

# faith

May and June 2012  
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Mark Vickers

## Was John Paul Great?

Joanna Bogle

## “The Glorious, Ever-Virgin Mary”: Our Lady as Model of Participation at Mass

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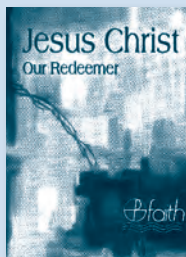
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by Edward Holloway

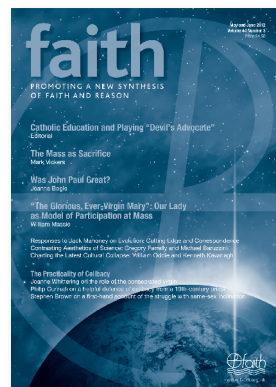
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May and June 2012  
Volume 44 Number 3

Early March saw the collapse of a section of our iconic white cliffs of Dover. We are told that there will now be a “full survey of the area”. In this edition **William Oddie** (Comment on the Comments) and **Kenneth Kavanagh** (Letters) capture the analogous nature of the seemingly imminent removal of Judaeo-Christian marriage from formal civil discourse. Our **editorial** describes a similar state of collapse concerning the Catholic vision of man in our schools – though it ends on a tentative note of hope.

As we enter the “Year of Faith”, a “full survey” of the British Church may be in order, to find out how we became so weak as to have lost such a pivotal, not to say epoch-making, battle. Perhaps we might even gain a new penitential spirit as we beg God to help our culture before it is dragged even deeper into the quicksands which Pope Benedict has been warning us about. The Chief Rabbi has been issuing such warnings since the early Eighties. For 40 years now *Faith* movement has been making the same point and proposing some ways forward.

Providentially this is also the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and we are being called to look carefully at its texts during the Year of Faith, which starts in October. Our last two **Road from Regensburg** columns have chronicled this call, and in this issue we present extracts of a recently published document from the Holy See’s International Theology Commission in which Vatican II looms large. Quoting *Gaudium et Spes* the document states:

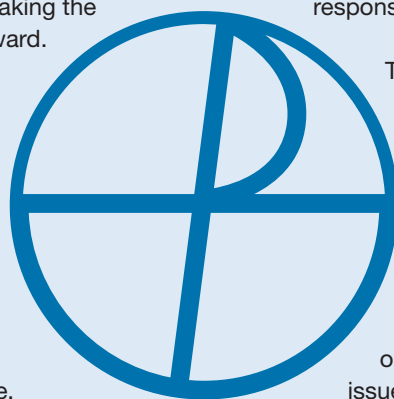
“With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the whole people of God, particularly of its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine Word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented.” [*Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World*, n. 44]

We surely need to be reminded of this teaching, which, as Pope Benedict emphasised in *Porta Fidei*, “can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church”. Henri de Lubac’s thought and the Theology of the Body are encouraging examples of an all too rarely found obedience to this call to faithful development. More often, within otherwise orthodox circles, this teaching seems to be downplayed in favour of a simple reassertion of Church teaching or an encouragement of reverent liturgy, crucial as both of these are.

Some justify turning a deaf ear to the Conciliar teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* by pointing to the word “pastoral” in its title, to its unusual aversion for definitive canons, and its

apparent emphasis upon the sixties concept of “progress”. Yet Pope Benedict has reaffirmed Blessed John Paul’s plea that “the texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers [...] be taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium” (see our second **letter**). *Gaudium et Spes* calls in particular for doctrinal development in the light of “progress” in human knowledge and culture.

In this regard, both Pope Benedict and Blessed John Paul have, for instance, repeatedly highlighted developments in technology and in our understanding of the rights of man. Another area for consideration would be the relationship of the human body to other forms of matter-energy across space and time. For example, in his recent, well-received book, *Christianity in Evolution*, Jack Mahoney SJ has used evolution to challenge the Church’s crucial affirmation of the existence of the spiritual soul (see our third **letter**). The second part of our **Cutting Edge** column outlines our response to this challenge.



The first part of the same column deals with a topic that has recently become more prominent in the Christian interpretation of our scientific knowledge of the world, namely our experience of beauty. Rather than allow this experience to float free of the moorings of actual science, as Jürgen Moltmann appears to do, we would prefer to ground it in the dynamic of scientific observation, along the lines indicated in this issue’s **Notes from Across the Atlantic**.

The theology of the Mass is another area which we think is ripe for development, especially given the affirmation in *Gaudium et Spes* that “in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history” (n.10). Fathers **Mark Vickers** and **William Massie** offer some insights in this regard.

In our January editorial, “Christian Formation: Where do we start?”, we wrote: “Throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s *Faith* movement carried the flag in the UK for [orthodox] doctrinal catechesis ... made [even less fashionable] by our calls for a real development of doctrine and theological expression ... There are now many voices championing orthodoxy ...[which] are greatly to be welcomed.”

But, as Edward Holloway concluded in his 1996 piece entitled “Is neo-orthodoxy enough” (reprinted in our January 2004 edition, and available on our website): “All reform has come from the teaching of new wisdom and the original sanctity in the Church. Yes, we must welcome the neo-orthodoxy; but yes, it is only the platform on which a great and beautiful fullness of the Gift of God is to be built.”



# Catholic Education and Playing “Devil’s Advocate” *Editorial*

**“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2)**

A class of children aged 13 to 14 is ready for an RE lesson. The plan is to discuss a controversial subject (abortion, contraception, gay marriage, celibacy, or women priests ... tick the box.) The teacher says sagely, with a conspiratorial smile: “I’m going to play devil’s advocate.” He then skilfully sets out the case for the opposite of what the Church teaches; the youngsters then have to argue against him.

This might not be a bad activity for a group of well-informed young people, committed to their faith, to assist them in the task of apologetics and evangelisation. Such a lesson would need to include at the end a run-down of the best answers to some of the questions that they struggled with, confident advice on how to deal with the more difficult objections to the Church’s teaching, and an affirmation of the truth of the Catholic faith. Sadly this rarely happens, more because of a prevailing culture than through the fault of the usually very professional teacher.

This not infrequent exercise is usually based on the absurdly unrealistic idea that pupils unthinkingly parrot Catholic dogma, and need to have their horizons widened to understand the views of others in a secular world. The “devil’s advocate” objections to the faith can confuse the Catholic pupils who have some knowledge of their faith, since the objections come from a teacher. However much he might cherish the sub-marxist idea of being a facilitator of pupil-centred learning, he is, like it or not, an authority figure and the path to loss of faith is made wider and easier.

In his New Year Pastoral Letter, Bishop Campbell of Lancaster pointed out that, in terms of committed membership, we have experienced a transition from Christianity adhered to out of social convention, to Christianity once again being a way of discipleship that is deliberately chosen by relatively few. The “Let me play devil’s advocate” strategy is bizarrely inappropriate in such a situation, as it assumes that the young people in our secondary schools are so indoctrinated that they need to be shaken out of the complacency of a life of faith based on social approval.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In many Catholic secondary school classes, there are few young people who enthusiastically practise the faith. The editorial of the February edition of *The Catholic Voice of Lancaster* observed what many parish priests have found to their alarm, that it is not uncommon for children from practising families to be bullied by other children because they are such a tiny minority in schools in which the majority of children, and teachers, are either non-practising or non-Catholic.

In such a situation, the “devil’s advocate” approach profoundly undermines the position of the committed and practising Catholic young people, and effectively reinforces the loss of faith of the young people on the fringe of Catholic

practice and just looking for an excuse to drop out. Sometimes it can seem reasonable to ask whether the teacher really is only pretending to support the anti-Catholic position. One might ask “Why not play God’s advocate just for a change?”

## Theological Issues

The senior management of many Catholic schools are of an age to have experienced the introduction of the “new catechetics” through the infamous Corpus Christi college and the like, or to have grown up with the projects and RE materials that this new philosophy spawned. Over the years, we have examined and critiqued these materials in *Faith*, but now we are no longer a voice crying in the wilderness. Bishop Campbell is only the latest to acknowledge the very real problems that have resulted; and we are profoundly grateful to him for doing so – as, we are sure, are many others. Yet there remains a general ignorance in the senior management age group of what has happened in the Church in the pontificates of Blessed John Paul II and Pope Benedict, of the revival of faith, whether through new movements or the rediscovery of the tradition of the Church.

There is a certain recognition of the enthusiasm of World Youth Days and the Papal Visit to Britain, but generally there is no real understanding of the project of the last two Popes. We also need to bear in mind that in many Catholic schools, the proportion of practising Catholic staff has dropped alarmingly. Many years ago, the *Memorandum on the Appointment of Catholic Teachers* used to state that for all teaching posts in Catholic schools, a practising Catholic applicant should be preferred, all other things being equal, and that for head, deputy and head of RE posts, a practising Catholic was essential.

This was diluted in 2003: the requirement for a practising Catholic applicant to be preferred for all posts was replaced with the expression that finding Catholics was a “high priority”. Concerning the new “free” schools there seems to be a lack of clarity concerning guarantees of some of these basic aspects of Catholicity. In many Catholic secondary schools the proportion of non-Catholic teachers is now as high as 70 per cent. Of the Catholics, some will be practising, some not. Of the practising Catholics, some will accept magisterial teaching, some not.

## Problems

All of this creates an environment in which problems arise that can demoralise parish clergy in their relationships with schools. At the school Mass, pupils will be marshalled up to Holy Communion without any reference to their practice of the faith. It is assumed that all who are nominally Catholic are properly disposed to receive Holy Communion, even if they have not actually attended Mass during the past year or two. Inevitably there are problems with how pupils receive

# Catholic Education and Playing “Devil’s Advocate”

## continued

Communion, and, not rarely, instances of the desecration of the sacred species. If the priest complains, he is considered to be part of the problem.

For priests in London and the South-east who have to take on the traumatic responsibility of signing school forms to say whether applicants go to Mass regularly or not, it is dismaying to find that the same pupils a year later are signed up for a weekend school trip on which no provision is made for attending Sunday Mass. He may also be faced with incomprehension and hostility when he tries to persuade the school not to support “Red Nose Day” or “Jeans for Genes”; when he suggests that asking pupils to stand at the front of the class and shout out the names of intimate body parts is an invasion of their modesty; when he objects to the non-Catholic geography teacher’s presentation of solutions for over-population, the “gay rights” agenda seeping in through text books, the chaplaincy co-ordinator’s failure to get abortion agency leaflets removed from the library, or the school nurse’s distribution of cards with information on how to get the morning-after pill.

For a teacher or priest to attempt to challenge such situations can be precarious. They might be considered “rigid” or “conservative” unlike the nice people at “The Diocese” who recognise that we have to live in a pluralist society and we must not try to create a Catholic enclave with a “ghetto mentality” in a secular society.

It is no wonder that some priests are beginning to ask themselves how they might use their limited time to better effect. Not a few still valiantly attend governors’ meetings, spending hours of their valuable time in the evenings rubber-stamping the latest government initiative and approving the various ways that conscientious headteachers implement this year’s scheme for proving to Ofsted that their school is “outstanding.”

Priests are becoming weary of receiving notices and press releases proclaiming this year’s percentage of five GCSEs at A\*-C when they know that there are other criteria according to which many of our schools are failing in relation to the faith. If a sought-after school is in the position of accepting only those applicants for whom a priest will sign that they attend Mass every week, one might ask: what is the value-added measure for this by Year 11? Starting from a benchmark of 100 per cent practice in Year 7, how many pupils are still attending Mass when they leave the school? The school might reasonably say that this is not under their control: much depends on the commitment of the parents. And one might answer that this is true regarding pupils’ commitment to do the coursework for their GCSEs. In the one case there is the sanction of published results; in the other, we shrug in despair and blame the parents.

Bishop Campbell drew attention to the dilemma of the small proportion of practising Catholics being called upon to

support and maintain schools in which the majority of pupils and staff are not practising the faith. *The Catholic Voice of Lancaster* put it more starkly, referring to the sacramental and educational system that has produced five million lapsed Catholics. Of course, the schools are good at raising money for charity: this is a handy “Catholic ethos” indicator which is measurable. The problem is that without effective evangelisation, including the “new evangelisation” directed to people who are “Catholic in name only”, the charitable fundraising activity will lose its fundamental base of practising Catholics as well as being itself divorced from Catholic principles by supporting the more fashionable charities whose activities are in some cases morally unacceptable.

### Parents’ Trials

The concern felt by the priest, though real, is nothing compared with that felt by the “*Humanae Vitae* Catholics”, as we might call them. We use that term because, in practice, adherence to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is undeniably a litmus test of fidelity to the magisterium. In our parishes, if we are lucky, there will be a small number of families who rejoice in this teaching and try to live it fully. They are a godsend to the parish priest. Not only does he have allies in defending the teaching of the Church, but he also has people who are tuned into formative parochial apostolate as well as overwhelmingly generous in giving their time and energy to the Church. With the support of the priest, they can take an important role in the mission of the parish, often in small and informal ways, those little acts of witness, charity and encouragement to others that make all the difference.

Unfortunately it is often different when it comes to the Catholic school. Some of us have seen at first hand the process that parents go through. Something happens at the school – it might be anything in the list that we mentioned above faced by priests. The parents are shocked and feel quite sure that the headteacher will be supportive as soon as the issue is flagged up.

They are then further disturbed that the headteacher loyally supports the staff member who has made the children shout out “penis” or “vagina” at the front of the class, or has said that the Church will one day ordain women priests, or has talked openly about their gay partner. Letters to “The Diocese”, whether the Education Commission or the bishop, elicit carefully guarded responses. Some well-informed (or well-advised) parents will gather a dossier of correspondence and send it to one of the Roman Congregations.

Sometimes some action is taken as a consequence, but this will be after perhaps 18 months of a traumatic process in which the parents are scandalised. Their confidence in the Church is shaken, they suffer being cast in the role of enemies of the state, and their children are taunted on the playground. Some take the courageous and uncertain route of homeschooling, others quietly withdraw their children and place them in a nearby non-Catholic school where life is more

**“We have written before in *Faith* concerning whether we should continue to fight for the integrity of state-aided Catholic education. The question is no less urgent”**

peaceful and their religious convictions are scrupulously respected along with those of the Muslims, Sikhs and others.

### **What Next?**

We have written before in *Faith* of a “time for reassessment”, a time to consider whether we should continue to fight for the integrity of state-aided Catholic education. The question is no less urgent but has changed in some respects. Within the Church the impact of the pontificate of Blessed John Paul, and its consolidation under Pope Benedict, has provided a new generation of young priests who are firmly orthodox and fully aware of what is going on in education. Among the laity, strong *Humanae Vitae* families have grown in confidence and are better organised. There is a loss of confidence in the liberal consensus and a cautious approach to Rome now that the game has changed.

If we are to tough it out with state-funded Catholic schools in the mainstream voluntary-aided or academy sectors, there is a desperate need for the training of Catholic teachers. If this were based straightforwardly on an in-depth study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it would be an immense step forward. The Maryvale Institute has done sterling work in this field over many years and one would hope that this work will continue to bear fruit in well-educated and informed teachers; those teachers also need to be supported and encouraged by “The Diocese.” A couple of dioceses are taking this path against a powerful headwind. May the Lord prosper all their efforts.

For Catholic schools to be a worthwhile enterprise for the Church, they must survive and flourish as institutions where pupils grow in a “personal relationship with Jesus” which includes following the teaching of Jesus, through His Church, that we should attend Mass every Sunday, go to confession regularly, say our prayers and be loyal to the magisterium – especially in its moral teaching regarding the sanctity of human life, and the meaning and purpose of sex and marriage, in accord with *Humanae Vitae* and *Evangelium Vitae*.

### **Religious Freedom**

This brings us face to face with a further change in society over recent years, namely the encroachment of the state upon religious freedom. To be fully Catholic, our schools now have to be radically counter-cultural. One of the hot-button issues for the foreseeable future will be the question of homosexuality in general, and civil unions and gay marriage in particular. The US bishops are showing that concerted opposition to a government’s restriction of religious freedom is not a hopeless cause. As we go to press, there are signs that the Obama administration is beginning a tactical retreat on its controversial healthcare policy. Whether the US bishops are successful or not, they have certainly not taken the attack lying down. If we are to continue Catholic education we have to take the same robust approach to the question of gay marriage and any subsequent attempt to take away our liberty to proclaim Catholic teaching – especially in our schools.

The alternative would be to make a tactical retreat, hand over our schools gradually to the state, and insist on the right of Catholic pupils in state education to be treated with the same consideration as people of other faiths. Our parishes would then need to provide a focused Catholic catechesis on faith, morals and prayer for the children and young people who are part of the families who keep the Church going. They could then be the principal agents of the new evangelisation to help their peers to recover the faith.

Which of these alternatives is viable depends on the willingness of our schools or dioceses to insist on a much more concrete, measurable and effective “Catholic ethos” than is presently the case in so many Catholic educational establishments. There is really no justification for continuing to commit time and money to schools that provide a vaguely Christian approach to fundraising for charity and respect for other people; after all, many non-religious schools do this perfectly adequately. For our schools to be worth the effort that is expended on them, they must turn into the storm, battle strongly for the faith, and be beacons of the stand that the Church is now forced to take against the ravages of secularism. If they won’t do that, Catholics will have to look elsewhere to engage in the new evangelisation.

# The Mass as Sacrifice

by Mark Vickers

With the new translation of the Mass bringing out the original emphasis on the concept of sacrifice more faithfully Fr Mark Vickers, using some ideas from Edward Holloway's *New Synthesis*, shows the meaning of the idea in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This was originally given as a talk at the Faith Winter Conference 2011.

## A Parish Scenario

I arrived at my current parish halfway through Lent. I discovered the parish was planning a *Seder* meal for Holy Week. A *Seder* meal is the re-enactment of the Passover Meal as celebrated by Jews today, remembering their deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt. This left me in something of a predicament. *Seder* meals organised by Christians often fail to respect the Jewish ritual and content. I once had to attend such a meal. It was decided red meat was too exclusive so, instead of lamb, we'd have chicken. How off message: "Christ our paschal chicken has been sacrificed!"

Most parishioners attend *Seder* meals with the best of intentions. They want to experience the Passover Meal as Jesus experienced it, to have a better appreciation of the Mass. You can't argue with that, you'd think.

But there are problems. First, Christian *Seder* meals can offend devout Jews, who think we are play-acting at their religion. More importantly, we send out the wrong message about the Mass. Sometimes the organisers of *Seder* meals have an agenda, to emphasise, even distort, the meal aspect of the Eucharist.

Of course, the Eucharist has a meal aspect. But there are some important distinctions between the Mass and an ordinary meal. Those who miss these can tend to make the Eucharist something the community does for itself. A meal is something you prepare for yourself and like-minded friends. You don't need an ordained priest for a meal; ultimately, you don't need God.

One parishioner once asked me why I did the "washing up" at the altar. At a dinner party, she said, you wait until after the guests have left. One then has to find a way of pointing out that she is in fact referring to consuming the particles which are the Body and Blood of Christ, Jesus Himself. An undue emphasis on a meal can easily undermine people's belief in the mystery of the Mass, in the Real Presence of Christ. If the Eucharist is just a meal, why don't we invite everyone to receive Holy Communion? Isn't it rude and wrong of the Church to say Holy Communion is for Catholics in a state of grace? Perhaps we should acknowledge that the Eucharist isn't just an ordinary meal.

## A Theological Problem

At the Last Supper, Jesus specifically said: "Do this in remembrance of Me." Isn't He approving the practice of *Seder* meals, of viewing the Eucharist as a meal? In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict asks: "What exactly did the Lord instruct them to repeat?" His answer is clear: "Certainly

not the Passover meal."<sup>1</sup> Before the Protestant Reformation no one referred to the Eucharist, the Mass, as a meal. Not for 1,500 years. When Martin Luther called the Eucharist "the Lord's Supper" it was "a complete innovation".<sup>2</sup>

So if the Mass isn't primarily a meal what is it? Most Catholics catechised in a previous age would have had no problem: they would have replied that the Mass is the *sacrifice* of the Cross perpetuated through the ages. As the Council of Trent explained: "In *this divine sacrifice* which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ Who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner."<sup>3</sup>

Clear enough, you'd think. But Pope Benedict reminds us how controversial it became to talk about "the holy sacrifice of the Mass". Many Catholics today appear to agree with "Martin Luther, who says that to speak of sacrifice is

'the greatest and most appalling horror' and a 'damnable impiety:' this is why [they] want to refrain from all that smacks of sacrifice, including the [Eucharistic Prayer], and retain only that which is pure and holy... This maxim was also followed in the Catholic Church after Vatican II, or at least tended to be, and led people to think of divine worship primarily in terms of the feast of the Passover related in the accounts of the Last Supper."<sup>4</sup>

The Second Vatican Council seemed clear enough: "At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic *Sacrifice* of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the *sacrifice* of the Cross throughout the centuries."<sup>5</sup>

So is the Mass a meal or a sacrifice, or a bit of both? Already by the 1960s, doubt had crept in. Pope Benedict talks of "the lack of clarity which has prevailed in this area, even during the Council."<sup>6</sup> Catholic scholars were already writing: "The determining structure [of the Mass] is that of the meal."<sup>7</sup> Pressed to explain what they meant by this, some claimed that we *believe* the Mass is a *sacrifice*, but it *looks* like a *meal*. Such separation of symbolism from sacramentality empties out the Eucharistic meaning of both.

## An Ambiguous Atonement?

So what's the problem with sacrifice? As we have suggested, some people had an ideological agenda. If the Mass is a *sacrifice*, it follows that you need a *priest* to offer it and an *altar* on which it can be offered. That puts paid to the Protestant preference for *ministers* and *tables*. But there's also a more understandable objection to viewing the Mass



## “Without the Fall of man Christ’s sacrifice would have been to draw all into full communion with God”

as a sacrifice. It has to do with mistaken theories of the Atonement. “Atonement”, or “expiation”, is about making reparation for a wrong or injury committed, specifically about reconciling sinful humanity to God. Jesus *did* effect our redemption by means of His atoning sacrifice on the Cross.

The problem comes with seeing Christ’s atoning sacrifice, as some Evangelical Protestants do, in terms of punishment. Basically, we’d made God mad by our sins, offending His infinite majesty and breaking our communion with Him. We couldn’t put this right ourselves. What’s to be done? Jesus takes the punishment for us. An “angry Father” [contemplates] the disobedience of man in human sin, decrees to condemn [us] to eternal death... Against which sentence of divine justice the Son interposes Himself... so that in His total sacrifice ‘the Father is appeased’.”<sup>8</sup>

We need to be careful. We don’t drop the idea of sacrifice because our world wants God to conform to its expectations. The Pope writes: “The mystery of the atonement is not to be sacrificed on the altar of overweening rationalism.”<sup>9</sup> Atonement takes seriously the disaster of sin, the fundamental rupture it causes between us and God. It recognises our inability to repair this by ourselves. It acknowledges the absolute necessity of Christ. As St Paul says: “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by His grace as gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, Whom God *put forward as an expiation by His Blood*.”<sup>10</sup> But...

But to buy into a view of atoning sacrifice as punishment is hugely problematic. First, the solution is purely external. If Jesus just stands in to take the rap for us, in the long term what good has been achieved? How has human nature actually been changed for the better? God’s plan is far more wonderful than that. And what sort of God would do that? It makes God the Father vindictive and unjust. Would He really send His only Son into the world simply to vent on Him all His accumulated wrath? That’s not the God of Jesus Christ. “God is *love*.”<sup>11</sup> “For God *so loved* the world that He gave His only Son.”<sup>12</sup> These “punitive” theories are based on a wrong idea of God, and a wrong idea of sacrifice.

### Sacrifice

It is time to pin down what we mean by “sacrifice”. Young adults probably hear it most often from their parents. “Think of all the *sacrifices* your mother and I made to make sure you received a decent education – and what a disappointment you’ve been to us.” That’s how the world understands “sacrifice” – giving up something of value for a greater good.

But it is only a secondary definition. The primary meaning is always connected to religion. Try doing a Google Image search for “sacrifice.” The results are fascinating – and frightening. We’re back in pagan times, the days of Aztecs and ancient mythology. There’s nothing about Christ. All the images are of human sacrifice.

But that’s not the essence of “sacrifice”. The literal meaning is “to do a sacred deed”. It is to make someone or something holy; it is a consecration. It is worth quoting St Augustine’s classic definition: “True sacrifice is every work done to establish us in a holy fellowship with God, every work tending to the attainment of that good in which alone we can be truly blessed.”<sup>13</sup> For something to be a sacrifice it has to be performed for the sake of God.

Sacrifice involves offering something to God in the attempt to achieve holiness, communion with Him. Sacrifice doesn’t necessarily involve the killing of a victim – the technical term for that is “immolation”. That’s important.

Without the Fall of man, without the original sin of Adam and Eve, Christ’s sacrifice, His sacred deed, would have been to draw together the whole of humanity into a relationship of full communion with God in one act of joyful recognition and adoration. Without sin, Christ would have been “the Sacrifice of Praise”: the Eucharist, thanksgiving in its fullest sense. But, of course, He did enter a sinful world. Therefore, Christ’s sacrifice is also one of immolation, of pain, suffering and death. Christ becomes a victim: “this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim” as the revised translation has it.

### “The New Should be Hidden in the Old”<sup>14</sup>

To understand the sacrifice of the Cross, the sacrifice of the Mass, we need to go to the Old Testament. Sacrifice is normative to human nature. Ghandi, a Hindu, said that “worship without sacrifice” is an absurdity of the modern age. Sacrifice was there from the beginning. “Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.”<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that it is the sacrifice of the lamb which is acceptable to God. Again, it is a lamb which Abraham substitutes for the sacrifice of his only son, Isaac. Hebrew has no punctuation, and so it is valid to read the passage as “God will provide *Himself*, the Lamb, for a burnt offering.” We are being prepared for another, more definitive sacrifice. “Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world!”<sup>17</sup>

But it is not just animal sacrifice that is mentioned. Again, at the beginning, we have that mysterious figure Melchizedek, King of Salem, “priest of God Most High”, with his offerings of bread and wine.<sup>18</sup>

The sacrifice which concerned Israel more than any other was that of the Passover lamb the night they were freed from slavery in Egypt. The angel of death passed over the houses whose doorposts and lintels were smeared with the blood of the lamb. It wasn’t a one-off sacrifice. The Jewish people were commanded to celebrate it each year for ever. God gave them very precise instructions how to do so.

In the wilderness God enters a covenant with Israel: He is their God; they are His people. This covenant is ratified by a

## The Mass as Sacrifice continued

sacrifice. As the Book of Exodus recounts, Moses

“sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar... [The rest he] threw upon the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you...’ ...Then Moses and... the elders of Israel went up... they beheld God, and ate and drank.”<sup>19</sup>

Note the words “sacrifice” and “blood of the covenant”. Note, too, that the sacrifice isn’t over until they eat and drink. But it is no ordinary meal – it is a heavenly banquet, a sacrificial rite.

### The Temple

The Temple in Jerusalem, built initially by Solomon, by tradition on the site of the sacrifices of Melchizedek and Abraham, became *the* place of sacrifice for the Jewish people. Until its destruction it was served by thousands of priests. There were various types of sacrifice, public and private.

There were sin offerings and trespass offerings, “intended to restore communion when it had been disturbed or dimmed by sin and trespass”.<sup>20</sup> The most solemn sin offering occurred once a year as the High Priest sprinkled blood in the Holy of Holies in atonement for the sins of the nation. Afterwards the priests ate a sacrificial meal of that flesh which had not been burnt. Burnt offerings were a sacrifice of devotion and service, symbolising an individual’s, or a group’s, surrender to God, and God’s acceptance of that. But there were also peace or thanksgiving offerings, principally the Passover. These were joyful celebrations of communion with God. In thanksgiving God is acknowledged as the One Who delivers Israel from slavery.

We seldom mention the Bread of Presence: 12 loaves God commanded to be kept always in His presence on a golden table in the Tabernacle, together with bowls for incense and flagons for wine.<sup>21</sup> The incense confirms that this bread offering was a sacrifice. Ezekiel refers to the table as an altar.<sup>22</sup> By tradition, something happened to this bread as it was offered in sacrifice. Afterwards it was held to possess miraculous qualities. Each Sabbath in the Temple the sacrifice of bread and wine was renewed by the priests, after which they ate the bread which had been replaced.

Every Jewish male had to come to Jerusalem at Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, as Exodus says, when they would “see the face of the Lord.”<sup>23</sup> On those feasts the priests raised the table so the pilgrims could see the Bread of Presence. As they did, they proclaimed, “Behold, God’s love for you.” Bells should be ringing for us at this point. A Sabbath sacrifice which is also a meal was being observed: the bread that was about to be consumed revealed “the face of the Lord”, the sign of His love.

### “A Pure Sacrifice”

So what did the Jewish people think they were doing when they offered sacrifice? Sacrifice was required for the forgiveness of sin. In the words of Psalm 32: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”<sup>24</sup> The idea was taken up by the Letter to the Hebrews: “Under the Law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.”<sup>25</sup> Of course, Hebrews continues, “It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.”<sup>26</sup>

The people of the Old Testament weren’t naïve. They knew sacrifice wasn’t magic. They knew that “God demanded an *interior* sacrifice as well.”<sup>27</sup> Psalm 51 puts it like this: “For in sacrifice You take no delight/ Burnt offering from me You would refuse/My sacrifice a contrite spirit/A humble, contrite heart You will not spurn.”<sup>28</sup> And the prophet Hosea says: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.”<sup>29</sup>

“The passage in which Abraham is about to sacrifice his son Isaac can validly be read: ‘God will provide *Himself*, the Lamb, for a burnt offering’”

“The blood of animals could neither ‘atone’ for sin nor bring God and men together. It could only be a sign of hope, anticipating a greater obedience that would be truly redemptive.”<sup>30</sup> Israel hopes for a Messiah, a new Prophet, a new Passover and a new Covenant. The Old Testament is orientated to the future. Malachi foretold that God would send His Messenger to purify His people “till they present right offerings to the Lord. Then the offering [the sacrifice] of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to Him.”<sup>31</sup> By tradition the Messiah would come on Passover night.

### “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been Sacrificed”<sup>32</sup>

Christ’s earthly ministry approaches its climax as He enters Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He sends Peter and John to prepare for the Passover meal.<sup>33</sup> They had to get a lamb. That didn’t mean going to Sainsbury’s or the local butcher. Their lamb had to be sacrificed in the Temple before it could be eaten at the Passover supper.

The biggest difference to the Jewish religion between the time of Jesus and today is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was a wonder of the ancient world, vast, ornate and rich. Its destruction was one of the most controversial and compelling of Jesus’ prophecies. “The days will come when there shall be left not one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”<sup>34</sup> That happened within a generation as the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and razed the Temple in 70 AD.

That’s my real grudge against *Seder* meals. They don’t do

## “The early Church understood Malachi as prophesying the sacrifice of the Mass”

what they claim. They don't accurately portray the Passover meal as it was at the time of Jesus, because the Jewish religion has fundamentally changed. There's no more Temple sacrifice. There hasn't been for almost 2,000 years. The Jewish faith is now based on the synagogue and the rabbi. The Passover meal has been ripped from its sacrificial context. “Judaism at the time of Jesus was much more like Catholicism (priests leading worship based on sacrifice), whereas rabbinic Judaism after the Temple's destruction was more like Protestantism (Scripture teachers leading worship without blood sacrifice).”<sup>35</sup>

The fact that Temple sacrifice came to an end for ever in the first century AD does not mean that God is through with sacrifice and priests. It doesn't mean we've graduated to Bible study and fellowship meals. Remember what Jesus said: “Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.”<sup>36</sup> Temple sacrifice is no longer needed because it has been fulfilled by Christ, Who “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins”.<sup>37</sup> The rabbis at the time taught that once the Messiah came “all sacrifices will cease except the *toda* sacrifice [the thanksgiving sacrifice, what the Greeks translated as “eucharist”]. This will never cease.” The sacrifice of Christ remains.

But back to the Last Supper. No one who went to Jerusalem for the Passover at the time of Christ would have had any doubts. This was about sacrifice. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that 250,000 lambs were sacrificed in the Temple for the two and a half million pilgrims. As the lambs' throats were slit and their blood drained, they were fixed on two wooden staves at right angles to be skinned, gutted and cleaned. Interesting: the lambs were crucified.

St Luke makes clear the context of the Last Supper: “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.”<sup>38</sup> As the Passover lambs are being sacrificed in the Temple, *the* Lamb of God is preparing for His sacrifice.

### A Sacrificial Meal

The climax of the sacrifice consisted of the priests pouring the lamb's blood against the altar. But that's not the end. The lamb had to be *eaten*. “The Passover sacrifice was not completed by the death of the lamb, but by eating its flesh.”<sup>39</sup> Sacrifice and meal are connected – but not according to today's meal theology. This is a *sacrificial* meal, a ritual meal, in which we enjoy communion with God. Nor is it open table – as some want the distribution of Holy Communion to be. Only Israelites could eat the Passover meal. You had to be a member of the People of the Covenant, living in accordance with God's Commandments.

This is the context, but Jesus turns the focus from the body and blood of the lamb to His own Body and Blood. He's saying, “I am the new Passover Lamb; I am the new

sacrifice.” This is the Passover of the Messiah. The blood of the lamb has just been poured out in the Temple. Jesus gives the apostles “the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of Me.” This sacrifice is to be repeated. Unlike the Temple sacrifice, the Mass continues.

Jesus also uses the imagery of manna. The Messiah, the second Moses, was expected to rain down bread from heaven. The bread and wine also refer to the Bread of Presence. This was the sign of God's presence, *the* Sabbath sacrifice, the bread offered and consumed by priests. The breaking of the bread, the pouring out of the wine, point to the violent, sacrificial death Jesus is to suffer on the Cross.

“The blood of animals could  
neither ‘atone’ for sin nor bring  
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only be a sign of hope”

Before they left the Upper Room, Christ and His apostles sang the Hallel chant, including Ps. 116: “I will offer You the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.”<sup>40</sup> Praying the same Psalm, Christ says, “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.”<sup>41</sup> The Passover meal included four cups of wine mixed with water. If we read Luke's Gospel carefully, we see there's more than one cup of wine being drunk. Like the eating of the lamb, this was essential. Without drinking the four cups of wine the Passover sacrifice wasn't completed.

The American scholar Brant Pitre argues that Jesus didn't drink that fourth cup in the Upper Room. That makes sense. Jesus says *before* the last cup is drunk: “I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”<sup>42</sup> In Gethsemane Jesus prays three times, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.”<sup>43</sup> Why? Because He knows the fourth cup is the cup of His Blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. So does Jesus actually drink the fourth cup? As He approaches death, He says from the Cross, “I thirst.” St John writes: “A bowl of vinegar [sour wine] stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on a hyssop stick and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar [wine], He said, “It is finished.”<sup>44</sup>

It is finished. Jesus did drink the fourth cup. The Passover sacrifice is completed on the Cross. As Brant Pitre says: “When we view the supper and the Cross through the lens of the Jewish liturgy, it becomes clear that Jesus *Himself* saw both events as one single [event].” “By means of the Last Supper, Jesus transformed the Cross into a Passover, and by means of the Cross, He transformed the Last Supper into a sacrifice.”<sup>45</sup> In His Eucharist Jesus combines the thanksgiving



## The Mass as Sacrifice continued

and communion sacrifice of the Passover with an atoning sacrifice for sin.

### “One single sacrifice”

What Jesus accomplished on the Cross is clearly a sacrifice. There is the Eternal High Priest, Who is Himself the victim offered in obedient love. That offering is made to restore communion with God. Jesus Christ “is the sacrifice that takes our sins away”.<sup>46</sup>

So, is the Mass a sacrifice? Both the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism teach that it is: “The Eucharist is a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the Cross, because it is its *memorial* and because it *applies* its fruit.”<sup>47</sup>

But the Protestant Reformers explicitly rejected the notion of the Mass as sacrifice. Luther saw the Mass as the work of man, ineffective in advancing our salvation, which comes from God alone. For Protestants the Eucharist is primarily a fellowship meal. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England still state: “Wherefore the sacrifice of Masses, in which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ for the [living] and the dead, were blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits.”<sup>48</sup>

To support their interpretation Protestants tend to fall back on Hebrews Chapter 10, in which the author writes that Jesus “has offered one single sacrifice for sins”. Any suggestion that a different sacrifice is required – that of the Mass, offered over and over again – is blasphemy, they would say. But so would we. There aren’t lots of sacrifices. The Cross and the Mass are one and the same sacrifice, simply offered in a different manner. The same person offers the same sacrifice. By virtue of his ordination the priest offers the sacrifice *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ. The Mass isn’t the work of man, but the work of God.

At the Last Supper “Our Lord gave them the power to renew the sacrifice of the Eucharist with the command, ‘Do this as a memorial of Me’ as He blessed the cup.”<sup>49</sup> Jesus expected frequent liturgical celebrations of the Eucharist.<sup>50</sup>

And that’s exactly what the first Christians did. Immediately after the Ascension, we read, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.”<sup>51</sup> The Eucharist is referred to, almost euphemistically, in this way, precisely because the first Christians believed it was so holy, that it was barely to be spoken of to anyone other than believers.

The understanding of the Mass as sacrifice was there, at least in embryonic form, from the beginning. Probably the earliest Christian document outside the Scriptures is the *Didache*, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, dating back to before AD100. It tells Christians: “On the Lord’s own day [Sunday], assemble in common to break bread and offer

thanks [ie celebrate the Eucharist]; but first confess your sins so that *your sacrifice* may be pure.”<sup>52</sup>

The revised translation of the Mass makes clear that the Third Eucharistic Prayer is citing the prophet Malachi: “You never cease to gather a people to Yourself so that from the rising of the sun to its setting a *pure sacrifice* may be offered to Your Name.”<sup>53</sup> The early Church understood Malachi as prophesying the sacrifice of the Mass, which would supersede the Temple sacrifice and would be offered for all time across the whole world. In the words of St Justin Martyr: “God has, therefore, announced in advance that *all the sacrifices* offered in His Name, which Jesus commanded to be offered, that is, in the Eucharist of the Bread and of the Chalice, which are offered by us Christians in every part of the world, are pleasing to Him.”<sup>54</sup> St Irenaeus adds: “The oblation of the Church, which the Lord taught was to be offered in the whole world, has been regarded by God as a *pure sacrifice*, and is acceptable to Him.”<sup>55</sup>

Speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus said: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”<sup>56</sup> This is the internalisation of sacrifice which the prophets had foretold. St Peter says Christians must “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup> St Paul says the same: “Present your *bodies* as *living sacrifices*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”<sup>58</sup> Christian worship must be spiritual. But Paul immediately notes that human beings are a unity of body and soul, and therefore our living sacrifices must be evident in the lives we live in and through our *bodies*. There should be external, visible sacrifice.

We can only offer our lives to God as a living sacrifice through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, in which we participate in the sacrifice of the Mass. We can’t do it by ourselves. “The *Eucharist*, in which the Lord’s obedience on the Cross embraces us all, purifies us, and draws us up to that perfect worship offered by Jesus Christ.”<sup>59</sup>

The Church Fathers knew this. St Gregory Nazianzus wrote: “No one is worthy of the great sacrifice and of the great High Priest of God, unless first he has made of himself a living and holy offering pleasing to God and offered to God a sacrifice of praise and a contrite heart.”<sup>60</sup> The revised translation makes this much clearer. No longer “*our sacrifice*,” but, “Pray, brethren, that *my sacrifice and yours*.” There are two sacrifices, distinct but connected. The priest offers the sacrifice of the Mass. Thanks to our sharing in that sacrifice we can give God the offering of our lives.

The early Church believed the Mass was a sacrifice. In the fourth century St Ambrose wrote that the priest must “offer *sacrifice* for the people”.<sup>61</sup> St John Chrysostom clearly sets out the Catholic understanding that the Cross and the Mass “are one single sacrifice”. “For Christ is everywhere one

## "In a fallen world, pure love is confronted by the reality of evil and sin"

complete Body. Just as He is one Body and not many bodies, even though He is offered in many places, *so there is but one sacrifice*. It is our High Priest who offered the sacrifice which cleanses us. So we offer now that which was then offered, and which cannot be exhausted."<sup>62</sup>

### A Corrected Translation

We began with some of the problems which arise if a person has a mistaken understanding of the Mass as an ordinary meal. In some respects it wasn't helped by the old translation of the Mass. The language tended to be rather flat. The revised translation is much more explicit on *sacrifice*. In the Third Eucharistic Prayer, the priest used to say only "see the Victim." Now he says "recognising the *sacrificial* Victim". In the old translation of the First Eucharistic Prayer poor old Melchizedek lost altogether his "holy sacrifice, a spotless victim". He's now got it back.

Among the most important changes are those in the Prayer over the Gifts, when the priest offers God the gifts to be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. You'd think there'd be lots of talk of sacrifice here, the sacrifice of the Cross, the sacrifice of the Mass. There is in the Latin. Much of it was dropped in the old English translation. For example, the old translation said only: "Lord, accept our prayers and offerings." The revised translation is far more accurate: "May our prayers rise up to you, O Lord, together with the sacrificial offerings." You see how important it is that the language we use matches what we believe.

### Conclusion

Understanding better the nature of sacrifice, we realise it doesn't necessarily involve the destruction of a victim. But we shouldn't be embarrassed to speak of *atonement* sacrifice. Christ isn't punished by a vengeful Father. Christ was always going to enter the world to bring us to full communion with the Father. But, in a fallen world, pure love is confronted by the reality of evil and sin. His sacrifice became the sacrifice of the Cross. This isn't punishment, but love. It is love which respects our freedom and, nevertheless, bears sin away in suffering. "Insofar as God is a lover, He must also be a sufferer when His love comes up against the No of sin."<sup>63</sup> "Atonement is sin which has been transformed into the opposite by the power of a suffering love."<sup>64</sup>

Pope Benedict replies thus to the critics of sacrifice: "Now sacrifice takes the form of the Cross of Christ, of the love that in dying makes a gift of itself. Such a sacrifice has nothing to do with destruction. It is an act of creation, the restoration of creation to its true identity. All worship is now a participation in this 'Passover' of Christ, in His 'passing over' from divine to human, from death to life, to the unity of God and man."<sup>65</sup>

The sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuated in the sacrifice of the Mass, reveals God's love for us. Recognising that, we can't do better than to say with Blessed John Paul II: "The Eucharist is above all a Sacrifice."<sup>66</sup>

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, CTS (London, 2011), p. 139.
- <sup>2</sup>Joseph, Cardinal Ratzinger, *Feast of Faith*, Ignatius Press (San Francisco, 1986), p. 37.
- <sup>3</sup>Council of Trent (1562), DS 1740.
- <sup>4</sup>ed. Alcuin Reid, OSB, *Looking Again at the Question of the Liturgy with Cardinal Ratzinger*, St Michael's Abbey Press (Farnborough, 2003), p. 19.
- <sup>5</sup>Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1962), n.47.
- <sup>6</sup>Ratzinger, *Feast of Faith*, p. 36.
- <sup>7</sup>Joseph Pascher, *Eucharistia, Gestalt und Vollzug* (Münster-Krailling, 1947), p. 27.
- <sup>8</sup>Fr. Edward Holloway, *Catholicism: A New Synthesis*, Keyway Publications (1969), pp. 251-252.
- <sup>9</sup>Pope Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth*, ii, p. 240.
- <sup>10</sup>Rom. 3:23-25.
- <sup>11</sup>Jn. 4:8.
- <sup>12</sup>Jn. 3:16.
- <sup>13</sup>St Augustine, *The City of God*, X, 6.
- <sup>14</sup>Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* (1965), n.16.
- <sup>15</sup>Gen. 4:3-4.
- <sup>16</sup>Gen. 22:8.
- <sup>17</sup>Jn. 1:29.
- <sup>18</sup>Gen. 14:18.
- <sup>19</sup>Ex. 24:5-6, 8-9, 11.
- <sup>20</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus*, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, 1994), p. 108.
- <sup>21</sup>Ex. 25:29-30.
- <sup>22</sup>Ez. 41:21-22.
- <sup>23</sup>Ex. 34:23.
- <sup>24</sup>Ps. 32:1.
- <sup>25</sup>Heb. 9:22.
- <sup>26</sup>Heb. 10:4.
- <sup>27</sup>Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
- <sup>28</sup>Ps. 51:16-17.
- <sup>29</sup>Ho. 6:6.
- <sup>30</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, ii, p. 133.
- <sup>31</sup>Mal. 3:3-4.
- <sup>32</sup>1 Cor. 5:7.
- <sup>33</sup>Lk. 22:8.
- <sup>34</sup>Lk. 21:6.
- <sup>35</sup>Brant Pitre, *Jesus & the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, Doubleday (New York, 2011), p. 63.
- <sup>36</sup>Mt. 5:17.
- <sup>37</sup>Heb. 10:12.
- <sup>38</sup>Lk. 22:7.
- <sup>39</sup>Pitre, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
- <sup>40</sup>Ps. 116:17.
- <sup>41</sup>Ps. 116:13.
- <sup>42</sup>Lk. 22:18.
- <sup>43</sup>Mt. 26:39.
- <sup>44</sup>Jn. 19:28-30.
- <sup>45</sup>Pitre, *op. cit.*, p. 170, 169.
- <sup>46</sup>1 Jn. 2:2.
- <sup>47</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.1366.
- <sup>48</sup>Art. XXXI.
- <sup>49</sup>Lk. 22:19.
- <sup>50</sup>Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
- <sup>51</sup>Acts 2:42.
- <sup>52</sup>*Didache*, 14,1.
- <sup>53</sup>Eucharistic Prayer III, cf Mal. 1:11.
- <sup>54</sup>St Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 117.
- <sup>55</sup>St Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 18,1.
- <sup>56</sup>Jn. 4:23.
- <sup>57</sup>1 Pt. 2:5.
- <sup>58</sup>Rom. 12:1.
- <sup>59</sup>Pope Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth*, ii, p. 235.
- <sup>60</sup>St Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio*, 2, 95.
- <sup>61</sup>St Ambrose, *Catechetical Letters*, 23.
- <sup>62</sup>St John Chrysostom, *Homily 17 on Hebrews*, 3.
- <sup>63</sup>Fr. Norbert Hoffman, "Atonement and the Ontological Coherence between the Trinity and the Cross," p. 244.
- <sup>64</sup>*ibid.*, p. 221.
- <sup>65</sup>Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 34.
- <sup>66</sup>Bl. Pope John Paul II, *Dominicae Coenae* (1980), n.9.

# Was John Paul Great?

*Joanna Bogle gives us a whistlestop tour of a blessed life*

Immediately after his death there were great public calls for his canonisation. His writings are described as “more prolific than those of any of his predecessors as pope”.<sup>1</sup> He is credited with re-energising the Church’s missionary work. He took a strong line on bishops, emphasising their role as pastors rather than that of princes of the Church. He was much admired beyond the confines of traditional Catholicism: a leading Protestant described him as a good Pope.<sup>2</sup>

But was he really “great”? One commentator describes him as “hostile to learning and crudely limited as a theologian”.<sup>3</sup> There were wars and difficulties during his reign – his huge popularity, especially in Rome, at his death cannot mask the fact that during his reign and despite his best efforts, many people did suffer.

Yes, it’s worth analysing: was St Gregory really “the great”? And what about Pope Leo, also given that title? He is credited with meeting Attila the Hun at the gates of Rome and urging him to spare the city – but in the end the Huns did invade and although Leo’s intervention prevented the worst of their activities, there was a considerable amount of wrecking.

So what are we to make of the spontaneous and now quite widespread usage of “the great” with reference to Blessed John Paul? His successor, Pope Benedict, spoke of him as “the great John Paul”. Was he really so great? We can certainly point to many failures during John Paul’s reign – the Church in Europe steadily lost ground, so much so that he himself referred to a “silent apostasy”, one that all too evidently caused him much anguish. Churches, monasteries and convents closed. Nations and territories once famed for their Catholicism became secularist or, more accurately, consumerist in their beliefs and lifestyles. By the time he died, the very future of Europe seemed at risk, with a plummeting birth rate and widespread abandonment of ideas, traditions, and achievements which were the essence of a Christian heritage. Any analysis of his reign must take full recognition of that.

Best, perhaps, to start at the beginning. When John Paul II assumed the Papacy in 1978, the Church was in a state of confusion following the Second Vatican Council. Huge numbers of priests had renounced their calling, as had many nuns and monks. It was standard to be able to observe absurd and tasteless silliness in ordinary parish liturgies, with girls in leotards dancing up the aisle or children brought forward to perform songs or poetry in place of the Church’s prayers. In many Catholic schools, colleges and universities it was rare to find enthusiastic and dedicated affirmation of orthodox Catholic teachings. There was a sense of disintegration in the air of the Church – as if things were somehow falling apart, even though it was still possible to rally large numbers to St Peter’s Square to observe the white smoke coming out of the chimney and to cheer the new Pope as he arrived on the balcony.

And what an extraordinary arrival it was. Popes traditionally merely gave a blessing after the formal announcement (“Habemus Papam!”) had been made. But on 22 October 1978 the new Pope – “from a far country” as he described himself – spoke directly to the crowd, saying that he hoped he made himself understood “in your – in our – Italian language” adding, to huge cheer, “if I make a mistake, correct me!”

It was the start of an extraordinary papacy. There has never been one like it: he visited 129 nations, travelling the equivalent of three times to the moon and back; he was seen personally by more people than any previous individual in history; he addressed the biggest crowd ever gathered in one place (at Manila, in the Philippines – an estimated five million). He brought together representatives of the world’s major religions to make a stand for peace. He canonised and beatified more saints and blessed than all his predecessors put together. He wrote 14 encyclicals, made 748 visits to parishes in Rome and adjacent territories of which he was Bishop, created nine specially dedicated Years (for the Eucharist, for Mary, etc) and led the Church in a three-year preparation for, and eventual celebration of, a Great Jubilee in the year 2000.

He survived an assassination attempt – later forgiving his would-be murderer and visiting him in prison – and a stabbing by a deranged priest from a schismatic group.<sup>4</sup> And he suffered a number of serious illnesses ranging from a stomach tumour to the Parkinson’s disease which marked his final years – but which did not prevent him from continuing his massive programme of overseas trips, rallies, meetings, conferences, *ad limina* visits with Bishops, and more.

John Paul can be worthily credited with a major – if not the major – role in the collapse of Communism, and with bringing freedom to the peoples of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. He bridged a centuries-long gulf between Christians and Jews, forging a new friendship between the two with massive implications for the future. He formed a deep bond with the rapidly growing Church in Africa. He took Christian unity to a new level of seriousness and was well-regarded – even loved – by men and women from Christian communities which had long regarded the Pope as an evil figure. He worked to achieve unity with the Orthodox. He brought together the world’s young Catholics in vast gatherings for prayer, instruction, Mass, penance and fellowship in World Youth Days, establishing a tradition that looks set to last for generations.

His encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* revitalised the teaching of moral theology even while it brought him condemnation from those who considered its message too challenging. His teaching on human relationships – later to be known as the “theology of the body” – gave a new direction and depth to the Church’s teaching on marriage and sexual communion. His defence of human life in *Evangelium Vitae* rallied the



## **“In highlighting, and expressing sorrow for, mistakes and wrongdoings in the Church’s history, John Paul gave Catholics a fresh sense of honesty and integrity”**

Church to the cause of defending the vulnerable and opposing the killing of unborn children and the frail and weak. His call to artists to show the world the glory of beauty and goodness, his appeal to women to discover their own unique vocation, his call to youth to seek God, brought a Christian inspiration into areas of life where a secular world view had long dominated. His devotion to the Eucharist, both in his personal celebration of public Masses and in his encyclical on the subject, emphasised its place at the heart of the Faith. He restored a sense of devotion to Mary in the Church, adding a new set of Mysteries to the Rosary, and personally visiting many of her shrines worldwide. His final example of courage in suffering brought him a solidarity with sick and disabled people.

But... John Paul’s pleading against war often fell on deaf ears, as did his appeals to Catholic institutions to adhere to the fullness of the Catholic faith, his call to the young to live chastely, his pleas for a renewal of priestly life. At the time of his death, scandals among the clergy, and local episcopal failure to deal with them, were widely known. Attendance at Mass across Europe, North America and Australasia had continued to fall during his pontificate. While he held high the host and chalice of the Eucharist, and knelt before them, elsewhere people simply felt they had no need for God, and gave their hearts instead to other things – material goods, sex, food, holidays. He was often lampooned as a ridiculous figure.

Back to Pope Gregory. How great was he? He sent missionaries to Britain, with lasting results that formed a base from where Germany and other parts of mainland Europe were evangelised. He was a prolific writer whose sermons and meditations have taught and inspired generations. He organised famine relief on a massive scale in Italy. He introduced liturgical reform. He set an example of personal holiness and simplicity of lifestyle among the clergy – disliking formal pomp at meals and always sharing his table. It was Gregory who first made extensive use of the term “servant of the servants of God” for the Pope. He was widely and deeply popular: people were grateful for the leadership he gave and the self-sacrificing way in which he gave it, never sparing himself and very evidently not seeking personal comfort or gain.

So, what of John Paul? Can he be called “the great”? Was he great? The crowds at his funeral called for his canonisation, as the crowd had called for Gregory’s. There are parallels and comparisons. As Gregory failed to outlaw slavery – still an accepted practice in his day – so John Paul failed to get people to stop aborting their babies. While Gregory successfully sent missionaries to evangelise pagans in Europe, John Paul sought, with less success, to re-evangelise after centuries of Christianity had started to flag. John Paul’s missionary zeal, his personal holiness and simplicity of life, his dislike of pomp, matched Gregory’s. He did not engage in practical administration of the city of Rome

in terms of its security or its food supply, as Gregory had had to do, although he did welcome millions of people there annually on an unprecedented scale. He spoke more languages than Gregory – but then he needed to. He wrote more encyclicals, and on more complicated subjects (no one was talking about in-vitro fertilisation in the sixth century), and he wrote in a way that will last: the legacy of his writings is certainly on a Gregorian scale. His personal heroism is possibly greater.

John Paul achieved victory over a decades-long, vicious and cruel attempt to impose atheism on millions of people: his teaching, his personal courage, and his kindness, faith and message of hope prevailed over Communism despite the latter having massive armaments, secret police, spies, prisons, and torture equipment at its disposal. In a century that had seen two hideous world wars and innumerable examples of massive human suffering, John Paul established a new Feast of Divine Mercy, giving men and women a practical means of accessing the forgiveness of a loving God.

Under John Paul, the Church found a voice with which to make common cause with people who had felt alienated from the Church – Jewish people, Christians from groups which had long broken with Catholicism, politicians, campaigners for various causes. In highlighting, and expressing sorrow for, mistakes and wrongdoing in the Church’s history, John Paul gave Catholics a fresh sense of honesty and integrity.

John Paul took the Gospel message to a world that had assumed that it no longer had any relevance. He brought the name and the message of Christ into people’s hearts and minds. He showed that Catholic doctrine and moral teachings had a fullness, integrity and beauty that nothing could match, even while they posed a challenge in their implications for daily living. He identified the Church with the cause of the poor, with the longing for peace and decency between people of different beliefs and ideas, with large and noble aspirations, with sorrow for sin and with hope for the future. In an era of doctrinal confusion, he launched and brought to fruition the great project of a new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which will stand as the Church’s detailed statement of faith and teachings and prayer for centuries.

Greatness does not necessarily mean success: some of the greatest saints have been failures in the short term (Thomas More, Edmund Campion, the Japanese martyrs). But greatness does mean that something has been achieved that will last: think of Gregory’s establishment of the papacy as a source of strength and integrity for the Church on the brink of its transition from the old Roman world to the new Medieval one. And it usually involves personal suffering, and certainly genuine – not feigned or obtrusive – humility.

I believe that John Paul was great – at least as great as Gregory and possibly greater, because the scale of things demanded this. While Gregory consolidated the power of the

# Was John Paul Great?

## continued

Church over a more limited geographic area, John Paul took the Gospel and the Sacraments to the ends of the earth. Gregory took the Church from the ancient world to the beginnings of the Medieval era. John Paul took the Church across the threshold of a new millennium and into the 21st century. I believe future centuries will hail him as “John Paul the Great” and that the crowds who hailed his sanctity in St Peter’s Square were the “vox populi, vox Dei” just as Gregory’s crowd had been centuries before.

That doesn’t make him the last great Pope – there will be more, for God is generous. (And for that matter, incidentally, we may one day be analysing his successor’s reign and talking about greatness too). It does mean that we should recognise him for what he was and what he did. John Paul’s papacy had a quality of greatness about it, a message of

hope, a sense of the Church being at the leading edge in great moments of history, of the Pope building for the future, bringing the message of Jesus Christ to people in extraordinary ways in extraordinary times. John Paul was not just personally holy and personally interesting – poet, philosopher, essayist, linguist, a man with a gift for friendship, a man of prayer, a courageous man with massive moral integrity matched with humour and great intellectual gifts. He was also a great Pope.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>[wikipedia.org/PopeGregoryI](http://wikipedia.org/PopeGregoryI).

<sup>2</sup>Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 4.

<sup>3</sup>Cantor, 1993, page 157. Quoted in Wikipedia entry, op.cit.

<sup>4</sup>A Lefebvrist priest – later disowned by the Society of St Peter and formally laicised – stabbed him in 1982 at Fatima. He drew blood but there was no lasting injury.

# faith

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# “The Glorious, Ever-Virgin Mary”: Our Lady as Model of Participation at Mass *by William Massie*

Fr Massie beautifully brings out how Our Lady's example and prayer can inspire our fruitful participation in Holy Mass. He develops his thoughts from some recent papal pleas as well as the vision through which Faith movement presents our Faith. This piece was first presented as a catechetical talk for young people at the Faith Winter Conference in December 2011. Fr Massie is Parish Priest of Scarborough and Vocations Director of the Diocese of Middlesbrough.

“The ‘door of faith’ (Acts 14:27) is always open for us...” (*Porta Fidei* 1). Pope Benedict has invited us to “rediscover the journey of faith” and much is being planned for the Year of Faith commencing in October 2012. The journey is by way of the sacraments. The Pope reminds us that it begins with Baptism. He goes on to say: “We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (cf. Jn 6:51)” (*Porta Fidei* 3).

In *Faith Movement* we offer a beautiful and thrilling vision of the relationship between Christ our Eucharist and his disciples. This brings out how the Mass is central to creation and salvation. For it proposes that Jesus Christ's coming fulfils creation, and that his loving of the world to the point of giving up his life on calvary achieves the redemption of the entire human race. The Mass then takes on the “cosmic” perspective so often written about by Blessed John Paul II (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* [EdE] 8). The offer of salvation and redemption is mediated through history *from the rising of the sun to its setting* through every celebration of Holy Mass. Clearly, then, we need to make the Mass the centre of our lives. Can we learn any more from this vision concerning how we should be present at it, how we should participate at Mass?

Pope Benedict says that one thing that will be of “decisive importance” in this Year will be “retracing the history of our faith” (*Porta Fidei* 13). In particular we should look to the examples of the holy men and women over the history of the Church, for “in him who died and rose again for our salvation, the examples of faith that have marked these two thousand years of our salvation history are brought into the fullness of light” (ibid). Great saints have left us wonderful teaching on the Eucharist: John Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, John Eudes, Alphonsus Liguori, John Vianney, John Bosco, Therese of the Child Jesus, to name but a few. We could gain much by studying their teaching and insights. We should do it!

But first we must go to the one who uniquely, and above any other saint, shows us how to approach the Mass, which is the *Mysterium fidei*, the mystery of faith – the one to whom, above all, the Holy Father is entrusting the Year of Faith as a “time of grace”. Mary was proclaimed by God “blessed because she believed” (Lk 1:45), blessed for her very faith in Jesus Christ. The *glorious, ever-virgin Mary* can teach us the most about Christ, our Eucharist. That is a bold statement but then so is this:

“Where the Mother is, there too is the Son. When one moves away from the Mother, sooner or later he ends up keeping distant from the Son as well. It is no wonder that today, in various sectors of secularised society, we note a widespread crisis of faith in God, preceded by a drop in devotion to the Virgin Mother.” (*Blessed John Paul II*, 1982, Quoted in the *Handbook of the Legion of Mary* p.6)

On other occasions, too, Blessed John Paul said that Mary is our “teacher in contemplating Christ's face” (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, quoted in EdE 53). And when he included the institution of the Eucharist among the new mysteries of the rosary it was, he said, because “Mary can guide us to this most holy sacrament because she herself has a profound relationship with it” (ibid). In fact he said that given our Lady's relationship to Christ, and that the Eucharist *is* Christ, we can call her a “woman of the Eucharist in her whole life” (EdE53 and *Abide with Us Lord* 10).

I want to stress three things in this short article. First, that Mary herself, because of her relationship with Christ, reminds us that the Eucharist is truly Jesus Christ in his divinity and his humanity. Second, that Mary's example and disposition before God at every moment of her life, but especially at the events of Christ's conception and birth and at Calvary, show us how we should receive Christ in our lives and participate in Calvary. And third, that Mary's powerful role as *intercessor* is something we should be especially aware of while we are at Mass and as we come from Mass.

## 1. Mary Reminds us that the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Jesus

The title of this article comes straight from the prayers of the Mass which refer to Mary as *glorious* and *ever virgin*. I hope that by the end it will be obvious why Our Lady is “glorious” but for now I want to make a point about Mary as a woman and Mary as “ever virgin” – and to make a connection with the Mass.

Sometimes we hear people referring to receiving the “bread and wine” at Mass. Mary reminds us never to make the mistake of thinking of the Eucharist as anything less than the person of Christ. The Church says that there should always be a statue of Our Lady in every Catholic church, and a very good reason for this is that *Mary always reminds us just who Jesus is*: her humanity reminds us that Jesus was truly human; her virginity in giving birth to Jesus is a sign of his divinity, for he had no earthly father. As we teach that the Eucharist really is the body, blood and divinity of



# “The Glorious, Ever-Virgin Mary”: Our Lady as Model of Participation at Mass continued

Christ, then we can actually call Mary “Mother of the Eucharist”. The presence of her image in every Catholic church is a reminder that the Eucharist is Jesus and nothing other and nothing less. I remember in my seminary, candles were always lit on either side of a statue of Our Lady of Walsingham during every Mass, and for me this was a reminder of Our Lady’s role in giving us the Eucharist, which is Christ. The German theologian Karl Rahner was once asked whether it was a good thing that after the Council there was less focus on Mary and Marian devotion. He surprised his questioner by replying “No” and added that there was always a risk in Catholic and Protestant theology of making Christ too abstract and an “abstraction” does not need a mother. Mary reminds us never to make Christ, and therefore also the Eucharist, *into an abstraction*.

Blessed John Paul II said that the Eucharist, “while commemorating the passion and resurrection, is also in continuity with the incarnation” (EdE 55). The coming of the Son of God into her womb at the Annunciation anticipates the coming of the Son of God to each believer in the moment of Holy Communion. If we remember this, that we are receiving the *Virgin Mary’s Son* as we go to Holy Communion, we’ll never be unclear just what it is we are doing.

## 2. Mary Teaches us how to Participate at Mass: by Her Example.

### Willingness

The Eucharist does not effect change in us as if by magic. If I had magical powers, I could turn someone into a frog and *even if he resisted* and tried to run away that change would take effect in him. Now the change at Mass of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ occurs immediately at the words of consecration and remains as long as the appearances of bread and wine remain. But its sanctifying effect in me will not be immediate or permanent unless I cooperate with God’s gift of Himself. The Latin expressions *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis* are helpful. The Eucharist is made present *ex opere operato*, “by the work done”, but it is only fruitful in us, only transforms us and makes us holier, *ex opere operantis*, “by the work of the one doing it”, that is the one who receives the Lord in Holy Communion. So clearly our disposition when we receive Holy Communion is vital to whether we’re going to become holier and grow in virtue.

Now no one has received Holy Communion more perfectly than Our Lady, who would have received Holy Communion from the hands of the apostles. But actually she was perfectly “disposed” even before that. At the Annunciation she made her first Holy Communion when she willingly received the Lord into her womb. But even before then, the saints tell us, she had received the Lord into her *soul*. So she can teach us how willingly to receive the Lord in Holy Communion.

### Belief

*Mary teaches us that God can and is doing this: she teaches us that God can work miracles.*

Mary teaches us *to believe* in the Mass. Our Lady never doubted the divine transcendent power of Jesus to work miracles – and the Mass is a miracle. At the wedding feast at Cana the Lord performed his first public miracle. Mary only called on Jesus to work it because she knew he could and would: “*Do whatever he tells you*” (Jn 2:5). Why did she feel able to ask this? Because she was certain of his divinity and so of his power. And she had known this almost certainly from the moment of the Angel’s Visit, when she was invited to become the Mother of God. “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow and the child will be holy... the Son of God*” (Lk 1:35-36). We need to be reminded that the same happens at every Mass.

Between the epiclesis and the consecration, the Holy Spirit comes on the altar and the priest, and the power of the Most High comes down. This is often so poorly covered in books used for preparing children for Holy Communion that it is no wonder they are uncertain *what* the Eucharist is and *how* it has become what it is. St Luke knew just what he was describing when he wrote those words, perhaps because he received an account from Our Lady first-hand.

The words “power of the Most High” refer to a rare event in the time of Israel when the Power of the Most High was manifested on earth. The Jews called it the *Shekinah Adonai*: it was a visible manifestation of the divine presence of the Lord. It is recorded to have taken place at the dedication of the first Temple in Jerusalem (of Solomon) but not the third Temple (of Herod). What did it look like? Like a light, bright cloud accompanied by angels. Ezekiel prophesied that it would be seen in the Messianic age when the “glory of the Lord” would re-enter the Temple (Ez 43).

And so it happened when the “power of the Most High” came upon Mary at the Annunciation and the Lord entered into the Temple of his creation. It was almost certainly the *Shekinah* which was seen by the Shepherds on the night of the Lord’s birth. The same Holy Spirit and power of the Most High come upon the altar at every Mass. We are not expected to see anything or feel anything but we are expected to know. And Mary’s own belief, and the account of what happened to her, and her continuing faith in her divine Son help us. This human-divine cosmic event takes place at every Mass, whether in a school with 500 teenagers pretending to be bored or at World Youth Day with a million pilgrims kneeling in the mud and dust a mile from an altar where the Holy Father has just made Christ present.

### Humility

*Mary helps us to welcome the Lord who comes to us at Mass with love, with humility.*

## **“The presence of her image in every Catholic church is a reminder that the Eucharist is Jesus – nothing other and nothing less”**

What Mary was offered, what she was asked to do at the Annunciation, is very close to what we are offered and asked to do when we come to Mass. *“Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High... his reign will have no end”* (Lk 1:30-34).

What are we offered? We too are offered God Himself. Most of those words can be addressed to us: *“...do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour. Listen! ... You are to bear a son... Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High... his reign will have no end.”* What the priest actually says in inviting us to come forward for Holy Communion is *“Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.”*

Mary’s response is the perfect model for our response. We are allowed to wonder *“How can this come about”* but we should welcome Him as she did: *“Let what you have said be done to me”* (Lk 1:38). In Latin, *“Let it be done”* is just one word, *“fiat”*, and so we say that Mary’s *fiat* is the model for our *Amen* when we go to receive the Lord into our body and soul (cf. EdE 55). When we say *Amen* we’re saying yes to the Incarnation, to the Incarnation of God *in me*, in this part of God’s creation. Pope Benedict says the effect of Holy Communion is a radical change, a sort of “nuclear fission” which penetrates to the heart of all being, beginning with ourselves, a “process which transforms reality, a process which leads ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world... where God will be all in all” (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 11).

We must identify strongly with Mary at the moment of Holy Communion. It is one of the themes picked up by the Fathers of the Church and passed down through the ages. We can trace it all the way back to the words of Jesus, when in the Gospels we remember him pointing to his disciples and saying: *“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”* (Mt 12:46-50). All the Fathers agree that Jesus was not putting his mother down, for no one did the will of the Father better than Mary. Rather, he was saying that the privileges of Mary are given to us all if we open our hearts and lives to the will of the Father.

This is confirmed by the vision of the woman in the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse, where in chapter 12 we hear of a Woman clothed with the Sun and crowned with 12 stars. The “woman” is creation bringing forth the incarnate Son of God. She is Mary bringing forth Christ, and she is the Church which continues to bring forth Christ through history. In other words, she is us! The idea of Christ needing to be carried, born in us as he was carried and born in Mary can be traced through the Fathers. St Irenaeus probably received it through St Polycarp from St John, St Hippolytus

from St Irenaeus, Origen from St Hippolytus, St Ambrose from Origen and St Augustine from St Ambrose. And St Augustine is the great teacher of the Church in the West: the Church of St Bede, St Thomas and all the great saints and theologians since. Here is the idea in one of St Augustine’s Christmas homilies:

“The Mother carried him in her womb; let us carry him in our hearts. The Virgin was pregnant by Incarnation; let our breasts be pregnant with faith in Christ. The Virgin gave birth to the Saviour; let our souls give birth to salvation, let us give birth to praise. Let us not be barren. Let our souls be fruitful to God” (Quoted in John Saward, *Redeemer in the Womb* p. 110).

Five hundred years later, the English Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote a hymn called *To the Virgin Mother*. He reflected on the example of Mary at the Annunciation as a model for the Christian receiving his Body and Blood in Holy Communion. He asks the Mother of God to help him welcome his divine guest with a love like hers.

Mary’s humble, courageous, generous “Yes” to God is the model for our humble “Yes” when we come to Mass. One way in which we display this humility, courage and generosity is when we come properly disposed with hearts free from sin, like Our Lady’s. Only in our case we need to purify our hearts through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and then go forward and say “Amen” to God’s gift of Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.

“When we say *Amen* we’re saying  
yes to the Incarnation, to the  
Incarnation of God in me”

There’s a very beautiful painting of the Annunciation by the Dominican Friar Fra Angelico which shows Our Lady saying “Yes” to the angel. Our Lady has her arms crossed as a sign of her total, humble submission and Catholics from eastern Europe traditionally approach Holy Communion with this posture. It is confusing in the UK because now it has become the sign of someone coming for a blessing. But I think we need gestures, postures, that express this humble, courageous, generous “Yes” to God at Mass. The Holy Father has given us a sign, I think, that he would like us to copy – that of kneeling to receive Holy Communion. Archbishop Longley of Birmingham said recently in a homily at Oscott College that “kneeling is the natural posture of humans before God”, so maybe it will return.

### **Adoration**

*Mary teaches us to adore the Lord in the Eucharist.*

Blessed John Paul II said that Our Lady anticipated the Church’s Eucharistic faith in this too. The Church Fathers, Catholic priests, bishops, theologians of the first centuries,

## “The Glorious, Ever-Virgin Mary”: Our Lady as Model of Participation at Mass continued

pondered and meditated upon the nine months that Jesus, the divine, eternal Son of God and Son of Man, spent in Mary’s womb. She was in a sense, says Blessed John Paul, “a ‘tabernacle’ – the first ‘tabernacle’ in history” (EdE 55), where Christ was adored first by Mary herself and then also by St Elizabeth at the Visitation.

Sometimes Catholics are confused by speakers who say that the “primary” or “original” reason for reserving the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass was communion for the sick. This has some truth in a chronological sense but not in a theological sense. St Francis of Assisi is credited with having strongly encouraged adoration of Christ in the tabernacle in the early 13th century. However, this was just a logical development of belief in Christ’s Eucharistic presence. St Augustine in the fourth century said: “*We cannot eat the Eucharist without first adoring it,*” and in the gospel we have this clear example of Mary and Elizabeth adoring Christ in the womb. Blessed John Paul also draws our attention to the “enraptured gaze of Mary” as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ as an “unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive... Communion” (EdE 56).

### Offering

*Mary teaches us how to join the sacrifice of our lives to that of Jesus.*

Holy Mass is a sacred meal in which the living God feeds us with the Bread of Life, the food of eternal life. But it is also an *action* into which we are to be drawn. Because the Eucharist is the living God, Jesus Christ, in all the events of his Eternity including his earthly life, and because Jesus did all these things both as man and as God, he achieved something for us men, for our salvation. He did what we, because of sin, were incapable of doing: he made a perfect offering of Himself in love and obedience to the Father, *for us men, for our salvation*. But we are not just passive observers, recipients of this offering in obedience and love. We are to join the offering of our lives to that of Jesus, to the Father. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that we join the *sacrifice of the Church to the sacrifice of Christ*.

And what is Mary’s role in this? She has done it before us. She too was saved by her Son. Mysteriously, in a way the Church does not try to explain, at her conception she was preserved from Original Sin in anticipation of and through the merits of Christ’s saving passion and death (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 491-492). She gives us the perfect example of how to join the sacrifice of our lives to that of Jesus.

Mary was helped by being warned that she would have to share in the sacrifice of Jesus when she and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the Temple to do as the Law of Moses required. We could take her warning as ours too. She was told by the prophet Simeon: “*This child is destined to be a sign that is rejected – and a sword will pierce your own soul*

*too...*” (Lk 2:15). This piercing of soul must have happened many times to Our Lady during the course of Jesus’ life, but it reached its climax at Calvary. When Jesus was rejected, when Jesus’ offering of himself to the Father was completed, in obedience and love, *for us men and for our salvation*, Mary was there at the foot of the Cross, with the rest of the Church – John and the group of women – participating in his sacrifice in a tiny but painful, courageous, generous way. And *there* she gave us an example of how to participate in offering our lives in the offering of Christ’s sacrifice at Mass.

So what can we learn? First, that we should join Mary and the rest of the Church at Calvary. That is what it means to go to Mass on Sunday or any day at any Catholic church, regardless of the music, the priest, the language, the ritual. We should join Our Lady and the rest of the Church and join the offering of our lives, however half-heartedly, however confused and tempted and sinful we might feel. There is no better place on earth to be. Mary did not disown her son who was saving her on the cross; nor should we. Mary did not say she was “bored”; nor should we. Mary did not prefer to work in Asda or play football in a Sunday League, and nor should we! When someone we love is suffering we want to be there. When someone we love is suffering and that suffering is mysteriously going to help us, we must be there. How should we feel when we are at Calvary, at Mass? Well, that doesn’t really matter. But we might find ourselves feeling, like Mary, rather grateful and joyful that Jesus through his Cross and resurrection has saved us. And this might motivate us to get to Mass whenever we can: certainly in our parishes every Sunday, but perhaps also at a weekday Mass on an evening after work or with the pious few in a school chapel or classroom.

### 3. Mary’s Powerful Role as *Intercessor* is Something We Should be Especially Aware of While We Are at Mass and as We Come From Mass

Mary can help us besides just giving us the perfect *example* of how to participate at Mass. She is a powerful intercessor. She is most powerful because of her unique relationship to Jesus. Jesus is still the son of Mary in heaven; she is still his mother. Just as she had free will to ask him for things while on earth (“*they have no wine*”) so she can and does still ask him for things in heaven. She can ask for very great things for his response now is always “*My hour has come.*” In this sense she is “glorious”, for the Almighty continues to do great things through her and for her. We should not wonder that there are so many claims of apparitions of Our Lady and of healings at her shrines. There are degrees of holiness in heaven just as there are degrees of loving on earth. No human being was closer to Jesus on earth than his mother, and no human being is closer to Jesus now, in heaven, than his mother, Queen of Heaven.

Now there’s something very precious and important that we can ask her to pray for. We can sometimes pray for the



## “Mary did not say she was ‘bored’ standing at the foot of the Cross; nor should we at Mass”

wrong things or have less than perfect motives. Well, there is something very right to pray for and not at all selfish.

St Louis Marie de Montfort was a priest living in France in the 17th century. He was a very zealous and hard-working missionary priest working in poor parts of France where the Church was somewhat cut off from the ordinary people. He was only canonised in 1947 and so is a saint for our times. He wrote a book for which he is justifiably famous. It was lost for 200 years, but when it was found in the 19th century it became a spiritual classic. Blessed John Paul II said that he had to read it twice to understand it; Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary, said he had to read it half a dozen times! The book is called *True Devotion*. At its heart is the insight that as God chose to come into the world through Mary at the incarnation, so too today he does not choose to work except with and through Mary. It is strongly incarnational: God has assumed humanity to himself so that he can work with and through it, and he continues to do so. Mary was *and remains* the most perfect and most powerful human co-operator of God. St Louis lists the various works of Mary. One of them is especially relevant to us when we are at Mass.

When we are young we are sometimes given presents which are too big for us – a train set when we are only three, boxing gloves when only six. So our parents keep these gifts safe for us, and when it is appropriate they give them to us. This is a loose analogy of what Our Lady can do for us with the graces of Holy Mass and Holy Communion. St Louis puts it like this: “*Mary helps us to preserve the graces and treasures we have received from God.*” He explains, “... *We see how many persons fuller of grace than we are, richer in virtues, better founded in experience, far higher exalted in sanctity, have been surprised, robbed and unhappily pillaged... whence comes this sad change? It was not for any want of grace, which is wanting for no man; but it was for want of humility. They thought themselves capable of guarding their own treasure*” (*True Devotion* p.88).

Perhaps there are people we have admired or followed, who have fallen badly. It could happen to us. “*It is difficult to persevere in justice because of the strange corruption of the world... it is the Virgin, alone faithful, in whom the serpent has never had a part, who works this miracle for those who serve her*” (ibid. p.89).

The intercession of Mary that we seek at Mass has been clarified by the new translation of the Roman Missal. For example, the Collect for the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary has restored the words “*through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary*” to the prayer also familiar from the Angelus that begins: “*Pour forth we beseech you, O Lord*”. So we now acknowledge that we are brought to the glory of the resurrection *by the Passion and Cross of Christ, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. As an act of personal devotion, I suggest that in our thanksgiving after

Holy Communion it would be very sensible, and could be very fruitful, if we say a *Hail Mary* and ask Our Lady to help us preserve the graces and treasures we have just received.

When Pope Benedict came to Britain he had a special message for the young. He did not water down his words. At one event which is, I think, unprecedented in any papal visit, he spoke to all the young people of our islands through a live stream via the internet in a “Big Assembly”:

“I hope that among those of you listening to me today there are some of the future saints of the 21st century. What God wants most of all for each one of you is that you should become holy. He loves you much more than you could ever begin to imagine, and he wants the very best for you. And by far the best thing for you is to grow in holiness.”

The speech, given at Twickenham, is still available online at <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk>.

The idea of becoming a saint might seem beyond our reach. And of course it is. But the Lord *reaches down to us* in Christ, in *Christ's Mass*. And then we see how the Marian profile of the Church truly precedes and completes the Petrine. For Mary was the first *Mater et Magister*, Mother and Teacher of faith, as she was the first to receive Christ and to bear Christ for the world. The “*time of grace*” we spend with Christ our Eucharist can be surely entrusted to the Mother of God, proclaimed “blessed because she believed” (Lk 1:45) (cf. *Porta Fidei* 15).



# The Truth Will Set You Free

## Catholic Doctrine in the Pastoral Context

### CONSECRATED VIRGINITY IN THE WORLD. WHAT IS IT?

Joanne Whittering

*Miss Whittering was recently commissioned as a consecrated virgin in Folkestone Parish. Here she beautifully brings out the relevance of this ancient vocation to parish life today.*

Consecrated virginity, the perpetual commitment of a woman who is a virgin to remain in that state, in faithfulness to Jesus Christ and prayerful service of His Church is, to say the least, counter-cultural. It is also very little understood even within the Church despite having existed from Apostolic times. It fell into disuse in the 10th century AD, only being revived after the Second Vatican Council, and is still a rare vocation at the diocesan level.<sup>1</sup>

That a phenomenon of women remaining virgins, dedicated to prayer, and living within the community, existed is clear in the New Testament in the central passage of 1 Cor 7. Later there is some evidence for virgins taking formal vows and living either in their own home or in a group under the guidance of bishops such as St Athanasius and St Ambrose, and this continued for centuries until monastic life became the dominant form of female consecrated life. The Second Vatican Council revived the ancient Order of Virgins in the life of the Church, in which the individual is consecrated to virginity, to a life of prayer and penance, and to the service of the Church under the jurisdiction of the bishop.

#### A Positive Affirmation of Love

Perhaps one of the most important points to make at the outset is that this vocation is *not* a negative asceticism but a *positive* response of the whole person to the love of Jesus Christ. It is often described as *sequela Christi*, following Christ, and the virgin as *Christi sponsa*, spouse of Christ, in a relationship classically described as epitomising the marriage of Christ and His Church. As the Rite of Consecration says:

*The Church is the Bride of Christ. This title of the Church was given by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church to those like you who speak to us of the world to come, where there is not marrying or giving in marriage. You are a sign of the great mystery of salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and His Church.*

This chastity shares the same eschatological perspective as that of all consecrated life, that it is “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12). As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, it is “an eschatological image of this heavenly Bride of Christ [the Church] and of the life to come” (922-4).

The Rite is at pains to place a high value on the more

common vocation of marriage, which is not to be considered as denigrated by implication, but it affirms the positive value of the vocation to consecrated virginity in itself. The candidate does not ask the Church to discern this vocation out of disparagement for the married state, much less out of a fear of her own sexuality, but as a joyous and full commitment of these potentialities to a complete love of Christ. The attitude of the candidate is that of Psalm 64: *O God, You are my God, for You I long, for You my soul is yearning ... therefore I have gazed upon You in the sanctuary, to behold Your power and glory.* It can only be understood in the context of a profoundly personal relationship between the individual and Christ, which is why it is considered primarily as a contemplative vocation. The bridal imagery invoked throughout the Fathers and in the Rite itself may sound awkwardly to modern ears, yet it contains a profound truth about the absolute fidelity to which the virgin is called.

#### A Vocation in the Church

Although this vocation is at heart profoundly personal and interior, it is at the same time completely rooted in the life of the Church. As Pope Benedict said to the Congress of Consecrated Virgins in 2008:

*Your vocation is deeply rooted in the particular church to which you belong. It is your Bishop's task to recognise the charism of virginity in you, to consecrate you, and possibly to encourage you on your way in order to teach you the fear of the Lord as they commit themselves to do during the solemn liturgy of consecration.*

The Code of Canon Law defines the Order of Virgins as distinguished by these twin aspects: “Virgins are consecrated to God, mystically espoused to Christ, and dedicated to the service of the Church when the diocesan bishop consecrates them” (Canon 604). There is a vocation in the Church not simply at the representative level already referred to, but, as Pope Benedict emphasised, because the vocation is discerned, and the consecration conferred, by the Bishop with whom the candidate has a relationship. It is given its *raison d'être* by living the Prayer of the Church both in the Sacramental life and in the obligation to pray the Divine Office. It is defined by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as being a vocation to “prayer, penance, and the service of her brethren” (CCC 923). In practice this vocation is embraced by women engaged in all manner of work, not all of which will be directly for the Church, and there are also hermits whose life of service is a hidden one. But normally the life of the consecrated virgin is rooted in the particular situation of her parish, in which she will wish to be a supportive and unobtrusive presence, in cooperation with her parish priest, and to serve as he considers appropriate. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, the particularity of her service will vary according to her gifts.

The virgin's recitation of the public prayer of the Church, even when prayed privately, unites her to the whole Body of Christ

## “The state of virginity is the preservation of a state of faithfulness to Christ”

with whom she joins in the prayer of Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit. In that sense, even in her private prayer she can be said to be set apart from all and yet united to all. At a personal level the prayer of the Divine Office also strengthens the virgin in her own seeking of Christ by uniting her with the whole Church, and that discipline and objective reality of the Office will sustain her in the inevitable times of aridity in her spiritual life.

That two-fold balance of the interior vocation and exterior service permeates the Rite itself: *May she give You glory through holiness of action and purity of heart. May she love You and fear You, may she love You and serve You* (Prayer of Consecration). The candidate must hold these two aspects in balance in the way she lives out her vocation as they are inseparable.

### Virginity, a Necessary Condition and a Spiritual State

Some may wonder whether actual virginity is a necessary condition of this consecrated state, and if so why? Such questions may arise because people confuse the vocation of consecrated virginity with the taking of vows of celibate chastity by religious and the consecration to celibacy of the secular priesthood. It is important to say at the outset that the consecration of virginity is *the consecration of an existing state of virginity and not a prospective vow of chastity*, even if the two have the same practical *effect* concerning the future; a further important distinction is that consecrated virginity is a permanent state from which one cannot be dispensed.

The remarks of Archbishop Burke on the necessity of actual virginity in his commentary on the Rite elucidate the point very precisely:

*Once the virgin has knowingly and willingly given up her virginity, even by a single act, she no longer has the gift of virginity to offer to Christ and His Church. In the case of rape or involuntary incest, one can rightly say that the woman still has the gift of her virginity to offer, for she has not knowingly and willingly given it up.*<sup>2</sup>

Why is the state of virginity in itself a precious one? There are two answers to this. First, it is the preservation of a state of faithfulness to Christ and the moral teaching of His Church, which has value in itself as never having been subject to grave sin. That is a good in itself, and the Fathers are quite clear that although repentance may restore spiritual virginity it is never to be considered equal in value to that of unblemished fidelity (see St Basil's treatise on virginity). Secondly, picking up on the latter point, virginity throughout Scripture is an image of obedient, covenantal faithfulness between Israel and God, and between the Church and Christ; it is this fidelity that the virgin is called to embody in herself.

Consecrated virginity cannot, of course, be simply an exterior discipline: without a chaste mind and heart, the life of the virgin would not be truly chaste. There is a complex interplay,

therefore, between “spiritual virginity” and the exterior state, in the sense that each is the necessary complement of the other and neither is sufficient on its own. St John Chrysostom made precisely that point, that consecration is physical integrity mirrored in purity of heart. As Selvaggi writes, “the nature of consecrated virginity [is] holiness of body and soul, the one inseparable from the other, both for the glory of God in humble service and modest living in a stable way of life.”<sup>3</sup>

As such it requires a degree of maturity, both spiritual and psychological, in the individual undertaking it; she must have lived long enough as a virgin in adulthood to be “serene in the practice of chastity by which she is able to fulfil her resolve to remain in the virginal state over a lifetime” (Archbishop Burke op cit para 17). It is a vocation that requires the capacity to dedicate her whole self: a capacity for warmth and friendship which understands and respects the nature of her focus without stifling the capacity for a generous relationship with others; a blend of purity and simplicity of intention in seeking Christ, with a well-rounded humanity. That is perhaps why it is normally suggested that the vocation is not suitable for those still young in their adult and spiritual lives, though the discernment needs to be made at the individual level.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>There is a Consecration of Virginity for religious, often practiced in enclosed monastic communities, but that is outside the remit of this discussion.

<sup>2</sup>Burke, R.L. Archbishop *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: the Rite of Consecration and the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity lived in the world*. Paper given at Rome International Congress of Consecrated Virgins (May 16th 2008) para 15.

<sup>3</sup>Selvaggi, Anne Marie “An Ancient Rite Restored: Consecrated virgins living in the world.” *Canadian Catholic Review* January 1997.





# Comment on the Comments

by William Oddie

## End of a Sleepwalk

I'm not sure that I expected to read this kind of thing in *The Daily Telegraph*:

"Should two people who care deeply for each other, who love each other and who want to spend the rest of their lives together be allowed to marry? .... My answer is that marriage should be for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation. Society is stronger when people enter into a stable relationship; when they commit to each other; when they make binding vows to love, honour and cherish one another."

When I saw who had written that, my hopes for an intelligent, or at least receptive, government response to the campaign against gay "marriage" then getting under way died within me: those words were written by Theresa May, the Home Secretary, and they appeared on the very morning she launched a "consultation" on the government's proposals to enforce a change in the legal definition of this ancient institution. She was, with all due deliberation, indicating clearly that whatever the government was consulting us about it wasn't about whether but about how they should do it.

I have to admit that I had got this one badly wrong: I had supposed it was just Nick Clegg who wanted it, but that Cameron, who was after all still a Tory, couldn't, not really. Big mistake. He really did mean it when he said he supported gay marriage. And his government made it absolutely clear that we could say anything we liked, but that *they were going to do it, so we might just as well give up and accept it*. Among Theresa May's tactics for sounding reasonable was to pretend to think that what we were really worried about was whether or not we would have to "marry" homosexual couples in Church:

"That's why I want to emphasise that this has nothing to do with telling the

Church – or any religious group – what to do. I want to be absolutely clear that we do not propose to touch religious marriage in any way. We are talking about civil marriage ceremonies – the sort currently conducted in register offices, country houses and hotels.... People of faith have nothing to fear [sic] from our proposals. But the State clearly does have a role in defining what is and isn't a legally recognised marriage."

But that is, of course, precisely what is at issue here: does the state, *can* the State, at any particular time and in any particular place, define an institution which has existed in nearly all cultures for millennia? Dr Sentamu argued very clearly that it could not – and was called an extremist for his pains.

This is what he actually said, off the cuff but absolutely on the button: "Marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman. I don't think it is the role of the state to define what marriage is. It is set in tradition and history and you can't just [change it] overnight, no matter how powerful you are. We've seen dictators do it in different contexts and I don't want to redefine very clear social structures that have been in existence for a long time and then overnight the state believes it could go in a particular way." Why is that "absurd", as *The Times* newspaper said it was? How is that any different from what *The Times* more suavely accepted, that "it is not a frivolous criticism that the legitimacy of marriage and the social cohesion that it provides might be damaged if the law is rewritten without regard for how most people understand an historic institution"?

Cardinal O'Brien made exactly the same point, and it's worth considering why he argued that gay marriage would be "a grotesque subversion of a universal human right"; note exactly where the language of human rights comes from here:

"Can we simply redefine terms at a whim? Can a word whose meaning has been clearly understood in every society throughout history suddenly be changed to mean something else?"

"If same-sex marriage is enacted into law what will happen to the teacher who wants to tell pupils that marriage can only mean – and has only ever meant – the union of a man and a woman?"

"Will that teacher's right to hold and teach this view be respected or will it be removed? Will both teacher and pupils simply become the next victims of the tyranny of tolerance – heretics whose dissent from state-imposed orthodoxy must be crushed at all costs?"

"In Article 16 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, marriage is defined as a relationship between men and women. But when our politicians suggest jettisoning the established understanding of marriage and subverting its meaning they aren't derided."

"Instead, their attempt to redefine reality is given a polite hearing, their madness is indulged. Their proposal represents a grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right."

"Tradition", said Chesterton, "is the democracy of the dead." Every generation has supposed itself to be wiser than all its predecessors; and succeeding generations have then rejected their immediate predecessors and as often as not either returned to what they swept aside or at least bitterly regretted that it was impossible to do so, since not every mistake can be reversed.

It is one of those questions, like abortion, which delineate starkly the profundity of the gulf that exists

## “What is being proposed here is not a minor social tweak, but a fundamental redefinition of an ancient institution”

between the Catholic understanding of reality and the secular. Catholics see clearly that “gay marriage” is quite simply against the grain of human history and human nature. Cardinal O’Brien has been traduced for the strength of his feelings on this matter: but what kind of man would he be, what kind of Christian leader, having seen so clearly what a disaster the proposed legislation would (almost certainly will) visit on our society, if his feelings had been more “moderate”, or his language less passionate?

Well, one more like an English archbishop, that’s what. The predictably less colourful pastoral letter of the Archbishops of Westminster and Southwark was, admittedly, probably better calculated to be taken seriously by the liberal press: they could hardly have called it extreme or obscurantist. The archbishops kept well away from any suggestion that homosexual activity might be intrinsically disordered. As William Rees-Mogg amusingly put it in *The Times*, “The [English] Catholic archbishops are far from being a set of authoritarian reactionaries. The majority have not been extreme ecclesiastical conservatives since the Second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII”. Quite.

Where does all this leave us? The fact is that the coalition’s plans will ineluctably be enacted unless, somehow, the parliamentary process can frustrate it. It was made absolutely clear that the “consultation” in which the Government has engaged is a sham: whatever we think, it will do what it likes. If the Government really wants it, it will happen. Cameron has a strong will: witness his determination to get his unpopular and incomprehensible health bill through. Even if the Lords do give it a rough time, it will still get through. As for Christian and other religious opinion, we have been told, virtually, that civil marriage is none of our business, and that if we don’t like it, too bad. It’s pretty clear the Government doesn’t care about secular public opinion either. There is absolutely no public pressure

for this bill (anymore than there was for the alternative vote, or Lords reform, or any of the other Lib Dem enthusiasms that have to be pandered to if the coalition is to survive).

*The Telegraph* at one point ran an online poll, which found that 33.76 per cent were in favour of gay marriage and 55 per cent were against. The press is divided. *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Mirror* support it. *The Daily Mail* opposes it for as many of the right reasons as it is now possible for a secular paper to admit to: “This legislation,” it said, “which not even Stonewall, the most persistent gay rights group, was agitating for, is not just about allowing homosexual couples to have a wedding rather than a civil partnership. It is about redefining an ancient and precious institution and recalibrating the entire way we speak about it.” Precisely. *The Daily Telegraph*, too, got the point:

“What is being proposed here is not a minor social tweak, but a fundamental redefinition of an ancient institution, partly in order to signify the ‘modern’ values of David Cameron’s Tories. In pursuing this reform, the Government has created a neat, but disingenuous, conceit: namely that if you believe the estate of marriage is a benign and stabilising influence then you must also favour marriage between two men or two women. They go further: Lynne Featherstone, the equalities minister, said opposition to gay marriage was fanning the flames of ‘dark ages’ homophobia. This is unfortunate rhetoric. If anything, it is the Government’s attempt to change the law that risks reigniting anti-homosexual bigotry.”

But there is a question to be asked. The fact is that we have the substance of “gay marriage” already, in the civil unions enacted by the last government, to which the opposition of the English Catholic Church has been confused and fitful to say the least. We have, it might be argued, already lost this

particular battle. Does this argument over the meaning of a word actually matter? I would argue that it does, very much. Words matter. Change the definition of a word like “marriage” and the consequences ripple out in all directions. Consider this, for instance. As a result of the proposed legislation, the words “husband” and “wife” will be forbidden on all official forms: does that not send a chill to the heart? Can it really be said this legislation will make no difference?

There is, of course, something else to be said, which does seem powerfully to bear out the defeatist conclusion that we have already lost the battle for traditional marriage. Peter Hitchens, in *The Spectator*, argued that those who oppose gay marriage are simply fighting the wrong battle. It is, he says, “a stupid distraction from the main war”. We need rather to address the fact that

“the real zone of battle, a vast 5,000-mile front along which the forces of righteousness have retreated without counter-attacking for nearly 50 years, involves the hundreds of thousands of marriages undermined by ridiculously easy divorce, the millions of children hurt by those divorces and the increasing multitudes of homes where parents, single or in couples, have never been married at all and never will be.”

All true, of course. But the battle over how the word “marriage” is defined surely isn’t a “distraction”, as Hitchens argues. A crucial battle over a small area – Agincourt, Poitiers, Crécy – can ultimately determine the control of an entire territory: Normandy, Anjou, Aquitaine. And this battle is indeed crucial. We have probably left it too late – but we must at least go down fighting.



# The Road From Regensburg

## Papal Inspired thoughts towards a new apologetic

### MARCH 2012 – VATICAN II AND DEVELOPMENT

*Extracts from International Theological Commission document: Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*

#### Introduction

1. The years following the Second Vatican Council ... Catholic theology has sought to follow the path opened by the Council, which wished to express its “solidarity and respectful affection for the whole human family” by entering into dialogue with it and offering “the saving resources which the Church has received from its founder under the promptings of the Holy Spirit” [*Gaudium et Spes*, 3]. However, this period has also seen a certain fragmentation of theology ...

2. ... the Church clearly needs a common discourse if it is to communicate the one message of Christ to the world.

#### Chapter 2: Abiding in the Communion of the Church

33. ... the council declares that the entire people of God participates in the prophetic ministry of Jesus [cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 35] ... and then of the bishops [*Lumen Gentium*, 3] who, through ... their own specific *charisma veritatis certum* (sure charism of truth) [*Dei Verbum*, 8], constitute, as a college in hierarchical communion with their head, the bishop of Rome ... the Church’s magisterium. Likewise, *Dei Verbum* 3, ...

34. ... the *sensus fidelium* is the sense of the faith that is deeply rooted in the people of God who receive, understand and live the Word of God in the Church.

37. ... theology receives its object from God through the Church whose faith is authentically interpreted by “the living teaching office of the Church alone” [*Dei Verbum*, 10].

51. ... The Second Vatican Council said that the Church should therefore be ready to discern in “the events, the needs and the longings” of today’s world what may truly be signs of the Spirit’s activity [*Gaudium et Spes*, 11]. “In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever-recurring questions [people] ask about the meaning of [life].

52. ... “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is for the whole people of God, particularly its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine Word, so that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented” [*Gaudium et Spes*, 44].

#### Chapter 3: Giving an Account of the Truth of God

59–64. ... Revelation is not received purely passively by the human mind. On the contrary, the believing intelligence actively embraces revealed truth [cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q.2, a.10]. ... The truth of God, accepted in faith, encounters human reason. ... Human reason, itself part of created reality, ... adapts itself to the intrinsic intelligibility

of reality. ... So, the revealed truth of God both requires and stimulates the believer’s reason. ... The dialogue between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy, is therefore required not only by faith but also by reason, as Pope John Paul explains in *Fides et Ratio* 65. ... The Fathers of the Church located Christianity alongside “natural theology”, ... [cf. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, VI, 5-12].

72–74. In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II ... called for a renewal of the relationship between theology and philosophy. ... A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should strive to give a scientifically and rationally argued presentation of the truths of the Christian faith. ... Vatican II directed that all theological treatises “should be renewed through a more vivid contact with the Mystery of Christ and the history of salvation”.

82. ... It pertains to philosophy, as rational wisdom, to insert the results obtained by various sciences into a more universal vision. ... Scientific knowledge gained with regard to the evolution of life needs to be interpreted in the light of philosophy, so as to determine its value and meaning, before being taken into account by theology [cf. Pope John Paul II, Message to Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 22 October 1996; also, *Fides et Ratio* 69].

### FEBRUARY 2012: “The Announcement of the Gospel Today”, Cardinal Timothy Dolan to New Cardinals

... the New Evangelisation: the rekindling of faith in persons and cultures where it has grown lacklustre ... Listen to how our Pope describes it ...: “secularisation ... has been manifest for some time in the heart of the Church herself. It profoundly distorts the Christian faith from within, and consequently the lifestyle and daily behaviour of believers ...”.

1. ... [from] the address Pope Benedict gave [the Roman curia] at Christmas two years ago ... “As the first step of evangelisation ... we must seek that human beings do not set aside the question of God, ...”.

2. ... We are convinced, confident, and courageous in the New Evangelisation because of the power of the Person sending us on mission – who happens to be the second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity – because of the truth of the message, and the deep down openness in even the most secularised of people to the divine. Confident, yes! Triumphant, never!

3. ... [there is] love of a Person, a relationship at the root of our faith.

4. ... Cardinal Avery Dulles call[ed] for neo-apologetics, rooted not in dull polemics but in the Truth that has a name, Jesus ... through His Church.

5. ... [the New Evangeliser] must be a person of joy ... 6. [expressing] a love incarnate ... 7. [even giving] the supreme witness [of] martyrdom.





# Letters to the Editor

The Editor, The Parish House, Moorhouse Road,  
Bayswater, London W2 5DJ, [editor@faith.org.uk](mailto:editor@faith.org.uk)

## CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Dear Father Editor,

Your editorials, "The Eclipse of Authority" (November/December 2011) and "Christian Formation: Where Do We Start?" (January/ February 2012), resonate with my experience, as an octogenarian.

The de-christianisation of the country by successive governments, with the formal assent of the sovereign, has gathered pace. Legislation has weakened marriage; permitted abortion; destroyed Christian adoption agencies; fostered adolescent promiscuity by promoting contraception; and hampered the supervision of failing parents, leading to the deaths of children. All have been justified by appealing to compassion and disregarding Truth. Greed has been accepted at all levels of society and the portrayal of cruelty is considered an acceptable form of entertainment.

God has long since been excluded from any role in civil society's reflections on how to conduct itself. Personal relativism, the notion that the truth or falsehood of moral statements varies from person to person, was actively promoted in the mid-20th century and welcomed as liberating.

Anthropologists such as Margaret Mead had a remarkable influence on social science, philosophical thinking and professional training. There was muted criticism, on theological and moral grounds, from Christians. In the face of society's crumbling morality the National Church, divided against itself, had little to offer, and has clearly become part of the problem.

The Prime Minister argues that parents should do what successive governments have undermined their ability to do. He retreats into proposing coercion as a solution to the crumbling of authority of society. An unsympathetic biographer has described him as "a man adrift in a sea of his own emotivity". A society not rooted in God, trapped in social relativism where, as Hume put it, "morality is more properly felt than judged of", readily collapses into emotivism; the looter claims his opinion carries as much weight as the victim's.

Jesus is not entirely absent from the thinking of politicians. He is called upon to set a seal on anything we choose to believe. Baroness Warnock speaking on Channel 4 expressed the view that Jesus was a revolutionary who would have been sympathetic to the protesters camped at St Paul's. Mr Cameron's office said in 2008 that he was of the view that Jesus would have been a "gay rights" campaigner.

Pope Benedict XVI offers a way forward in his reflections in *Jesus of Nazareth*, saying that being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice but of an encounter with a person which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. That person is the real historical Jesus of the Gospels – a person who, historically speaking, is much more plausible, intelligible and convincing than the reconstructions we have been presented with in recent times.

The way forward is with the Jesus of history; who else?

Yours faithfully  
Kenneth Kavanagh  
Byron Crescent  
Bedford

## VATICAN II

Dear Father Editor,  
Your Road from Regensburg column (12 March) highlights the request of the Congregation for the Doctrine of

the Faith for prominent study of the Second Vatican Council during the Year of Faith. In the light of some negative attitudes towards those texts from some Catholics it may be opportune to highlight these words from the Pope's recent letter *Porta Fidei*, (n.5):

"the texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers, in the words of Blessed John Paul II, 'have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition ... I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as *the great grace bestowed on the Church in the 20th century*.'"

Yours Faithfully  
Andrew Levander  
Hinton Rd  
Littledown  
Bournemouth

## EVOLUTION AND CHURCH TEACHING

Dear Father Editor,  
Father Jack Mahoney's recent book, *Christianity in Evolution: An Exploration*, sees the constitutive role of death in evolution as a problem for Catholic teaching [see *Cutting Edge in this issue – Ed*]. When I was a theological student, I got to understand that once the human body had evolved and received the soul, we were dispensed from the apparent problems and conflicts, including death, within nature. We intimately shared life with God. Alas, God did not continue the dispensation owing to the human choice of sinful ways.

Subsequently, through our Redeemer, sharing in the Divine life became a real possibility once more. I've always found this so convincing. I am really puzzled why Father Mahoney SJ does not also find it convincing.

Yours faithfully  
Bryan Storey  
Tintagel  
Cornwall



# Cutting Edge

## Science and Religion News

### From Physics to Theology

*Comments on a lecture by Jürgen Moltmann, 14 Feb 2012, Faraday Institute for Science and Religion.  
By Dr Gregory Farrelly*

Jürgen Moltmann is a Protestant theologian of international stature and great personal integrity. He recently lectured at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, on the title “From Physics to Theology”. The lecture was given in two halves, the first describing his personal journey following his captivity as a prisoner of war in Scotland, the second explicitly addressing the title of the talk.

He explained that having been interested in mathematics and physics as a young man, and with a secular upbringing, he gradually felt the attraction of Christianity. During the latter years of his interment he devoured theology books and pondered the problem of suffering and evil. The question of God was of critical importance to him, but scientific truth was also a key concern, something that has remained with him since then.

The Protestant theologian Karl Barth was a huge influence on him, as he has been on so many Protestant and Catholic theologians of the 20th century, particularly Hans-Urs von Balthasar. Moltmann, however, seeks a greater link with historical reality than that present in Barth’s thought. Nevertheless, the Hegelian background of Moltmann’s philosophical thought is often evident.

In the lecture he quotes Plato’s “Truth is beautiful” as a leitmotiv, referring often to the beauty of truth and the “aesthetic dimension” of Christian theology and its parallel in modern physics. Like Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, albeit from a Protestant perspective, he seeks to make the Christian thinker more aware of the beauty of God in Himself and in his creation.

Moltmann points out that goodness, truth and beauty were always held to

be unified, coexistent properties, but that after the separation of science and theology in the 17th century this unity was broken, although he believes that beauty and truth still form a unity in modern scientific thought. He mentions the use by physicists of the geometrical symmetries of nature to inform their understanding and reminds his audience that the separation of science and theology damages both.

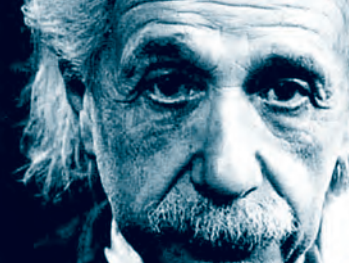
Moltmann’s thoughts on the dangers of using the power of scientific knowledge without pondering beauty – and in particular on the dangers of the “economisation” of science in this century, in which scientific thought may only be valued generally in terms of its economic power – would be shared by many researchers in the UK. However, what is absent is a metaphysics that can enter into non-poetic dialogue with physics, in other words a common ground of rational thought in which the existence of God is not primarily part of some theological aesthetics, but is seen to provide a necessary context to the very dynamic of science itself. As I watched the lecture, I wondered how many in the audience were atheist scientists. If there were any, what would Moltmann’s thinking have had to offer them? I fear that they would have dismissed such theological thoughts as merely poetic, having nothing to do with reality.

In the opinion of this writer Moltmann is correct to insist on the importance of a theological perspective when considering science, and on the need to ponder the intrinsic unity and beauty of all of creation, but it is surely the lack of a coherent metaphysics of science that has led to the increasing gap between modern scientific thought and Christian theology. The rejection of metaphysics by most modern philosophers and theologians has seen the gap filled by influential scientists, often with little philosophical training but with the credibility that their status as scientists confers on them. This is in sharp contrast to the modern “lay” perception of theology (and philosophy).

The link made in Edward Holloway’s synthesis of science and theology, involving the co-relativity of all material being in a metaphysical system that is faithful both to modern scientific thought and to orthodox Christian theology, gives a more solid basis on which to develop a dialogue with science. Then, and only then, may one more fully appreciate and develop a theological aesthetics, as Moltmann seeks to do, that sees beauty and truth in both scientific and theological thought.

The lecture can be viewed by going to <http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday> and following the link. The audio (and flash video) are of poor quality as the recording was made from within the audience, whose coughing can be heard throughout.

## “Man only makes sense as a creature because God has destined us unto Himself”



### The Soul and Evolution?

Comments on an article by Fr Jack Mahoney SJ. By Fr Hugh MacKenzie

In January, *The Tablet* carried an article by Jack Mahoney SJ entitled “Humanity’s Destiny”. Under the banner “Towards A Theology of Evolution” it summarised the views expounded in his recent book “*Christianity in Evolution: an explanation*”. Fr Mahoney is extremely frank in expressing his view that the doctrine of Original Sin through the primordial fall of our first parents should simply be ditched, and that the core Christian view of Redemption through the atoning Sacrifice of Christ should be modified beyond traditional recognition.

Other Catholic teachings, such as the special creation of the human soul and many moral and sacramental dogmas, should also be abandoned or changed, in his opinion. He said that he is expecting objections on these points from some quarters, but feels that these are the full implications for traditional Christian teaching of accepting evolution. Needless to say, we beg to differ!

What is most noticeable about Mahoney’s arguments is his partial understanding of key traditional doctrines and his apparent ignorance of the richness of tradition. He says that the Christian view of bodily death is that it is entirely due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, whereas we now know that death is a key driver of environmental adaptation in evolving life. He then reduces Jesus’ death and resurrection to “a major evolutionary step [note the indefinite article] in the moral achievement of humanity”... “saving his fellow humans from extinction, their evolutionary fate, to share in the life of the Trinity”.

We would say that Man was always created for the vision of God in Union with the Blessed Trinity. But we also know that the flesh is of itself a principle of mortality, subject to dissolution because it is built up from a

complex of causal events in a temporal series. The individual physical organism in evolution is not an absolute value and its death makes possible the onward progress of life on earth. But Man is that goal. In us, matter is brought into direct synthesis with spiritual mind from ontological (and indeed biological) necessity. So in Man matter is raised into the supernatural realm of relationship with God through the Word made flesh. In Man, therefore, matter is subsumed and transformed into a more perfect state by direct union with the Godhead and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is the foundation of the Incarnation and the Eucharist.

This means that Man only makes sense as a creature because God has destined us unto Himself through the gift of the Incarnation. It is this destiny and this environmental harmony that is lost by sin in the first generation, damaging the whole organically and spiritually interconnected Body of Humanity. Worse than just the threat of “extinction”, this threatens the eternal frustration of human nature – spiritual as well as physical death. However, through the mercy of God and to the praise of his glorious grace, the mystery of his purpose in Christ is upheld by the Son, who takes upon Himself the burden of healing and reintegrating our broken nature and vindicating the glory of God in creation. This is the foundation of his redeeming Sacrifice: not “an evolutionary step” for mankind, but the plenary self-giving of God to his creatures, to the utmost of both human and Divine love.

This perspective is not really new. In fact it can be found in all these essential outlines in the *Adversus Haereses* of St Irenaeus, written in the second century AD. However, we can readily update it with the language and insights derived from modern science without compromising the Catholic and Apostolic faith.

When Mahoney speaks of the Atonement, he does so entirely in juridical and punitive terms, “which leaves no room for mercy on the part of

God, except once the divine honour has been satisfied”. so he then speaks of “a sense of theological relief to be released from having to subscribe to such doctrines and to accept the evolutionary alternatives”. The recent editorial in *Faith* on that very subject would perhaps given him the fuller Catholic vision, which places the Atonement within the perspective of the absolute Primacy of Christ in creation and the solidarity and identity of humanity in his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

So many issues that Mahoney raises have already been answered by Edward Holloway in his *Catholicism: a New Synthesis* and other writings published by Faith movement. Although what he writes is open and unapologetic “heresy”, at least Jack Mahoney has highlighted the fact that the question of science and religion is not some purely academic issue revolving around a few specialised philosophical and theological discussions. The whole edifice of Christianity as traditionally understood is at stake over this question. Those who reject physical evolution out of hand understand this, but unfortunately their position effectively rejects the whole understanding of the physical cosmos uncovered by modern science.

Others, like Mahoney, also understand, and more or less explicitly reject, traditional teaching and reinterpret Christianity altogether. Yet this is a false choice and a false contradiction. We do not need to reject or twist defined doctrines in order to present our faith credibly in this new age of discovery, neither do we need to distance ourselves from the scientific consensus about the natural world. A valid synthesis of comprehension which is both fully orthodox and scientifically credible is not only possible but urgently, desperately, needed for the re-evangelisation of the world.





# Book Reviews

## Washed and Waiting – Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality

By Wesley Hill. Published by Zondervan, USA, 2010, 153pp, £9.99. Available from Amazon.

I have a hunch that this type of book is quite rare, because its subject matter is homosexuality and the struggle involved in “being gay” as well as embracing orthodox Christianity’s teaching on the homosexual orientation. This struggle is portrayed in a uniquely intimate way – through the personal story of a young Christian (I presume Evangelical) man, who has made the very courageous decision to reveal his condition, struggles and insights to the wider public. The subject has assumed great importance in the western world, and is surely one of the major challenges which the Church must address, within the whole context of her teaching on human sexuality and gender. One senses among the general public, and among the thinking young especially, a shift of opinion regarding the issue of abortion. However, the issue of sexuality, made concrete particularly in the question of same-sex marriage, is still dangerously confused. Wesley Hill’s book will do much to increase people’s understanding of how same-sex attraction affects a human being – surely a necessary pre-condition to addressing it and to providing assistance and hope. Indeed, I think that the provision of hope to others who suffer against their will from homosexual inclinations is one of Hill’s primary aims in writing the book.

The book starts, interestingly, with some biographical material relating to Hill’s dawning realisation of his homosexual orientation. He explains the title of the

book, which refers to two quotes from St Paul – that we were *washed* when baptised, and are now *waiting* for the redemption of our bodies. Emphatically, this orientation was not one that Hill consciously chose, and it caused him much anxiety because of his strong Christian upbringing. He tried and was unsuccessful at forming heterosexual relationships, and with admirable courage finally sought help through friends, lecturers, pastors and counsellors. This provided a degree of relief, in that part of his anguish was that he could not be fully open with people about himself and his “secret”, an aspect of the suffering this disorder brings which is not often understood by others.

Hill provides an analysis of the biblical teaching on homosexuality and has a section on why the Church’s teaching seems unpersuasive at first sight. This is an important point, for, while we have often taught what is wrong with homosexuality, why it is a disorder and that “gay sex” is always morally wrong – we have been less effective at proposing the whole, positive vision of sex and love, and also what paths to fulfilment are open to people who experience same-sex attraction. In a sort of “apologia” Hill then explains why he chooses to be faithful to Christian teaching and stay single. His theological meditation on the burden of the homosexual cross is insightful, if lacking a certain “magisterial clout” with which we are blessed in the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, he discerns the truth that sex is not essential to human fulfilment – and that faithfulness to Christ is never a gamble; victory is assured. One senses, however, the great lack in Protestantism of a theology and spirituality of celibacy, so long established in both Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

In a second part, Hill relates what he learned from reading of Henri Nouwen’s struggles with same-sex attraction, particularly the problem of loneliness. It struck me on reading this how woefully lacking in Britain are proper support and encouragement for those Catholics/Christians who carry this cross, desiring to be faithful to Christ, notwithstanding

small groups such as *Encourage*, which receive negligible financial and public support from the Church. I couldn’t help thinking that some quotes from Benedict XVI would have contributed much to the book, especially on the nature of love. Part three gives some beautiful spiritual insights into what we might call the attempt to integrate a recognised homosexual condition into one’s interior life. Here there is a good summary of the pain the disorder causes, which Hill has been trying to describe throughout the book, namely “the struggle to be faithful to the gospel’s ‘terrible decree’ that we must hold in check our strongest urges and not engage in homosexual activity; the struggle to *belong*, to find the end of loneliness; and the struggle with shame, with nagging feelings of being constantly displeasing to God” (p.127).

To counter this awful feeling of being unacceptable to God, Hill shows how the New Testament in no way supports a negative self-conception. And, as with all burdens and crosses in this life, they must be looked at with “Resurrection glasses” on, for these trials prepare us for a weight of future glory out of all proportion to them. Hill has come to see how his struggles are not separate from God’s providence for him – they do not disqualify him from living the Christian life and being pleasing to God, but are rather “part and parcel of what it means to live by faith in a world that is fallen and scarred by sin and death”.

Fr Stephen Brown  
Bradford

## The Spirit of Celibacy

By Johann Adam Möhler, translated by Cyprian Blamires. Hillenbrand Books, distributed by Gracewing, October 2007, 196pp, £15.99.

As a third-year seminarian, it’s been a joy to start my theology studies proper this year. One of the highlights is ecclesiology. The last 200 years has seen great scholarly study regarding the life and nature of the Church, culminating in particular in the documents *Mystici Corporis* and the Vatican II constitution

## “This book will do much to increase people’s understanding of how same-sex attraction affects a human being”

*Lumen Gentium*. It is in my studies in this area that I first encountered the name Johann Adam Möhler. As a theologian at the University of Tübingen in the first half of the 19th century, Möhler played an important role in Romanticism and encouraged a rediscovery of patristic thought. This contributed towards the Church’s deeper understanding of her own mystery and particularly to the development of the theology of the Mystical Body through theologians like Henri de Lubac and Pope Pius XII. This knowledge left me excited at the prospect of reading his work, and I was not disappointed.

His essay on celibacy was written in 1828 in response to a petition called the *Denkschrift*, which was produced in Baden, Germany, and called for an end to priestly celibacy. It argued that celibacy was outdated and unsuitable for contemporary Germany using a variety of theological and social arguments that were poorly conceived and constructed. Möhler’s riposte to this petition is well argued and forthright. He dismisses the arguments with ease through his outstanding knowledge of scripture and the early Church, while offering the reader a vision of priestly celibacy that is both refreshing and exciting.

The clergy in Baden, at the time, appear to have been in a state of some turmoil. They were unspiritual, worldly, unmotivated and few in number; and the writers of the *Denkschrift* lament that if only celibacy were removed, priests’ spirits would be reignited and more men would put themselves forward for the sacred ministry. Moreover, they claim that celibacy was never really essential to being a priest but was a later addition imposed by the Church. Surely, the letters of Paul show that men were called who were married (1 Tim 3:2). It all sounds a little familiar, doesn’t it? It is remarkable that the arguments put forward almost 200 years ago still resonate today. The re-printing of this book is therefore very timely.

Möhler responds to these arguments in very clear language: “Do they really believe that wives can give priests what

they lack?” (p4). He is concerned that the authors of the *Denkschrift* too easily give in to the zeitgeist of German society at the expense of what is precious to the Church. The Church always proclaims the spiritual dimension of humanity because ultimately it must be oriented to God. It is from this perspective that Möhler condemns the unspiritual motive of his opponents. He writes, for example: “The fact that our author can persistently talk about sacrifice as if it meant a joyless, unwilling and hesitant gift shows that not even the faintest spark of religious inspiration can have glowed in his heart” (p26). Indeed, for Möhler, anyone who attacks celibacy is really betraying a deeper discomfort with the Church: “Failure to comprehend the Gospel and failure to understand the Church and her history always go hand in hand” (p11).

His understanding of celibacy’s intrinsic value to the priesthood, however, is the real treasure of this work. He expounds a vision that reaches for the ideal that draws people out of themselves towards God and the life of holiness. If this life is lived with authenticity and commitment he foresees no shortage of priests from all levels of society but particularly from the young. If this positive view of celibacy is conveyed, “then we shall see the most distinguished among the younger generation fired up with the inspiration to feed the flock of God... and their deep hearts will grasp the whole idea of the Church and accept it into themselves as a living power” (p73). The reader will find that Möhler writes with this powerful conviction throughout the essay.

The book ends with a commentary on the essay that helps to understand some of the wider context. Much of Möhler’s argument, however, is regurgitated in this section and little is added to the strong defence already made. Nevertheless the editor offers us his reasons for re-producing a book that was little known in its own day. His conviction that Möhler’s arguments are just as poignant and compelling today as they would have been then is shared by this reader. The book not only offers a comprehensive

argument defending priestly celibacy that answers many of the objections found today, it also acts as an excellent introduction to an important 19th-century theologian whose rediscovery can only be positive.

**Philip Cunah**  
Oscott

### **Newman the Priest, a Father of Souls**

*By Gerard Skinner. Gracewing 2010, 299pp, £12.99.*

Blessed John Henry Newman has been a great gift to his biographers: he lived a long life and left a large literary legacy. Fr Skinner has trawled through Newman’s life using his books, his sermons and contemporary reminiscences. Bouyer, Blehl and Zeno have given us the spiritual view; Walgrave the theological angle; Culler and Coulson the didactic. Skinner leans heavily on Zeno to examine John Henry Newman from the perspective of his priesthood.

When you think you know just about all there is to know about Newman, you find that there is always something more to be discovered. So it is that Fr Skinner unearths those insights into Newman which emerge from the hidden depths. For instance I didn’t know that he wrote *sermonets* when he was 16, and that when he was 23 he found preaching “rather a drain upon my head”.

Those who persist in seeing the future cardinal as melancholy (and the picture of Newman on the cover does not help) will be pleased to learn that he founded a dinner club as vicar of St Mary’s in 1828, which met once a fortnight.

There was always a serious side to Newman. He told Dean Church that the famous Richmond portrait lacked something because the artist “could not draw [him] out”. But here was someone who would spend three to four hours saying the breviary, who counselled an element of mortification in one’s life, and who relentlessly examined his own thoughts and actions in the light of God’s truth.



Fr Skinner considers that Tract 90 brought things to a head but I would have liked mention made of the influence on Newman of the Jerusalem bishopric, which was, in a way, as crucial as the Gorham judgment was for Manning. It is also strange that he quotes the letter to his curate, Bloxam, in 1841 on the conversion of England by missionaries going barefoot and being pelted and trampled on, and does not make the connection with Blessed Dominic Barberi.

But these are minor quibbles. Newman's ministry as a priest was not seen as a *profession* but as an apostolate. When he was a fellow of Oriel he would combine St Mary's with the bursary and his tutorship. As superior of the Oratory, he would oversee Smethwick, Harborne, the new workhouse, the ragged school, the Oratory school, his writings, his help for the poor, and his daily community practices, which included waiting at table, hearing confessions, baptising and marrying. Newman's affectionate side is also illustrated. He writes with feeling to a parent of the school, "I often think what poor creatures we priests are, who, like gentlemen of England, sit at home at ease, while you, married men, have all the merit of anxiety and toil which the care of a family involves. Your state is in fact one of 'perfection', when compared with ours, and there is a day in prospect when the first shall be last and the last first."

The same Hungerford Pollen was the architect for the University Church in Stephen's Green, Dublin (and its professor of Fine Arts). The Church of Our Lady Seat of Wisdom was built mainly from the fund raised as a result of the Achilli trial. It is a fine demonstration of Newman the priest's views on ecclesiastical architecture: "the beauty of Greece with something of the wildness of other style yet without the extravagance of the moor or the gloom of the Gothic". It enjoys an enduring reputation as a setting for the marriage of Irish graduates.

Newman's devotion to Our Lady is often overlooked. Fr Skinner mentions the

incident recorded by Newman about a Protestant visitor to a Catholic friend who was dying. The visitor said that nobody, even as holy as Mary, should be allowed to come between the soul and God, leading her to forget him. The Catholic replied that she could hardly forget him as she had only just received him from the priest.

As a sort of appendix Fr Skinner includes seven complete sermons, four from *Parochial and Plain Sermons* and three preached as a Catholic.

Fr Skinner is to be thanked for his industry, giving us new insights into the life of one who made such an impact on the people of Birmingham alone that 20,000 attended his funeral cortege. His influence on the wider world is, of course, incalculable.

**Fr James Tolhurst**  
Chislehurst

## Sunday and Feast Day Sermons

*By Rev Robert Letellier, St Paul's US, paperback, 270pp, £9.99.*

At first I thought I shouldn't be the person reviewing this book, as it's clearly meant for priests. It's a readable, practical handbook with sermon ideas for all the Sundays and principal feast days of the Church's year, following all three cycles of the Scripture readings. As a laywoman, I could quickly set it aside as being not-in-my-department.

But sermons, although delivered by the clergy, are aimed at the laity, so I dipped in. And it's good – very good. The suggested sermons are packed with interesting titbits of information, supportive of faith, easily digested and very nourishing. This would be an extraordinarily useful addition to the desk of any busy priest. In fact, I'll go further – fathers, do please get this book, because your parishioners will benefit, and you will be able to take the credit for doing good work.

A sample: for the feast of Corpus Christi, we are given some practical grounding in

Christ's words about being the "living bread come down from heaven", together with thoughts about how we are united to the Father through Jesus, and also with one another – quoting St Paul – and finally a profound look towards eternity as "Jesus' gift of himself is transmitted to us beyond time and space". It's rich, inspiring, drawn from the Scriptures, and something that we can all grasp and think about.

Another example, taken at random: for the Third Sunday after Easter, with a sermon on Acts 5: 27-32 and 40-41 we get a strong and vivid picture of the Apostles who are now ready to go out into the world and take the Gospel everywhere. We learn that the word "martyr" means "witness" and that "apostle" means "one who is sent" and then grasp what this really meant in the lives of the Apostles, and indeed what it means today: "Faith and love in Jesus will issue forth in ministry. 'Witness' means being sent, and being sent may well mean giving your life for Jesus..."

We need good sermons. It would be excellent to think that this book could help to dispel that dreadful waffle that replaces a homily and too often begins: "Um...I was just thinking this morning, on my way here..." thus indicating that no real preparation has been done at all.

I found this book a helpful and inspirational read. In fact, I found myself looking ahead to the next couple of Sundays and thinking about the readings I'd hear at Mass and the messages that had been drawn from them.

This book would make a good ordination gift, and copies should be available at seminaries; it should find a place in retreat centres and religious houses. It might look a bit too pointed to give one to your parish priest, but he'd probably appreciate it. And this laywoman really enjoyed reading it, and has been inspired and helped by it – not something I thought I would ever say about a book of sermons.

**Joanna Bogle**  
New Malden, Surrey



## “Fr Apostoli’s book is wake-up call to the reality of one of the great Marian visions of modern times”

### Fatima for Today: The Urgent Marian Message of Hope

*By Fr Andrew Apostoli, CFR. Foreword by Cardinal Raymond Burke. Ignatius press, USA (February 2011), distributed by Gracewing, £14.99*

The Fatima conspiracy theorists will loathe this book. It is a well-written and well-researched account of the events that began outside a small village in Portugal in 1917 and that continue to have strong repercussions today. It carries a foreword by the Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura. It demolishes the notion – put about widely at present and assisted by the internet – that successive popes have lied to us about the visions of Fatima and especially about the famous “third secret”. It calls us all to prayer and has a simple and humble message – very irritating to those who prefer apocalyptic predictions, plots and indignation.

Three children experienced a series of extraordinary visions in 1917 and were given a message that was both extraordinary and very ordinary: people must pray and do penance (that was the ordinary bit; these things are central to Catholic life, always have been and always must be) and failure to do this would ensure that evils would be spread by Russia across the world (an extraordinary statement to make to children living in an obscure corner of Portugal with limited access to any knowledge of Russia or indeed to anywhere else outside their local area).

The place where the visions occurred was the “Cova da Iria”, or “Cove of peace”. In 1917 Europe was at war. Portugal had been spared the slaughter, and when the Fatima visions occurred the three young children were spending a peaceful day as they had done many times before, taking care of their families’ livestock, eating a snack lunch and playing together in the sunshine.

They prayed together as a matter of course – all came from devout and practising Catholic families. They were by modern standards poor and by any

standards good, hard-working, honest and truthful children.

The children’s accounts of the visions were consistent and they did not flinch under considerable pressure from their families and others, and even under some rather brutal treatment by the local authorities. They understood that Mary had come from Heaven to call people to penance and they took this very seriously, undergoing much physical discomfort with fasting and sacrifices. Two of the children later died in the influenza epidemic of 1919/20 and the third, Lucia, lived on to a great age as a Carmelite nun, dying in 2005.

Mary had told the children that the Pope must consecrate Russia to her, and this was done in 1984 by Pope John Paul II, the Pope from Poland whose life was so extraordinarily bound up with the Fatima message. In a vision, the children saw a pope shot and falling to the ground before a great crowd. On 13 May 1981, the anniversary of the Fatima visions, John Paul was shot and fell before a great crowd in St Peter’s Square. The shot should have been fatal, but the Pope did not die. As he would later express it: “One hand fired the bullet – another guided it.” He had not known of the children’s vision – it formed part of the “third secret”, which had not then been revealed. He asked for the secret to be retrieved from the Vatican archives, read it, and saw its significance. He would later place the bullet in the crown of the statue of Our Lady at Fatima, and release the secret – accompanied by a detailed commentary by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

But if you trawl the internet for “Fatima” you will not get much of this – instead you will get a great muddle of conspiracy theories, assertions of papal duplicity, affirmations that the Consecration of Russia was not done properly, that the published secret is a fraud, and much more. Which is why it is useful to have a book which sets things out in their chronological order, and in a spirit of faithfulness to what occurred and loyalty

to the Church to which the young Fatima visionaries entrusted all that they had seen and heard.

Pope John Paul did consecrate the world, including Russia, to Mary in 1984; and five years later the Russian atheistic empire, which had caused so much misery and under which some nations had been crushed and virtually annihilated, crumbled and was gone. Prayer and penance are still needed and always will be. Popes will continue to suffer and be shot at, literally and metaphorically, and much of their sufferings will come from within the Church. Paul VI was vilified by people claiming to be deeply loyal Catholics, and continues to be after his death. Blessed John Paul not only suffered in the 1981 assassination attempt but endured several serious illnesses and operations. He was loathed by some of the traditionalist “Fatimist” campaigners – one tried to stab him in May 1982 at Fatima – and some lobbied angrily against his beatification. On a pilgrimage to Fatima, Pope Benedict XVI spoke movingly about the continuing role of suffering in the life of the Church and thus of the Pope.

Fr Apostoli’s book is a wake-up call to the reality of the one of the great Marian visions of modern times. The Christian life is a journey with God – we are aiming at Heaven. Our sins will be what prevent us from getting there, and they will also wreak havoc and misery while we are on earth. The Church has taken to heart the message of Fatima and recognises that it still has so much to say to us all. Fr Apostoli notes, for instance, the link with Islam (Fatima is the name of a major female figure in Islam: Muslims pay great honour to Mary, and the Fatima statue has proved to be a source of devotion when taken to Islamic groups). The saga that began in 1917 and continued through the huge events of the 20th century up to the beatification of a pope in the 21st is not over yet. This book will help us to understand it all much better.

**Joanna Bogle**  
New Malden, Surrey

# Notes From Across the Atlantic

by Michael Baruzzini, Colorado Springs



## THE BEAUTY OF CREATION

Richard Dawkins recently attracted attention for his admission that his atheism was more properly a scientific agnosticism. This admission, though it caught the notice of the media, was not really anything new for Dawkins, who has made similar concessions in the past. Dawkins' approach to all knowledge is strictly scientific. And since scientific knowledge is always technically tentative, so too must his ostensibly scientific opinion of the non-existence of God. Dawkins dismisses God because he finds no scientific evidence for God, but he must make allowances for the fact that scientific knowledge is always expanding.

In the course of the same discussion, Dawkins made another, more interesting comment that has not received quite the same attention. Speaking to his believing conversational companion, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, Dawkins said: "What I can't understand is why you can't see the extraordinary beauty of the idea that life started from nothing. That is such a staggering, elegant, beautiful thing – why would you want to clutter it up with something so messy as a God?"

The archbishop, rather than disputing, agreed with Dawkins about the beauty of the scientific description of the development of life. But he then explained that God was not an extra that was "shoehorned" onto the scientific explanation. Dawkins' mistake, the archbishop attempted to show, was to suppose that the scientific explanation suffices, and the religious one is an unnecessary complication. The beauty that Dawkins finds in science is not challenged by belief in God; it presupposes it.

Beauty is something reasonable. The

beauty of scientific explanation comes from seeing that the arrangement of things is so ordered to produce the phenomena we observe. The scientist begins with a mess of clues and an unfinished puzzle. He begins with a mystery. He seeks that moment when the pieces fall into place. Dawkins' picture of scientific beauty comes from seeing just this arrangement in evolution, in the material development of the universe. But where creation presents a unified theme returning, finally, to reason, atheistic scientism must insist that at bottom it is only unreason.

Dawkins supposes that the doctrine of creation requires a Divine Tinkerer, interfering with or co-opting the natural beauty present in the workings of the natural world. Whether or not God tinkered with creation in the manner envisioned by creationism or some versions of intelligent design, such tinkering is neither necessary to the doctrine of creation nor is it the source of the beauty seen by the believer.

To use an analogy previously developed by Stephen Barr, to ask whether God or evolution created life is like asking whether Shakespeare or Hamlet killed Polonius. If there is no Shakespeare, Hamlet's act is meaningless. It is merely the accidental arrangement of ink on a page. If there is a Shakespeare, however, his existence as the creator of the literary Denmark does not obviate the drama of the play. It is rather a necessary prerequisite for it. Shakespeare, as a playwright, is not a competitor with the drama of the play.

God as creator is not in competition with the beauty and causality of nature. Nor is God an unnecessary ornament added as a beautiful but superfluous extra onto the complete and subtle explanations offered by science, anymore than Shakespeare is a superfluity to the play

*Hamlet*. The beauty seen in the working out of nature's laws is not commandeered by God; God is the source of it, just as Shakespeare is the source of the drama in *Hamlet*.

Old debates about evolution often turned on the question of whether a million monkeys could accidentally type *Hamlet* in a given amount of time. The more important question is whether *Hamlet* could even be *Hamlet*, whether typed by monkeys or no. In recognising the text of *Hamlet*, we see something beyond letters on a page. In recognising the beauty in nature uncovered by science, both the believer and Dawkins see something beyond an arrangement of atoms. The believer can trace the source of this beauty to an ultimate source and declare that it is real. Dawkins must trace this beauty to a mere subjective reaction, and declare that it is an illusion. In presenting beauty as evidence against the archbishop, Dawkins invokes something that he, as an atheist, cannot finally believe in. He highlights something that the archbishop's faith can plausibly give grounding to, but his atheism cannot. Dawkins attempts to challenge the believer with a weapon only the believer can legitimately wield.

But we cannot blame Dawkins too much: he accepts the evidence of what he sees even over the conclusions of his ideology. Recognition of the divine is something that flows naturally from contemplation of nature. Philosophically, the mind knows that mere matter as such cannot be the source of the beauty that the mind sees, and looks beyond it to find a source. The heart also, even the heart of the scientist, is moved to rise above mere physical description and be lifted into wonder, marvelling, and praise.

*With thanks to "First Things". Fr Peter Mitchell is away.*

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Our understanding of the role of Mary, the Virgin Mother through whom the Divine Word comes into his own things in the flesh (cf. John 1:10-14), is greatly deepened and enhanced through this perspective. So too the dignity of Man, made male and female as the sacrament of Christ and his Church (cf. Ephesians 5:32), is strikingly reaffirmed, and from this many of the Church’s moral and social teachings can be beautifully explained and underlined.

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