often to forget that we are only workers in the vineyard, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs, to use the words of Oscar Romero. Today we have begun to rediscover a fundamental aspect of the spiritual heritage we owe in particular to Francis Libermann, namely that the mission is primarily God's not ours, that God alone can touch and change the hearts of people, and that we are merely servants in his hands. It is an insight that makes for a less stressful, more humble and joyful ministry.¹⁰ The demands of ministry too often took precedence over community life and prayer in common, something that Libermann saw as a danger even in his own

⁸ In 1992 the percentages were as follows: Africa 15.8%; Europe 73%; North America 8.6%. In 1998 the statistics were as follows: Africa 24%; Europe 65.1%; North America 7.6%

⁹ Laurent Boisvert. in a booklet entitled "Laïcs associés à un institut religieux" [Editions Bellarmin, 2001, cf. pp. 17-18] points out that the challenge for religious congregations today is to distil the essence of its charism from its religious expression so that it can be applied and lived by laypeople in the secular context.

¹⁰ P. Schouver once pointed out that what hurt people most over the years in our ministry were not our mistakes but our pretensions: *The greatest threats to our mission are not our limitations or our faults and weaknesses, but a certain self-assurance which can make us difficult to live and work with and can cut us off from others.* [Spiritan Anniversary Diary 1703-2003, Preface, p. 1]

day and repeatedly warned against for a truly effective apostolate. Today we have begun to realize once again that mission is, *above all, a witness through the quality of our lives and that we are called to conversion and transformation by a process of kenosis.*¹¹

Several developments have led us to be more aware of our weakness and fragility

- the recent scandals in the Church, which have touched all of us deeply- perhaps more deeply than we would care to admit. If we are honest with ourselves we will have to acknowledge that there is a gap in all our lives between the image we project and the reality that we live;
- ageing and diminishing resources coupled with a dramatic fall in the number of those presenting themselves to share our life, which have meant the closing of many traditional works to which we were closely attached;
- an increasingly secularized world where the priest and religious no longer enjoy the prestige and esteem they had in the past and where our deepest faith convictions are questioned;
- an increasingly well-educated laity that claims its rightful place in the Church and on occasions leaves us feeling theologically inadequate.

The celebration of the Spiritan Year, of course, should have helped us recall that our beginnings as a missionary family were very humble indeed and that the Holy Spirit can accomplish wonders with very limited resources – ‘a bunch of poor people’, in Libermann’s words - if we are open to his voice.

Perhaps most importantly of all we have begun to rediscover the need for a deep personal spirituality to underpin our life and mission in an increasingly secularized, and indeed violent, world. We have begun to see, as Francis Libermann taught us, that prayer and contemplation are at the heart of mission if we are truly to share in God’s vision of the world and be effective ministers of God’s Word¹². *“Prophetic action is the public face of*

¹¹ Maynooth 2.3, introduction

¹² One of the effects of contemplative union with God, according to Libermann, is the ability to see God’s action in the life of others and the way in which to lead people to God. “If you are full of the love of God...you will be profoundly touched at the sight of the misery of the people among whom you find yourselves; consequently it will be in your thoughts always day and night; you will be weary to the point of

mysticism. Contemplation is the root of public engagement...Only a life of ever-deepening and faithful contemplation can keep the prophet attuned to the divine pathos, to the dream of a suffering God for humanity and earth."¹³ As people search for meaning in this fragmented and alienating postmodern world, we are beginning to see again that theology and preaching must be grounded in spiritual experience, that the Good News is not primarily a doctrine or a set of moral codes but a personal experience of the liberating presence of Jesus Christ in our own lives, and that our task is try to put words on our experience for others. We realize too, more than in the past, that we need each other, that we depend on each other for mutual support and for inspiration¹⁴, and that we need the support of a praying community that is genuinely life-giving for ourselves and for our ministry.¹⁵ In addition, the witness value of community living, of brothers dwelling together in joy, harmony and peace¹⁶, particularly where this involves confreres from different cultural backgrounds, is becoming increasingly apparent in a world of growing alienation and trivialization of relationships, where many believe it impossible for people of different ethnic backgrounds to live together in peace¹⁷.

exhaustion. You will pray to God to enlighten you and to touch them ; you will look for a way to bring them out of this blindness and without any doubt you will find a thousand ways of procuring the good of these souls..."[R.P., Chap. 10, Art. VIII, Glose]

¹³ Sandra Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2000, p.150.

¹⁴ "The life of faith, whether in the arena of prayer or of ministry, is difficult to sustain without the stimulus and the credibility lent to it by others who share it, and having support on a daily basis from people who are habitually, physically present is a gift" [Sandra Schneiders, *Selling All*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2001, p. 321]

¹⁵ "I see many signs that we are discovering the necessity of a prayer life of high quality and that we are taking steps to achieve this..."[Jean-Paul Hoch, Address to the Irish Provincial Chapter, 2006]

¹⁶ "Confreres, communities, circumscriptions who allow themselves to be contaminated by... division obviously have no credibility when they attempt to carry out a ministry of reconciliation" [Jean-Paul Hoch, Address to Irish Chapter, 2006]

¹⁷ *Conflict, racialism and the cult of the individual are all too prevalent in the world of today. By coming together from so many different places and cultures, we are saying to our brothers and sisters that the unity of the human race is not just an impossible dream. In this way our community life is an integral part of our mission and a powerful witness to the message of the Gospel* [Maynooth 4.16ff, introduction]

Interestingly, in recent surveys carried out regarding international community living, while the difficulties and challenges posed were readily acknowledged, all those who had experience of international living saw its advantages as out far outweighing its drawbacks. The only confreres who opposed the idea of international communities were those who had no direct experience of international community living.

The former Superior General wrote in his report to the General Chapter at Maynooth, 1998: *Community should be about honest relationships, even true friendships.*¹⁸

Interestingly, Sandra Schneiders singles out friendship as the type of relationship that should characterize religious communities with a potentially powerful witness value in the contemporary world: “Religious life should be as much a school of friendship and altruistic relationship as it is of prayer, which is the first friendship in the life of the celibate... Friends care not only about one another but about the causes and commitments they share... The *conditio sine qua non* of friendship is equality... Friendship is not about changing the other but about accepting the other as other. In the end, probably nothing changes people as profoundly as the experience of friendship, but the change comes from within in response to the love offered, not from without by argument or force ... In John, mission is primarily a matter of living the community life of friends in equality and mutual service, which will draw others to seek the source of that life and to desire to share in it... It is preaching by being, being together in friendship, reaching out in friendship.”¹⁹ We recall the words of Francis Libermann: “Your principal preaching is the life that you live.”²⁰

Keeping the Vision Alive Today

A key insight of the spiritual vision that we have inherited from Libermann is that God always comes to us and calls us in the reality of our concrete human situation.²¹ Fr Henry Koren saw this as intimately linked with his Jewish background. “[The pious Jew] lives in the consciousness that the proper place for his encounter with God lies in the ever-changing situation of life. Again and again he hears God’s voice in a different way in the

¹⁸ Superior General’s Report to the General Chapter, 2004, *Our Life Together*, Section 4.3.

¹⁹ Quotes taken from Sandra Schneiders, *Selling All*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2001, pp. 295-305.

²⁰ N.D. XIII, p. 144, Letter to M. Lairé, 8th May 1851.

²¹ There are many examples of this in Libermann’s own life. He saw the founding of his own society in this light: *The whole world is turning towards Africa*. He noted that it was not possible to write a homily in one’s room without taking into account the actual people to whom it was addressed, their ‘*states and dispositions*’, adding that Bossuet, despite his great oratorical powers, would have been useless as a missionary if he could not communicate the catechism to a poor uneducated African woman. Hence his call to be *African with the Africans...to leave them what belongs to them, to form them as they should be formed, not in a European way...That is what St. Paul calls making oneself all things to all people...*[N.D, IX, 330-331]

language spoken by unforeseen and changed situations”²² As Fr. Koren so eloquently put it: “The openness to experience demands our detachment from the past...As soon as the past is really past, it becomes a museum of what life used to be... The past becomes meaningless as soon as it no longer speaks to human beings to indicate to them the meaning, the direction of their lives.”²³ “...The mobility of mind that should characterize him demands that a Spiritan give up the position he has taken, the direction in which he has spent God knows how many years of his hard work, without regret and without clinging to the past as soon as experience shows that he was on the wrong track”²⁴ The words of Libermann himself are well known in this regard and present a perennial challenge: *The problem with the clergy is that it has always remained in the (idea of the) past. The world has moved on...and we remain behind ...To want to cling to the good old times and to remain attached to the customs and the spirit of times that are gone is to render our efforts useless...Let us firmly embrace the new order in freedom and simplicity and bring to it the spirit of the Gospel.*²⁵ This conviction is essential if we are to keep our vision alive as we face the future together. Sandra Schneiders puts it in a very succinct and challenging way; “A Congregation does not need, for effective ministry, any more members than it has.”²⁶

God is calling us as Spiritans in the reality of our situation here in the United States today with our limited resources, our ageing personnel, to keep alive the vision of our founders in our times, in the society of our day.²⁷ This conviction makes all the difference between

²² Martin Buber, quoted in H. Koren, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History*, Spiritus Press, Bethel Park, 1990, p.12

²³ H. Koren, *Essays...*, p.17

²⁴ H. Koren, *Essays...*, p. 18

²⁵ Letter to M. Gamon on voting in the French elections, 1848

²⁶ S. Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure*, p. 88

²⁷ The Brazilian theologian, Carlos Mesters, in an inspiring address to SEDOS in 1996, identified the time of the exile as particularly appropriate for interpreting the times in which we live today. It was a period when the former religious paradigms were broken down, when the very institutions that symbolized God’s presence with his people were taken from them, when the old evangelization could no longer interpret the facts. What saved the situation, so to speak, was a small group of people who continued to believe that God was present with his liberating action in their day as he was in the past, if only they had eyes to see it. “No need to remember past events, No need to think about what was done before, Look I am doing something new, Now it emerges; can you not see it?” Is 43:18-19. It was a time of exciting discovery and, in particular, of a new sense of mission. (cf. C. Mesters, *Religious Life and its Mission among the Poor in the Light of the Word of God*, SEDOS, 1996)

simply dying gracefully and accepting the mission that is entrusted to us today in creative fidelity to our charism. The words of the poet, Philip Larkin, capture it very well:

*Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms
inside your head, and people in them, acting
People you know and can't quite name: each looms
like a deep loss restored, from known doors turning,
setting down a lamp, smiling from a stair, extracting
a known book from the shelves; or sometimes only
the rooms themselves, chairs and a fire burning.
The blown bush at the window or the sun's faint friendliness
on the wall, some lonely rain-ceased mid-summer evening. That is where they live,
not here and now, but where all happened once.*²⁸

Secondly, it is imperative that we see that all we have and are- our religious and community life, our organization, our finances - are at the service of our mission. This means that identifying the mission to which we are called today, as carriers of the charism of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, takes priority over the issue of organization and structures; the latter is at the service of the former²⁹. “Your greatest problem should not be seen as how long can we keep going as a Province. The only problem is what is our mission in the present circumstances of our country? How should

²⁸ Philip Larkin, *The Old Fools*, in *High Windows*.

²⁹ In a CMSM Forum on *Restructuring Men's Religious Communities*, published in Spring 2001, the centrality of mission as the standard and reference point for restructuring was emphasized by all of the Congregations consulted.

The Marianist Provincial quotes the interchange between Alice and the Cheshire cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [Lewis Carroll, Norwalk, CT: The Heritage Press, 1969, p. 85]: “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” He adds that “In some way any governmental restructuring must be for the sake of the mission of the congregation...otherwise we are engaging in administrative reshuffling which will make no long term difference... We have to be credible witnesses of community and mission responding to the critical needs of our United States culture as Marianists.”(cf. Forum, pp. 3-7).

The Redemptorist Provincial, reflecting back five years after the merger of two Provinces, states that “...the main reason for doing so had to be for the sake of the mission. How could the creation of a new Province be more effective in assisting us to live out our mission...”(Forum, p.16)

The OMI Provincial effectively stresses the same point adding that “change for the sake of mission involves refocusing some current ministries and taking on new ministries in tune with the needs of our time” (Forum, p. 10)

we organize ourselves, alone or with others, to carry out this mission as well as possible?”³⁰ As you are aware there have been other restructurings of recent years elsewhere in the Congregation – the creation of the regionalized Provinces of Central Africa, Nigeria and the West African Province, the erection of Circumscription Europe – but in each case the new structures were created in function of the mission that had been previously identified.³¹ It is worth noting that these new structures are somewhat different in each case, adapted to the situation of the particular circumscription concerned, and that they are *ad experimentum* pending future development. This too is completely in line with the vision of Libermann: “To conceive matters exactly, they must be considered practically.”³² Libermann deliberately wrote a ‘provisional’ rule for his new Society because he believed that it could only be “fixed definitively after several years of experience.”³³ The challenge of the last General Chapter at Torre d’Aguilha is particularly relevant: “It is the option for the poor that makes us different in a society that excludes large sectors of the population...Attention to the poorest and the most abandoned is at the heart of the intuition of both Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann. This is an important criterion for our lifestyle and discerning the works we take on. The option for the poor means allowing these intuitions of the founders to change our attitudes, the choices we make and the work we do...”³⁴

Thirdly, to continue the metaphors of view and perspective, in the light of recent developments within the Congregation we probably need to re-envision the way that we perceive ourselves as a circumscription. To a certain extent the categories of Province (a self-sufficient entity, responsible for the formation of its members, for sending them on mission and for caring for them in illness and retirement) and District (a receiving entity, dependent for personnel on sending Provinces) no longer reflect the reality in which we find ourselves. In a very real sense – with the exception of the notion of ‘Province of

³⁰ Jean-Paul Hoch, Address to Irish Chapter, 2006.

³¹ Cf., for example, the case of Circumscription Europe: “The aim of Circumscription Europe is to ensure the continued presence of Spiritan mission in Europe, particularly through the development and animation of Missionary Projects in Europe” [Statutes Ad Experimentum, 1.1]

³² N.D., VII, p. 82; cf. also VIII, p. 36.

³³ N.D. II, p. 153. Cf. also N.D. IV, p. 410; VIII, p. 47; XIII, p. 318.

³⁴ Torre d’Aguilha 2004, 1.1.4.

Origin”- the lines that formerly clearly divided these different entities have become blurred and are tending to disappear.³⁵ The understanding of mission as no longer simply geographical means that mission is now conceived of as *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*; many smaller circumscriptions (Districts and Groups) now have their own formation programs; virtually all of the Provinces are dependent for their continued existence and vitality on regional collaboration and on the support of personnel from other circumscriptions.³⁶

Perhaps, if we take account of the current organizational and demographic evolutions, we are moving more towards the reality of *Spiritan missionary commitments in France, Ireland, U.S.A. etc.* rather than *French, Irish, American etc. commitments with support from other circumscriptions*. Issues of integration and belonging of confreres assigned to a circumscription are becoming increasingly more important on the part of the receiving circumscription, as are issues of identification with and commitment to on the part of those who are assigned. The degree of success with which these challenges are faced and met will have a very significant impact on the effectiveness of our mission, in terms of witness and service, on whether or not we will truly keep the marvelous view us from the top of the tower, the view that has been entrusted to us and of which we are the carriers today.

³⁵ Although some modifications were introduced to Chapter 7 of SRL at the last General Chapter only three years ago, the current Superior General stated at a recent gathering that he believed a complete revision of this chapter on organization is called for as the categories we use (Province, District etc.) no longer in practice conform to the lived reality in the Congregation (cf. Jean-Paul Hoch, Address to the Irish Chapter, 2006)

³⁶ “To carry out this mission, the help of confreres coming from the southern circumscriptions is not just useful and symbolically significant but increasingly necessary and indispensable” (Jean-Paul Hoch, Address to Irish Chapter, 2006)